Violence in Animated Feature Films: Implications for Children

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Abstract

Cartoons and animated films occupy a significant proportion of a child's viewing time, but may be considered questionable in terms of their content. Although parents prefer such films in order to shield their children from daily problems and potentially harmful images in the media, examination of their content has so far been limited. In this study, violence depicted in popular animated cinema films was analyzed using content analysis, tabulating categories and frequency. Twenty-three animated films from among the 100 highest-grossing feature films of all time were examined. Results indicated that the most violent physical elements were punching and kicking, the most violent verbal elements were taunting and threatening and there were 18 scenes of killing. It is concluded that the frequency of the violence shown in some of the animated films may be disturbing for the healthy mental development of young children.

Introduction

The presence of violent elements on social platforms and in the media (television, cinema, internet, press, etc.) has been striking in recent decades. The violence takes various forms, including acts of assault, theft, vandalism (Gumpel & Meadan, 2000), armed attack (Hermann & Finn, 2002), bullying, punching, threatening, name-calling, rumor spreading, extortion, ridiculing and jeering (Strom & Strom, 2003; Cinkir & Kepenekci, 2003). Various definitions have been given by researchers as to what constitutes "violence". The most comprehensive, from the American Psychiatric Association (1993), defines violence as: immediate or chronic situations which harm the psychological, social or physical well-being of individuals and groups. According to Martin and Greenwood (1995, violence is an act that affects the victim and causes an impact which disrupts the integrity of that person.

Incidents of violence can be readily found in daily life. It is known that aggressive behavior in the surroundings where children are present affects them negatively. Given the amount of negative behavior conspicuous in children's entertainment, the importance of this aspect may be easily understood. Children's magazines, computer games, comics, cartoons, fairy tales and television programs all contain violence (American Psychiatric Association, 2005). Surprisingly, television programs aimed at children actually contain more violence than prime-time programs (Wilson et al., 2002). However, the mode of the violence changes depending on whether it is viewed or participated in (Kirsh & Olczak, 2000). Violent computer games, in particular, can increase aggression (Carnagey, Anderson, & Bartholow, 2007; Walsh & Gentile, 2001). New technology has made it even easier for children to access violent entertainment via DVDs, multi-channel television or internet-connected cell phones. Children imitate the violent actions they see on screen (Felson, 1996) and the attitudes and ideas of young people are influenced by negative media messages they encounter in their formative childhood years (Klein & Shiffman, 2006).

Visual media plays an important role in the formation of social conditions and role models (RTUK [Turkish Radio and Television Supreme Council], 2005). The degree of influence of media messages directed at young children changes according to whether or not they are perceived as imaginary or realistic. Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, and Eron (2003) highlight the risk of realistic perception of violence incubating aggression in later years. Kirsh (2006) separates the realistic and imaginative perception of children according to their developmental stage. A two-year-old child may try to clean a broken egg seen in a TV program, a three-year-old believes items on the screen will fall if a television set is turned upside down, a four-year-old does not repeat the same mistake but is still developing the ability to differentiate imaginary from realistic, while a six- or seven-year-old child can just about distinguish between "real" information and that which is imaginary. Only at the age of nine does the child become fully aware of the reality of news and written materials.

It is difficult for young children to differentiate between what should be modeled or imitated on TV because separation of the real world and that of the imagination takes place only after the age of seven. Children aged between seven and eleven think that children's programs are funny (25.2%) and appropriate for their imaginary world (Dogan & Goker, 2012). Children recognize the characters in animated films even before they watch them (Lacroix, 2004), which indicates the characters are important within the lives of children and can therefore be safely modeled. Aggressive behavior increases in children who repeatedly

watch violent programs as they believe that screen violence portrays the real world and they may choose a violent hero as a role model for themselves (RTUK, 2005). Cartoons and animated films that are often viewed, with their colorful and exciting imaginary content, play an important role in this context.

