

**“The Impacts Violent Actions and Sensitive Topics Featured in Cartoons have on the
Children Watching: *The Reasoning Behind the Laughter*”**

An Honors Thesis

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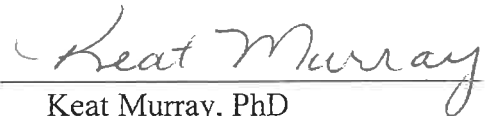
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Abstract

This paper focuses on the darker side of our beloved childhood cartoons as well as current day cartoons and the impact they can produce on the children who watch, in addition to the rationalization of the humor. One big fear that this topic gives off is that children can become desensitized to violent acts and not be able to distinguish what is right from wrong. In addition, this will highlight the social learning theory which states that children are prone to modeling the behavior and actions they see others doing. Depending on whether the actions the children are observing are good or bad, the children will either benefit and become well-rounded individuals, or they will have a disadvantage and will replicate harmful actions in their day-to-day lives. Also, the cultivation theory, which displays how television and media have an influence in our daily lives, shows how we go about forming relationships as well as our way of thinking with forming stereotypes. The cartoons being observed and critiqued include *The Looney Tunes*, *Pepe Le Pew*, *Tom & Jerry*, and *SpongeBob SquarePants*. The violent actions displayed and other sensitive topics featured in the selected cartoons are discussed. Therefore, a trigger warning for the following topics is in effect: depression, suicide, racism, alcoholism, gun violence, sexual aggression, and physical harm. In addition, the humor behind these acts is analyzed to show why we see no issue in watching the cartoons over and over again. It is suggested humor is caused due to the relief theory, benign violation theory, as well as resiliency. Here humor is justified due to the reduction of stress and if the event violates how we think the world should be. Laughter can also be produced based on resiliency, which is the ability to overcome an event and understand the actions and responses of the characters, if it is used as a coping mechanism.

Impacts of Cartoons on Children & Humor Responses

Television is the most popular medium in which children are exposed (Mahmood, 2020). Growing up, children are spending hours a day watching cartoon after cartoon for entertainment because cartoons are primarily viewed as innocent, child friendly shows. This then allows parents to have a nice break from having to be the source of action and the main focus of attention for their child. However, when taking a closer look into cartoons of the past and present, our eyes are opened up to a darker, more violent world than what is expected. Some of the violence as well as sensitive topics featured consists of depression, suicide, racism, alcoholism, gun violence, sexual aggression, and physical violence. The main focus here is that cartoons can have both significant positive and negative impacts on children who watch when these topics are shown quite substantially. This is done with support from the social learning and cultivation theory. Children are prone to modeling actions and behavior that they see, so monitoring their cartoon content might be something we, as the authoritative figure, need to pay more attention to (Bandura, 1963) since media, especially television, can have influence in our lives (Gerbner, 1969). Also, as human beings, we cannot help but to laugh at these harmful events almost instantly when they are viewed because of the disassociation, violation, and overall relation the event has on those who are watching. This will make sense by looking at multiple humor theories and responses. Therefore, it is important to be mindful of what is being shown to our youth if we want children to maintain a sense of innocence and a good moral standpoint.

Violent Actions and Sensitive Topics In Cartoons

It is surprising to say that the frequency of violence in cartoons is higher than in live-action dramas or comedies (Kirsh, 2006). It is important to note that for most animated cartoons, violence is found at the beginning and end of disputes (Kirsh, 2006). This is right as the cartoon short is climaxing as well as resolving. With both of these moments being violent, it really shows that there is not really time left for peace in any scenario. Violence appears in two-thirds to three-quarters of all television plays at a rate of between six and ten incidents per hour in primetime, and at rates three or four times as much in children's programming which is mostly in cartoons (Signorielli, 1995). Merriam-Webster (2020) defined violence as use of physical force to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy. Sensitive topics can be defined as anything that would cause someone to become easily upset in addition to things that people do not normally talk about because it is not a norm, and/or it is something that makes them uncomfortable. So, knowing what violence and sensitivity are, it's time to take a jump backwards to discuss one of the first cartoons that really showcases violence as well as the other sensitive topics. This would be *The Looney Tunes*. This was a series of short films that ran from 1930 to 1969 produced by the Warner Bros. This cartoon features characters like Bugs Bunny, Roadrunner, Daffy Duck, and Yosemite Sam as well as others not mentioned. Throughout each series there are vivid images of characters beating each other to the point where blood, bruises, and multiple missing teeth are revealed (Capozziello, 2020). Starting off strong with the episode *Ballot Box Bunny* (1951). This episode shows Bugs Bunny and Yosemite Sam competing against one another for the position of being the town's mayor. Towards the end of the episode, when the two are seen arguing and not