Gunter and Furnham (1984) found that children watch cartoons first, then, in the following years, they watch films in which real persons play the role of the same characters as seen in the cartoons. As a result, cartoons are perceived as less violent. It can be said that cartoons present a more innocent, harmless image to children. It is also known that violence carried out by "good" characters carries a message that "violence is acceptable in some circumstances", and induces insensitivity (RTUK, 2006b). In 1996, the American National Television Violence Study found evidence of violence in most television programs and that 73% of the perpetrators were not punished (American Psychiatric Association, 2005). This may lead the child viewer to lose belief in the fact that violence is punishable and encourage emulation of violence. According to Potter and Smith (2000), children are subjected to 2,200 acts of highly graphic violence on television over the course of their elementary school education.

It was determined in research by RTUK (2006a), that the most-watched programs by children were cartoons (72%). The cartoon has been an important concept for children and families since about 1920. Since then, the importance of animated films has steadily increased because they are funny, enjoyable, educational, and can be used in a teaching context (Champoux, 2001). According to Lauricella, Howard-Gola, and Calvert (2011), toddlers under the age of two can learn cognitive and logical reasoning skills from a video presentation when the onscreen character is socially meaningful to them. However, Jennifer, Cowie, and Bray (2008) did not find significant changes in 10-11 year-old schoolchildren's anti-bullying attitudes when they were shown an animated film on this subject. In recent years, children and families have become more and more interested in animated films on television and at the cinema which have high entertainment-educational value. Parents consider these films suitable for their children; however, we currently have insufficient data about the content of such films and their supervision.

Lively and brightly-lit scenes, especially in cartoons, play an important role in children's engaging with violence and being prepared for it (RTUK, 2005). According to research by RTUK (2006b), children like cartoons because they are humorous, joyful and they admire the heroes. The most important element of cartoons and animation films is "comedy". Violence and comedy are depicted together (Browne et al., 2002). Humor of various types is used to hide violence in most cartoons and animation films. This synergy of violence and comedy influences a child's perception of violence (Kirsh, 2006). Children's unsupervised encounters with this innocent appearance of violent content may be dangerous for their cognitive and social growth.

There is insufficient data in the literature concerning the effects of violence in animated films on children. Most research has concentrated on the relationship between variables instead of any cause-and-effect relationship (Zuckerman & Zuckerman, 1985). Methodological limitations of research on this subject make it difficult to ascertain the inferences of the effect of media in a cause-and-effect relationship (RTUK, 2005; Felson, 1996). When instances of violence in schools and the community in recent years are considered, together with those in daily life, it is not surprising that the favorite characters

with whom children feel comfortable may affect them negatively (Hoffner et al., 2001; Bonds, 2002; Zuckerman & Zuckerman, 1985; Gentile, Walsh, Ellison, Fox, & Cameron, 2004; Groebel, 1998; Kalayci, 2012; Huesmann et al., 2003; Browne & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005; Jipguep & Sanders-Phillips, 2003; Ozdemir, Ozan Boydak & Aydogan, 2013; Walsh & Gentile, 2001; Anderson et al., 2003; American Psychiatric Association, 2005). For this reason, establishing which characters perpetrate violence in animated films, and by what means, needs to be investigated. The fact of there being limited data on this danger for children and limited research about cartoons is thought-provoking. Nowadays, most families limit their children's television viewing time and allow them to watch only cartoons. Some parents employ a visit to the cinema to see an animated film as a special treat for their children. However, the number of animated films being made has increased in parallel with developments in computer technology and special effects, and we are insufficiently informed about their content. Hence, the present analysis of animated films in terms of their violence quotient will be useful for families, researchers, educators, animated film makers, and children.

Methodology

Content Analysis was used as the method in this study. Full-length animated feature films were the study material. The content of the films was examined using categorical and frequency analysis, and the number of violent acts (actions) was determined as the unit of analysis. Every violent interaction was counted and coded. The degree (severity) and duration of the act was not noted. The findings were then tabulated to reveal frequency and percentage. The study materials were selected from animated films originally released in cinemas that are still being viewed outside of the cinema (for example, on cable TV or DVD) using the purposive sampling technique. The intention of using this sampling technique was to reach and research the animated films most viewed by children. Statistics concerning cinema box-office revenue on a reputable internet site (www.boxofficemojo.com) were taken as the basis from which to select the animated films. Twenty-three animated films were chosen as the study material from a listing of the 100 most popular films of all time (i.e. highest grossing, worldwide - not adjusted for inflation) as of 24 March 2011. The listing included all genres (science fiction, thriller, adventure, etc.). All 23 films were viewed from beginning to end and a record was kept by unit. Each unit consisted of one action (incidence) of violence, regardless of duration or severity. The studied films and box-office receipts are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Worldwide box-office receipts of selected full-length animated films