paying attention to the election, the position is won by another contestant. Since their running was then viewed as pointless because they did not get their way, Bugs suggests they play a game of Russian Roulette and proceeds to pull out a gun. Sam fires a blank shot, the screen fades to black as Bugs puts it up to his head, and a loud shot is fired. Then they come back on screen, and it shows that Bugs had then shot Sam instead (Figure 1). Keep in mind the Russian Roulette is a game promoting suicide as random since they do not know where the bullet falls in the barrel. The cartoon depicts firearms as fun toys which are deployed for petty revenge (Stern, 2014). This use of gun violence comes across uncomfortably now due to the ever-changing world we are living in; guns usage is a topic that comes across heavily with there being so many arguments for or against. Circling back, Russian Roulette is not something that should be encouraged in cartoons, or in general, because it is conveyed to be an easy way out when conflict arises rather than approaching it civilly, even if a situation is one you would rather not deal with.



Figure 1

The *Pepe Le Pew* series exhibits violence in the form of sexually aggressive behavior. *Pepe Le Pew* was created in 1945. *Pepe Le Pew* exhibits many controversial

actions throughout his cartoon. Throughout his series he is persistent in trying to win over the love of Penelope, the cat, even though she is seen resisting and trying to escape his sexually aggressive stalking behavior. You can even go as far to say that it also focuses on misrepresenting the species of Penelope since Pepe Le Pew assumes she is also a skunk. Below you can see Penelope trying to push away from Pepe's embrace as well as a picture of her having a look of terror across her face (Rauser, 2019). She is noticeably uncomfortable and is easily displaying to Pepe her discomfort, but he is in a sense blinded by love and continues to disrespect her boundaries (Figure 2 & 3). The *Pepe Le Pew* cartoon is just a series featuring sexual assault. This ultimately shows that consent and respect is not needed, and that by using force you can continue to pursue and get what you want from someone [especially women]. This shows that there is really no escape for women.



Figure 2



Figure 3

Next, *Tom & Jerry*, created in 1940, showcases a cat in constant conflict trying to catch a mouse, but when analyzing, the darker and scarier plot is left in plain view. Let us look at a variety of episodes that showcase racism. The focus of racism shows the

underlying issue of social and cultural struggles that ethnic groups, such as the blacks, have. In the episode “Blue Cat Blues,” in order to pay off a car he had purchased for his girlfriend, Tom is shown signing a series of documents and one of them is a slavery clause for 20 years of his life (Figure 4). Also, in the original episodes of *Tom & Jerry*, the character Mammy Two Shoes was depicted as a black, grown-up housemaid (Figure 5). Mammy is the offensive term that has been defined as a black nursemaid or nanny and servant to white families. Mammies were shown as a caricature to display that blacks are happy and content being slaves (Pilgrim, 2012). *Tom & Jerry* was created in 1940 before the civil rights movement for black ethnic groups began to arise. The civil rights movement allowed for blacks to gain equal rights under the law in the United States. So based on the heavy discrimination, in their article on racial stereotypes in cartoons, Aravind argues that it was seemingly okay for the producers to show characters that were represented as “physically unattractive” and rely mainly on the stereotypical idea that blacks would care for the higher-class people (Aravind, 2011). With that being said, the producers ranked both Tom and Jerry in a higher class than Mammy Two Shoes even though she was a human. In the episode “Happy Go Ducky,” there were towels displayed in the bathroom with the letters “T” and “J” monogrammed onto them, which implies that Tom and Jerry are the actual owners of the house (Aravind, 2011). This created even more hardships for black women to deal with, such as being molested and abused, due to them seemingly having no ownership or possession of anything of value to those in a higher status. The higher-class people viewed the blacks as being significantly below them with black women on the very bottom tier, thinking that their only purpose was to be the caregiver that bends over backwards to complete any and every request that the