No.	Rank (1-100)	Film Title	Studio	Worldwide gross (US$ millions)	Year of Release
1	5	Toy story 3	BV	$1,063.2	2010
2	15	Shrek 2	DW	$1,010.8	2004
3	19	Ice Age 3: Dawn of the Dinosaurs	Fox	$886.7	2009
4	22	Finding Nemo	BV	$867.9	2003
5	28	Shrek 3	P/DW	$799.0	2007
6	32	Lion King	BV	$783.8	1994
7	37	Shrek Forever After (Shrek 4)	P/DW	$750.2	2010
8	40	Up	BV	$731.3	2009

No.	Rank (1-100)	Film Title	Studio	Worldwide gross (US$ millions)	Year of Release
9	46	Ice Age 2: Meltdown	Fox	$655.4	2006
10	49	Kung Fu Panda	P/DW	$631.7	2008
11	50	The Incredibles	BV	$631.4	2004
12	52	Ratatouille	BV	$623.7	2007
13	57	Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa	P/DW	$603.9	2008
14	65	Tangled	BV	$567.9	2010
15	71	Madagascar	DW	$532.7	2005
16	73	The Simpsons	Fox	$527.1	2007
17	74	Monsters Inc.	BV	$525.4	2001
18	76	WALL-E	BV	$521.3	2008
19	80	Aladdin	BV	$504.1	1992
20	82	How to Train your Dragon	P/DW	$494.9	2010
21	86	Toy Story 2	BV	$485.0	1999
22	88	Shrek	DW	$484.4	2001
23	99	Cars	BV	$462.0	2006

(www.boxofficemojo.com, March 24, 2011)

Abbreviations: BV (Buena Vista, Disney), DW (DreamWorks), P (Paramount).

A category pool was created according to the literature regarding data collection. Two main categories and a total of nine sub-categories were decided upon. While compiling the categories for manner (type) of violence, the American Psychiatric Association's (1993) description was taken into account; thus categories were created for physical violence, verbal violence, indirect violence (against the social environment), and violence toward objects. The category concerning personal aspects of the perpetrator and victim (e.g. form, color, gender, age) was created by the researcher. Final categories were reviewed by colleagues familiar with the field and organized accordingly. New items were added to the sub-categories for violent actions which emerged during the viewing of the films and did not match other classifications. The findings section was designed to include all main categories, sub-categories and classified items.

Two examples will suffice to indicate how the categorizing and classification was carried out. In one scene from the film Shrek 3, while the Ugly Stepsister is running away from Prince Charming, she slaps Snow White. This act was coded (classified) as having been committed by a good character against a good character, in human form, with light color tones, from woman to woman, adult to adult, and a form of physical violence (slapping). Another instance is the scene in the warriors' holy room in the film Kung Fu Panda where Shifu hits Po with a stick and calls him "fat". These two acts were coded as good character against good character (x2), in animal form (x2), perpetrator drawn with a light tone (x2), from man to man (x2), adult to adult (x2), physical violence (injuring with a tool, x1), and verbal violence (insulting, humiliating, offending the victim, x1).

Firstly, two films only were viewed and analyzed. A co-researcher was then asked to watch and keep a record of violent acts in the same two films using the same categories and criteria. Frequencies were counted and a consistency formula devised, as follows.

$$\text{Consistency Percentage} = \frac{\text{Compromises (560)}}{\text{Compromises (560) + Disagreements (91)}} = 86\%$$

The consistency percentage value (86%) was taken as evidence of consistency within the categories. Following this, the viewing of other films commenced and incidents of violence in each film were recorded as per the determined categories, sub-categories, and items.

After the 23 films had been viewed and violent acts classified, frequencies were counted. Percentages of counted frequencies were totaled in terms of main categories, sub-categories and items therein. Calculator and Microsoft Office Excel were used to compile frequencies and percentages, which were then tabulated and analyzed.