whites many have. Aravind continues to say that they have suffered major economic exploitations for the way they have been depicted on the television screen. Since the release of *Tom & Jerry* the creators have changed how they depict this character so that people will better receive the cartoon. Since Mammy's character was intentionally created to attack racial groups, the versions have been edited using rotoscoping techniques to replace Mammy on-screen with a thin white woman (Aravind, 2011). When the civil rights movement did start to arise, Aravind also notes that producers began to stray away from using black stereotypical characters in their shows to avoid troublesome issues and groups, in essence, to avoid conflict. Mammy Two Shoes was seemingly forced to retire in the cartoon in the episode "Push-Button Kitty" in 1952 since racism was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, resulting in the new white nanny becoming present in 1960s. Throughout the years the Warner Bros went back and dubbed over the black images to help with the show's overall appearance. Now that these images were replaced, *Tom & Jerry* went back to being the so-called innocent animated cartoon but has created a "hell" of a history [for black women] to live down (Aravind, 2011) because, during that time, people have then started to grow up watching television that became predominantly white. This allows for racial slurs and stereotypes to become even more heavy hitting and insulting. This makes it difficult for the people of color, specifically black women, to be respected in the world.



Figure 4



Figure 5

Tom & Jerry shows that even in almost complete silence, the characters set out to do very harmful things to one another. Here are some episodes that convey the use of alcoholism. For instance, the baby mouse, Nibbles (Tuffy), descended into Tom's stomach in the episode "Robin Hoodwinked" while he was asleep in order to retrieve a key. When the string broke, Tom wakes up and swallows Nibbles, and then proceeds to drink a large amount of wine which intoxicates Nibbles in the process. After Nibbles escaped from Tom's mouth he was shown to be stumbling around hiccupping with bubbles around his head (Figure 6). In instances like these, Tom looks overly satisfied with himself as if he has done something clever since it would seem to be easier, to him, to catch as his prey [the mice] since one mouse is now intoxicated (Hodgen, 2008). Also, in the very last episode of the series Tom had his girlfriend leave him for another cat that

was richer and overall better than Tom. Therefore, Tom sinks into depression and begins to drink his sorrows away; the cartoon shows him being surrounded by empty bottles, of what is pictured as milk, yet his head is sulked and eyes are dreary so these milk bottles are used as symbols for alcohol (Figure 7).



Figure 6



Figure 7

Also, featured in this series, one of many examples of suicide being implied is when Tom puts a shotgun in Jerry's mouse hole to finish him off once and for all, but Tom does not seem know that the barrel of the shotgun came out another mouse hole right next to his head. He pulls the trigger with a big smile on his face, and he shoots himself (Figure 8). Tom was so hopeful that he would have finally succeeded in

capturing his prey, but at the height of his glory [the cat] is knocked down (Hodgen, 2008). In addition, in the final episode, Tom and Jerry both went through a series of unfortunate events, some previously mentioned, which led them both to the train tracks where they sat down looking defeated, and as the screen went black the train whistle could be heard approaching (Figure 9). Messages like this were deemed excessive, and the images of drinking and representation of guns were all edited to create a more appropriate show for family audiences (Mittell, 2004). *Tom & Jerry* still incorporated these hidden messages throughout the rest of the series, but now had them play into the theme of the show better. For example, when there is a gun on the screen the cartoon is focused around the hunting of an animal that is in season. The series mostly focused on physical violence, such as running into a door or stepping on a rake and having it hit the character in their face, to move away from these more violent actions as well as the topics such as alcoholism and depression.