Two main categories were studied, the nature of the participants and the manner of the violence. The first main category concerned the "nature of the participants" involved in violent interactions and was divided into five sub-categories, namely; (1) Character (good or bad) of the perpetrators and victims (four items), (2) Physical form of the perpetrator (four items), (3) Color tone of the perpetrator (two items), (4) Gender of the perpetrator and victim (four items), and (5) Age of the perpetrator and victim (adult or child). The second main category, "manner of violence", was divided into four sub-categories classified as; (1) Physical violence (24 items), (2) Verbal violence (10 items), (3) Indirect violence (eight items), and (4) Violence towards objects (four items).

Findings

The studied animated films were watched for a total of 2,137 minutes (35 hours, 37 minutes). According to the analysis, 1,245 violent acts were recorded in the 23 films. There were 54 violent acts (on average) in each film. One violent act was shown, on average, every 1.7 minutes (1m:43s). Detailed findings and comments on the instigators, victims and types of violent act are shown as follows.

Nature of participants in violent interactions

Overall, the violence is generally committed by the bad character (antagonist) against the good character(s) (protagonist, victim). The perpetrators are mostly male, in animal form, light-toned, and adult. These findings are examined in detail as follows.

Character (good or bad) of perpetrators and victims

Table 2. Comparison of perpetrators (characters committing violence) with victims (characters exposed to violence)

Direction of violence	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bad character towards another bad character	20	1.6
Bad character towards good character	396	31.8
Good character towards bad character	258	20.7
Good character towards another good character	571	45.9
Total	**1,245**	**100.0**

When we examine the characters committing acts of violence, and those exposed to it (Table 2), we see the aggression is directed from a good character towards a different good

character in 571 cases (45.9%), from a bad character against a good character in 396 cases (31.8%), from a good character at a bad character in 258 cases (20.7%), and there are 20 acts (1.6%) targeted by a bad character towards a different bad character.

Physical form of perpetrator

Table 3. Physical form of character perpetrating violence

Form of character	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Human form	349	28.0
Animal form	540	43.4
Fantastic form	268	21.5
Creature-Monster form	88	7.1
Total	**1,245**	**100.0**

When the form of the characters perpetrating acts of violence in the films was investigated (Table 3), we established that 540 acts (43.4%) were by characters in animal form, 268 actions (21.5%) by characters in fantastic form, 88 examples (7.1%) in which the character was in the form of a creature or monster, and 349 scenes (28%) where the violent act was committed by human characters.

Color tone of perpetrators

Table 4. Color tone of character committing violent acts

Tone of character	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Light tone	825	66.3
Dark tone	420	33.7
Total	**1,245**	**100.0**

According to classification of the color tone of the characters perpetrating violence in the films (Table 4), 420 violent acts (33.7%) were carried out by dark-toned characters while 825 violent acts (66.3%) were committed by light-toned characters.

Gender of perpetrator and victim

Table 5. Gender of character perpetrating violence and victim of violence

Perpetrator	Victim	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Woman	Woman	13	1.0
	Man	144	11.6
	Unknown	5	0.4
	Group	10	0.8
Total		**172**	**13.8**
Man	Woman	70	5.6
	Man	593	47.6
	Unknown	66	5.3
	Group	92	7.4
Total		**821**	**65.9**
Unknown	Woman	6	0.5
	Man	77	6.2

Perpetrator	Victim	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Unknown	47	3.8
	Group	12	1.0
Total		**142**	**11.5**
Group	Woman	5	0.4
	Man	69	5.5
	Unknown	4	0.3
	Group	32	2.6
Total		**110**	**8.8**
General total		**1,245**	**100.0**

When the gender of characters committing acts of violence is considered (Table 5), 65.9% of the violent acts were carried out by men, 13.8% by women, 8.8% by a group and 11.5% by an entity of unknown gender. Men instigated the most violence towards men (593 acts). Concerning violence between men and women, the number of acts by women towards men (144) far exceeded those by men towards women (70), a finding that may be considered worthy of note.