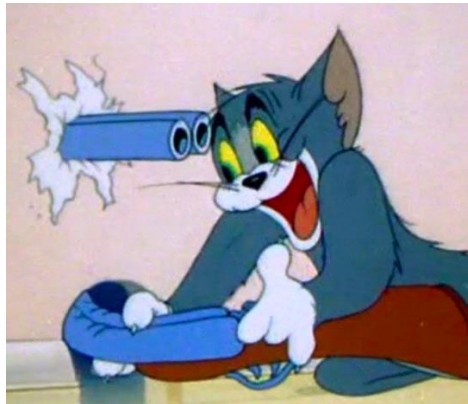


Figure 8



Figure 9

One of the more modern cartoons that most children can recall watching is *SpongeBob SquarePants*, especially since variations of this cartoon are still continuing to be produced. *SpongeBob SquarePants* is notorious for slipping in not so appropriate content throughout many episodes. Starting off with Squidward, during the episode of *SpongeBob SquarePants*, “Are You Happy Now” (2012), it focuses on his depression. He is shown saying “I just can't seem to get happy” as he swings a rope up into what is hinted at becoming a noose, and he also sticks his head into his oven to bake himself. Both of these situations end in a way that throws off the hidden meanings. When the rope is swung up a bird house is revealed (Figure 10), and when he reaches into the oven, he pulls a burnt loaf of bread (Figure 11). This is done to throw off the actual meaning behind the so-called joke. These are both hinting that Squidward either was going to or at least was tempted to commit suicide, but by having a light-hearted ending shown it enabled the producers to feature it in the episode.



Figure 10



Figure 11

In addition, in the *SpongeBob Movie* (2004), SpongeBob and Patrick gorge on Goofy Goober's ice cream. The ice cream here is used as symbolism for alcohol consumption. They even kept repeatedly shouting "waiter" which hints toward the frequently used terminology "let's get another round" which is the common language used at bars for getting the waiter's attention to order alcohol. Eventually SpongeBob's speech starts to slur, his vision blurs, and then he wakes up with a headache and bloodshot eyes (Figure 13). This is a nod for alcoholism, showing that it is okay to get extremely intoxicated with friends (Figure 12), and it shows that it can be a fun activity. The whole reason SpongeBob got carried away with his consumption of the ice cream

was due to the fact he did not end up getting a job promotion he wanted. This is not something that the younger audience needs to be seeing if the main goal in life is to teach them responsibility as well as good behavior because drinking, or overindulging in any substance, after something not turning out how you expected it is not a coping mechanism that should be supported or promoted. It is also suggesting public indecency in Figure 13 which is not something that anyone should be proud of and there could be serious consequences to endure if the law enforcement got involved.



Figure 12



Figure 13

Even though *most* of these actions and topics have been edited out of shows it is important to discuss that they were once prevalent in many childhood cartoons. It is pretty obvious that these have been edited out for a reason, especially the episodes that include a lot of gun violence. The assumption being that they are too violence and sensitive for the younger audience that typically watches cartoons. For *The Looney Tunes*, in most cases, and what most likely would be the same for *Pepe Le Pew* and *Tom & Jerry*, the rating is TV-PG. This rating signifies that the program may be unsuitable for younger children, the guidance of a parent is strongly encouraged. *SpongeBob SquarePants* is mainly rated TV-Y and for some of the newer episode's TV-Y7. TV-Y is

for all children and TV-Y7 is for children older than 7 years of age. Going off of these television (TV) ratings you can see that some unsaid warning is given to show that the cartoon may feature some more mature content. It is up to the parent or guardian to regulate what children grow up watching since they [the children] do not start out knowing how to read and interpret these ratings; children tend to just watch whatever is on to keep them entertained. Keep in mind that violence is not an incidental part of the cartoon form, it is the cartoon form (Staben, 2018).

On October 18th, 1990, United States Congress made a movement towards reforming production for children's media (Children's Television Act, 2021). The Children's Television Act was meant to increase the amount of educational programming shown, reduce the violent content, and limit production of material created explicitly for the marketing of toys and merchandise (Staben, 2018). In 1991, the task of regulating this type of content fell into the hands of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), where it remains today. Networks are required to have their content approved by the FCC before broadcast, and the FCC decides what is "educational and informational" (Staben, 2018). Even though this act is in effect it is likely that there are some topics or references to violent and sensitive topics that slip through. More present-day cartoons will need to be observed and analyzed in order to get an overview of the reliability of this statement, but there is always going to be more cartoons produced so it is up to the child's parents or guardians to monitor the content their child watches while growing up and developing.

Impacts On Children

A child's thinking and imagination are the most common factors that are being engaged when watching television. By the age of 12 a child would have watched about

18,000 hours of cartoons; this means that the cartoon can affect the functionality of the brain until at least the age of 12 (Habib, 2015). Up until this age, the cartoons being watched are one of the main factors that sculpt the human brain, resulting in a predetermined set way of thinking and behavior (Habib, 2015). Certain behaviors are not simply learned but neurologically fixed, and therefore hard to change (Drinka, 2018). Based on the results of research done it indicated that the aggressive behaviors of males may be more susceptible to cartoon violence than that of females, while females display higher aggressive behaviors than males in nonviolent cartoon context (Zhang, 2019). This is an important note to make because it will have an impact on relations with male and female development. The female brain is said to mature at a quicker rate than males because it is able to better establish connections and communication from cell to cell (Storr, 2020). This development causes the impacts cartoons have to correlate more with the male gender.

Social Learning Theory

The Social Learning Theory is defined as the observing, modelling, and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. This theory was initially proposed by Albert Bandura with his experiment with the bobo dolls (Bandura, 1963). The social learning theory considers how both environmental and cognitive factors interact to influence human learning and behavior. The theory states that people are more likely to imitate behavior that they see frequently modeled; this can be through any media whether they are watching a video or seeing their parents perform an action firsthand. Children are going to absorb what these cartoons, focusing on the violent actions and sensitive topics, feature. The cartoons that were observed show the main characters

taking part in so many irresponsible things, if children watch these cartoons over and over again, they will be more likely to exhibit the same characteristics and replicate their actions. This supports the fact that children will copycat even the finest details, including way of speaking, thinking, and body language (Habib, 2015). Cartoons also create a change in the behavior of the children because they take a liking to a certain character. This fixation makes them want to dress-up and look like that character for an extended period of time (Nair, 2018). The violence the characters in the cartoons above displayed received no reprimands. Therefore, when the child grows up and acts out in manners that are close to what they have viewed on the television it is easy for them to believe that it is an acceptable thing to engage in because they have witnessed all of these characters do the same exact actions and receive no punishment. It is possible that these cartoons ultimately lead children to have a different undesirable point of view of his parents, his friends, teacher, and the community as a whole (Habib, 2015). Negative consequences would also include a high propensity to enjoy laughing at others [failures] which relates to bullying behavior (Papousek, 2017). Everyone wants to follow the common rubric of “protecting children”, yet they allow children to witness these inappropriate actions starting from the time they are born (Mittell, 2004). These harmful events are placed in cartoons so that they are ingrained into everyone’s head at a young age to reinforce the harmful actions performed later in life.