Age of perpetrator and victim (adult or child)

Table 6. "Age" of perpetrators and victims of violence

Perpetrator	Victim	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Child	Child	38	3.1
	Adult	44	3.5
Total		**82**	**6.6**
Adult	Child	80	6.4
	Adult	1,083	87.0
Total		**1,163**	**93.4**
General total		**1,245**	**100.0**

As shown in Table 6, when the age of the characters perpetrating violent acts is considered, the number of violent acts by adults totaled 1,163 (93.4%), whereas only 82 (6.6%) were committed by children. Adult violence was directed more towards other adults (1,083 acts) and violence by children towards both adults (44 acts) and peers (38 acts). When children watch content in which adults commit acts of violence, they may receive an implicit message that adult violence is acceptable and normal. For the purpose of this analysis, "child" encompassed all children aged up to mid-late adolescence who did not exhibit "adult" behavioral characteristics.

Manner of Violence

When the type of violence was investigated, the predominance of physical violence becomes evident, followed by verbal violence, indirect violence, and violence directed towards objects (see Tables 7, 8, 9, 10).

Physical violence

Table 7. Acts of physical violence depicted in studied animated films

Type of physical violence	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Punching	132	10.6
Kicking	113	9.1
Slapping	51	4.1
Pushing	19	1.5
Pulling hair or ear	5	0.4
Poking	3	0.2
Injuring with a tool	97	7.8
Injuring with a weapon	59	4.7
Killing	18	1.4
Attempting to strangle	10	0.8
Chasing	46	3.7
Dropping something deliberately	56	4.5
Throwing the victim	56	4.5
Biting	19	1.5
Attempting to kill	76	6.1
Causing unconsciousness by hitting	13	1.0
Crushing	20	1.6
Taking hostage	64	5.1
Throwing objects	3	0.2
Force-feeding	11	0.9
Attempting to burn	23	1.8
Striking, hitting	5	0.4
Attempting to crush	3	0.2
Hitting victim, Dragging, Committing suicide, Burning	4	0.3
Total	**906**	**72.4**

The most frequent violence encountered was physical, with 906 violent acts (72.4%) committed in the films examined. Research determined that the most-often used type of physical violence was punching (132 acts), followed by, in order of frequency, incidents of kicking (113), injuring with a tool (97), trying to kill (76) and taking hostage (64). The least-used types of physical violence were acts of hitting the victim in an undefined place, actual burning, suicide, and dragging (one of each). These findings are compatible with the research of Ayranci, Kosgeroglu, and Gunay (2004), as well as Browne et al. (2002).

Verbal violence

Table 8. Instances of verbal violence found in studied animated films

Type of verbal violence	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Taunting, Ridiculing	65	5.3
Intentionally irritating, annoying	7	0.6
Shouting, bellowing	31	2.5
Frightening	37	3.0
Using a bad nickname	20	1.6
Swearing	10	0.8
Insulting, humiliating, offending the victim	45	3.6
Insulting, humiliating, offending victim's family	6	0.5
Stating or implying mental retardation	19	1.5
Threatening	29	2.3
Total	**269**	**21.7**

The second-most used type of violence was verbal, where a total of 269 occurrences was observed (21.7%). Most-often used were taunting-ridiculing (n=65), followed by insulting the victim (n=45), frightening (n=37), shouting (n=31) and threatening (n=29). The least-used instances of oral violence found in the films were insulting the victims' family (n=6) and irritating-annoying a person or group (n=7).

Indirect violence

Table 9. Use of indirect violence

Type of indirect violence	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Leaving victim alone intentionally for a period of time	6	0.5
Not allowing victim's participation in games or other activities	1	0.1
Ignoring victim	0	0
Spreading untrue rumors about victim	1	0.1
Setting others against victim	6	0.5
Saying bad things about victim when he/she is not there	20	1.6
Disturbing behavior in a public place	2	0.2
Vandalism	7	0.6
Total	**43**	**3.6**

Occurrences of indirect violence were not frequently recorded in the animated films viewed. The number of scenes depicting acts of indirect violence was 43, only 3.6% of the total number of violent acts. The most frequently encountered acts were saying bad things about the victim when he/she was not there (n=20), vandalism (n=7), leaving the victim alone intentionally (n=6), and setting others against the victim and other people (n=6). There was no recorded incidents in the "ignoring the victim" classification.

Violence towards objects

Table 10. Violence directed at objects

Type of violence directed at objects	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Taking money from victim by force or threat	0	0
Taking objects from victim by force or threat	2	0.2
Damaging objects belonging to victim intentionally	6	0.5
Stealing money or objects from victim	19	1.5
Total	**27**	**2.2**

The least-used type of violence in the examined films was violence towards objects, with a total of 27 occurrences (2.2%). The most frequent incidents were stealing money or objects from the victim (n=19), followed by damaging objects belonging to the victim intentionally (n=6), and taking objects from the victim by means of force or threat (n=2). There was no record of taking (extorting) money from the victim by force or threat.

Conclusion and Discussion

The place of animated films in children's lives has steadily increased. Nevertheless, animated films shown at the cinema are not checked adequately regarding their content. In the USA, a classification system exists for all films shown at the cinema, which consists of five different ratings. In fact, nearly all countries operate a rating system, ranging between four and eight categories. However, such classifications lack specific information about the content of the films and any negative elements, leading the system to be criticized by researchers (Yokota & Thompson, 2000). According to the findings of the present study, many acts that occur in the films are inappropriate for children. Concerning the person at whom violence is directed, "good" characters committed 66.6% of the violent actions and the target of this violence was mostly other "good" characters (45.9% of total actions, or 68.9% of actions perpetrated by good characters), a finding which may be considered shocking. This result is in accord with the findings of Yokota and Thompson (2000). According to Bonds (2002), children who are affected by violence are aware that they may become the victims of violence and are concerned about this. In particular, when they see on the screen that the target of violence is mostly good characters, they fear that they may also become the victim of violence, even if they are well-behaved. Klein and Shiffman (2006) state that cartoons both reflect and shape social values on physical attractiveness and help form children's initial notions of what it means to be pretty, handsome, or unattractive.

In addition, children who are exposed to violence in the media perceive the world as a dark and bad place (American Psychiatric Association, 2005). When children watch violence directed at good characters, and those same characters are the victims of violence, they may feel pessimistic about the world and life in general, leading to fear and negative responses. Goldstein (1999) asserts that the message contained within violence in the media enforces societal control. Children who disobey their parents, lie or steal can meet horrific ends. The absence of punishment in television content leads to disinhibition, and consequently, the justification of violent acts leading to higher aggression levels among viewers (Potter, Pashupati, Pekurny, Hoffman, & Davis, 2002).

It was an expected result of this research that the characters perpetrating the violence in animated films were mostly in animal form (43.4%). However, this may be an important factor in enabling children to separate fantasy from reality. Groebel (1998) determined that children's perception of the real world equates with their perception of programs watched on TV. Consequently, violent acts performed by characters in the form of animals in animated films may make it more difficult for children to distinguish between what is imaginary and what is real. Furthermore, it was determined that children aged between two and six may be frightened by the monsters, animals and disaster scenes they see in films (Ayranci et al., 2004). Kremer and Hight (2007) state that the type of cartoon character (action or neutral) influences children's responses, with the action characters reacting more aggressively than the neutral characters. Another finding of the present research is that perpetrators of violence were not portrayed with a particular color scheme. Dark-toned characters were less violent (33.7%) and light-toned characters were more violent (66.3%). However, color tone is not the decisive factor in acting violently. Thus, the findings of the present research are in accord with Yokota and Thompson's (2000) findings (51% dark-color tone). Consequently, violent content may send an implicit message to children that anyone may commit violence and physical appearance is not an important factor in their doing so.

Another research finding concerns the gender of the character carrying out the violent actions and the character who is the victim. It was determined that most violent characters were male and they directed violence mostly toward male characters (593 occurrences). This is similar to the findings of Bleakly, Jamieson, and Romer's (2012) study about the sexual and violent content of US films in the context of gender. In this research, characters of unknown gender perform violence the least, because characters such as these were few in the films and were generally in baby form. Violence perpetrated by women on men (144 instances) were more frequent than by men on women (70 instances), according to our findings. Children adopt heroes of their own gender and give them a special meaning in their real life (Oruc, Tecim, & Ozyurek, 2011). Most cartoons are likely to reflect the standards of gender construction in society (Sam, 1995). If we accept that children learn their cultural schema from popular media messages (Matti & Lisosky, 1999), then animated films are a source for children validating violence towards their own and the opposite gender. Zuckerman and Zuckerman (1985) also determined that watching TV programs may affect children's views on their own gender and towards certain groups. This finding may contradict the notion of "violence against women" in undeveloped societies. However, it is known that the cartoon world of children does not reflect adult perceptions that males constitute the majority of perpetrators of evil (Fouts, Callen, Prasentin, & Lawson, 2006).