Cultivation Theory

Something that is similar is the Cultivation Theory, introduced by George Gerbner, which examines the influence of television on viewers (Gerbner, 1969). The main idea behind this theory is that we start to interpret realities, whether it is our social

or personal lives, to how we see others portrayed on the television. It is stated that television does highly influence society's manner of relating and thinking (Settle, 2018). As humans we are always looking for similarities between things. For example, the way you handle your personal relationships are most likely similar and reflect the values you have witness people emote on television in romantic comedies and those of other genres. With the cartoons hinting towards alcoholism, shown in Figures 6, 7, 12, and 13, an argument can be made to say that when seeing these the child will pick up the sense that it is okay to drink to the blackout point where public humiliation is possible and memories are vague. It is further observed that television stabilizes societal patterns and induces resistance to change (Gerbner, 1978). After seeing certain things presented one way for so long, such as seeing the violent acts or the sensitive topics presented over and over again, it would be difficult to see the wrong in them and view those actions as something that should not be repeated in your own life. This also builds upon stereotypes being created and maintained. *Tom & Jerry's* character Mammy Two Shoes is a direct relation to this. Racism can be learned through what is conveyed through the characters on the screen; since Mammy Two Shoes is not treated with respect and the animals are shown to be perceived as high-class it can readily cause children to think this is the same hierarchy among their peers who are black. It is difficult to escape an ideal if it has been drilled into your mind repeatedly. Hence why the violent acts and sensitive topics featured in these cartoons are easy to replicate because they are so prevalent in what is on television every single time it is switched on.

Positive Impacts

Some of the positive impacts can be based around the same concepts of the negatives. It has been evident that children will, without a doubt, model the things that they watch. When looking at the social learning theory with a pro-social approach to a problem like sharing, or turning to an adult for help, or using words rather than actions are shown, this too becomes embedded in the child's response when facing a problem (Drinka, 2018). In turn, this can be a positive as well as a negative. As long as the media is portraying traits that will make the child a well-rounded individual then most cartoons like *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* (2006), *Doc McStuffins* (2012), and similar animated cartoons can be beneficial. In addition, good cartoons can be a great educational form for children to become advanced in basic skills including the alphabet as well as counting. Also, a cartoon hero is built by an illustrator as well as the scenario, so all negative side effects that could occur in a real life—that could be presented in a character or in a situation—could be evaded, causing the child to receive a pure content of good deeds and messages to correctly sculpture their brain (Habib, 2015). There are no honorable actions displayed in the cartoons that were observed in this paper; this is merely to state that *some* cartoons do have a positive outcome on children.

Negative Impacts

Children grow up watching these cartoons, and their brains are processing everything that they are seeing. Every parent wants what is the best for their children, but when the child sees all of these excessively violent actions they become rooted in their subconscious memory (Aravind, 2011). Based on the cultivation theory mentioned previously, television gradually shapes a person's worldview, so it becomes like what the

viewer is seeing on the screen. These harmful events are placed in cartoons so that they can be easily recalled as responses to real-life events. Since cartoons produce high levels of aggression anxiety, aggressive behavioral effects would then be expected after repeated exposure and subsequent desensitization (Hapkiewicz, 1979). Cartoons can negatively impact children who watch by desensitizing them to the world in which they live. When it is difficult for the viewer to make a connection between the onscreen violence and a personal threat of violence, the level of violence associated with the viewed media is diminished (Kirsh, 2006). Looking at the episode “Box Bunny Ballot” from *The Looney Tunes*, the game of Russian Roulette promotes suicide as a way to solve their, Bugs Bunny and Yosemite Sam, loss of the election. This event is not detrimental; the characters could have easily found a less violent solution to cope with their loss. This allows a child to see that suicide violence is used as a means to solve a problem which causes this lesson to become hard-wired in the central nervous system. The child will want to perform this action, explained by the social learning theory, that they do not believe is truly harmful (Drinka, 2018) hence becoming desensitized to the thought of suicide. These forms of violence may increase aggressive thoughts and desires (Kirsh, 2006). *Tom & Jerry* showed that it is okay to sign away your own life as a form of payment for something of higher value (Figure 4); children are able to view this and think that it is alright to ask for someone to be their property. This will throw off the sense of self-worth, children who are in a lower class and do not have many tangible things to offer can try to, in a way, sell themselves which promotes the idea of slavery still being present. In addition, the *Pepe Le Pew* series can encourage sexual acts of aggression. Since Pepe is shown pushing himself onto Penelope to get what he wants men will then