In the 23 animated films reviewed, adults instigate violence (93.4%) far more than children (6.6%), and children direct violence mostly towards adults. Hence children may adopt the idea that adults have the right to indulge in acts of aggression and consequently, may perceive that it is normal for adults to behave violently, even towards children. The most-often used types of violence were physical (72.4%) and verbal (21.7%). The most frequent form of action was punching (132 incidents), kicking (113), injuring with a tool (97), attempting to kill (76), and taunting (65 incidents). There were also 18 cases of killing seen in the films. On average, every film contained one scene of someone watching a killing take place. In this respect, the present study matches the findings of Yokota and Thompson (2000) and also that of Cox, Garrett, and Graham (2005). Considering the issue of whether

children imitate violence they have witnessed on the screen (Zuckerman & Zuckerman, 1985), it is expected that children may try to copy behavior seen in animated films. Groebel (1998) determined that children need and use media heroes in times of difficulty. Therefore, children may resort to this solution if they often watch scenes of killing in cartoons or animated films. Although many cases of physical and verbal violence were found in the films, there were few instances of indirect violence (3.6%) or violence toward objects (2.2%). This is contrary to the findings of Coyne and Archer (2004), who found that indirect violence on television was more frequent than verbal and physical violence. As a result, it can be said that violent acts committed in animated films may set a bad example for children. A comparison with desirable behavior in the films examined was not undertaken as this research focused solely on violent actions. However, further research concerning the intended (or unintended) message, and the portrayal of desirable behavior shown in such films, will provide us with more data about their content. Thereby, more information will be available about which films may safely be watched by children and whether their content is suitable for children. There were acts of violence unsuitable for viewing by children perpetrated in all the animated films we examined. The content of films should therefore be reviewed by a competent institution which can publish a detailed report for each animated film. At the same time, films should be classified and rated according to more specific criteria and parents should be given directions about which films are suitable for their children, thereby making the selection of films easier.

Parents who wish to protect their children from violent content should watch and check films prior to their children viewing them. They should obtain information from magazines, television programs, the internet, and suchlike beforehand. Furthermore, if parents watch films together with their children, commenting and answering questions about the content, this aids a child's ability to separate fantasy from reality. In Cantor and Wilson's (2003) opinion, adults' comments before or during media exposure may reduce the impact of violent programming on children's aggressiveness. However, according to Anderson et al. (2003), a person cannot be protected fully from the effects of violence in the media. It should not be forgotten that the amount of violence to which a child is exposed, together with family circumstances and developmental age, all determine the effect of violence on children (Bonds, 2002). Irrefutably, there are also useful programs for children, such as "Sesame Street", accepted as having significant positive effects on its viewers across countries and cultures (Fisch, Truglio, & Cole, 2009). Monk-Turner et al. (2004), who studied violence in war films, determined that the amount of violence shown in films generally has been increasing steadily and that the film industry has introduced more violent scenes into their productions over the past 30 years. Although similar research about animated films cannot be found, film studios and production companies should be more responsive and careful about the content of their animated films and cartoons. The effects of cartoons and animation films on children need to be known in order to protect children from violence. In this research, only the content of animated films was examined due to methodological and time limitations. Experimental and longitudinal studies on this subject would also be beneficial. It is striking that there so many animated films and cartoons on TV, yet so little research about them. Similar research to the current study needs to be carried out and all aspects (positive-negative) of the content should be investigated and compared. In particular, scholars bear the responsibility of creating a more effective classification system with appropriate criteria and categories for the benefit of competent institutions. In

addition, research on television programs for children, comics, and computer games should also be carried out, which would make a valuable addition to the literature and assist in finding solutions to media problems in the future.

Notes

A version of this paper was presented at the 4th National Counseling and Guidance Applications Congress in Ankara, Turkey.

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