view this and their desire to go after women, even if they are expressing disapproval, will increase. These violent acts and sensitive topics can result in a sense of fear and wavering. If the child feels as if the action they just witnessed on the screen defies logic, then the child will waver before taking an action in their real life. This conveys that their brain is no longer able to predict the correct outcome of an action and whether it will be acceptable or would cause serious harm (Habib, 2015). To support this statement, the suicide nods in *Tom & Jerry* and *SpongeBob SquarePants* are something that have serious outcomes in the real world, but there is no real punishment or harm caused in the cartoons. Therefore, the children's brains will not know whether or not a long-term outcome would result from replicating this action. In addition, children are not mentally mature in a way that enables them to differentiate between reality and fantasy, which leads them to wish everything in this world can be like what they are watching. This is why children can even act as if they are in the cartoon world causing the misbehavior to occur (Shaffer, 2007). Another area of research performed by Thomas A. Kooijmans with the Rochester Institute of Technology concluded that the violence that appears excessively and with no reason in a TV Cartoon Show causes an excessive increase in adrenaline production which leads to an instable state of mind; the child then begins to act nervously and aggressively towards normal situations or during his playing time with his mates (Habib, 2015).

The Humor Explained

Why do we laugh at these violent actions and sensitive topics shown? There are many theories of humor that will play into the reasons we laugh. Laughter is produced due to something called the Relief Theory; the perspective of this theory is that people

laugh because the sense of stress has been reduced in a certain way (Meyer, 2000).

Cartoon characters are usually known for running off cliffs and getting injured in various ways, but they never sustain any serious long-term effects. When no consequence happens, it almost immediately defuses a potentially tense situation and lets there be room for laughter (Meyer, 2000). This is a type of coping mechanism that shows that the viewers' egos are not affected by the traumas in the external world. Due to the harmful events taking place, laughing at or ridiculing another person is an expression of disapproval that induces strong negative feelings in that person (Papousek, 2017). Therefore, the misfortune shown on the screen is laughed at because the audience is relieving any nervous energy that they would have towards the events taking place, so they may laugh together (Meyer, 2000). It also involves the distance of the relation of the joke; if the viewers have a trauma close to the same degree as what they are witnessing then it will not be as funny as if they did not have any connection to the event. The Warner Bros production of the series *Pepe Le Pew* has events that many girls have unfortunately experienced in their lives; men do not know when they are overstepping boundaries, so they do not stop their advancement. The women who have experienced events similar to those shown will have a connection that will, in essence, burn like an open wound when seeing it. Therefore, they will be less likely to laugh when watching. In addition, laughter produced also depends on the given audience or contexts, what would be perceived as quite humorous in one instance may seem irrelevant in another (Meyer, 2000). For most of the cartoons mentioned these violent jokes all depend on the timing; if the joke is delivered at the incorrect moment, it will not be perceived how it is meant to be.

In addition, there is the Benign Violation Theory of humor. In order to produce laughter, the event being viewed must be a violation; a violation is something that threatens someone's beliefs about how the world should be. This could be something that seems either threatening, unsettling, or wrong (Humor Research Lab). It also must be benign; this word means that an aspect of the event being viewed must be gentle or not harmful in effect. The most important thing is that **both** of these rules must occur simultaneously. For example, tickling is a physical threat but is overall not drastically harmful to the person being attacked. This theory is used as a type of identification that brings the audience together; it is used as a means to release tension through humor (Meyer, 2000). One main point of this theory focuses on the fact that the events do not seem real. The situation may be so different from what the viewer would expect it to be that it then draws laughter from being so outrageous. Cartoons like to hint towards all of these violent and sensitive messages, but at the last second change the event into something that is overall not harmful. This was easily shown in Figures 10 and 11 in the scenes with Squidward from *SpongeBob SquarePants*; your mind was leading you to think one thing, but the outcome was completely different. It was hinted the since Squidward was moping around and could not seem to get happy he was going to commit suicide, but what was shown was something completely innocent. When the birdcage and loaf of bread is shown as the outcome of Squidward's actions, the audience cannot help but to laugh because of how it skews away from what they initially thought.

Resiliency is also something that plays into humor. Resiliency is the ability to withstand different hardships in life, that could overall be traumatic, in a positive manner. To understand this, the Theory of Mind (TOM) needs to be mentioned; this theory states

that you are able to understand the mental states, desires, intentions, and emotions of others (Aykan, 2018). There exists TOM cartoons which are defined by jokes where it is necessary to take into account the mental states of the characters within the cartoon to understand the joke. When looking at this, those who show resilience will overall be able to relate to the character and, in turn, understand the actions and results shown in the cartoon. From the cartoons above, *SpongeBob SquarePants* is a prime example of a cartoon where you have to take into account the mental states of the characters. This series has been argued that the characters represent various mental disabilities; if this is true as well as if the people watching know which disability is being conveyed, then they [the people] will understand the purpose of the character's actions and responses and laughter will be a result. It is also possible to use humor as a coping mechanism. In the face of hardship there is a positive adaptation quality that, if strengthened, could improve quality of life and possibly foster other resilient behaviors (Killion, 2017). Therefore, laughter can be produced after watching violent and sensitive topics on screen due to having experienced the same thing in your own life, and hence then overcoming it and being able to joke and find the humor in the situations.

Conclusion

These cartoons were chosen due to their violent nature as well as the inclusion of the sensitive topics featured. There were many other cartoons and animated shorts that could have been observed, but the Warner Bros and the producer of *SpongeBob SquarePants*, Stephen Hillenburg, are notorious for producing series that support the focus of this paper. These cartoons, *The Looney Tunes*, *Pepe Le Pew*, *Tom & Jerry*, and *SpongeBob SquarePants*, were ones that had reoccurring themes throughout the entire

series; all the cartoons also shared the similar themes discussed. The themes included different types of violence as well as sensitive topics. These include and are not limited to depression, suicide, racism, alcoholism, gun violence, sexual aggression, and physical violence. Other cartoons should be observed and analyzed in future studies so that a better judgement can be created of the animated-cartoon genre as whole, however after watching multiple episodes from *The Looney Tunes*, *Pepe Le Pew*, *Tom & Jerry*, and *SpongeBob SquarePants*, many aspects lean towards them having significant impacts on the development of children viewers. These impacts are both positive and negative, the content of the cartoon decides which one it leans towards. In order to relate child development with cartoons the Social Learning Theory and Cultivation Theory were looked at. Children are great at modeling and imitating actions and behaviors that they see around them whether they are exhibited by people or displayed on a television. Television and media in general have a very persistent effect on the way we present ourselves as well as to how we respond in social environments. Reality is what we make of it and most of the time our realities correspond and have similarities to the storylines we see created on the television since they are easy to replicate. Laughter is created by multiple humor theories. This includes the Relief Theory in addition to the Benign Violation Theory. The Relief Theory shows how stress and nervous energy is reduced, while the Benign Violation Theory shows how an event can stray away from what is viewed as acceptable, but it has no harmful effect in the end. An equally important cause for laughter is a skill called resiliency. Resiliency enables the viewer to relate certain experiences they have had in their lives to what characters are going through in the shows/movies they are watching. This relation allows the viewers to understand the

character's responses to the events they are going through, and thus laughing because they [the viewers] have responded or wish they responded in a similar way. Likewise, resiliency takes into account the mental states of the characters on the screen; the theory of mind establishes the understanding that people are able to interpret the emotions, desires, and intentions of others. In summary, there is now a comprehensive acknowledgment of some impacts cartoons can have on youth, with simultaneously recognizing the humor responses that are revealed when the different cartoons are watched. This is important to look over and consider so that we are able to really grasp the content that is being shown to the youth, in order to show a correlation between media violence to violence in the real world in addition to understanding how we then categorize humor. To conclude everything, the parents or guardians must always use their own judgement on what is being shown to their children because we never know when violent actions and sensitive topics will be featured.

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