

How Pre-school Children Play: The Influences of Television Animation and Family

Ma. Margarita A. Acosta

Television has been a household fixture in Philippine homes for over 50 years. While the medium's contributions to education and information delivery are undeniable, concern regarding its negative effects on audiences, particularly on children, has been a recurring theme of media research. This study on the connection between children's exposure to animated programs and resulting play behaviors considers family as a complementary influence. It focuses on a particular sub-group which has been quite understudied, i.e., Filipino pre-school children.

Results reveal that television viewing influences play behaviors, and that parental interventions are crucial in honing the children's ability to distinguish between bad and good, especially when play behaviors are concerned. Recommendations for parental and school interventions conclude the article.

Introduction

These days, there is a myriad of media choices to serve the entertainment and information needs of young urban audiences. The storybook, which is traditionally the first entertainment/information medium a child is exposed to, holds his/her attention visually with colorful and attractive pictures and aurally through the sound of his/her parents' voices as they read the text. However, another powerful medium, the television, sits in many Filipino homes today. Like a book, it is visual; and like a parent, it speaks.

Direct experience with television for many urban children begins at very early ages. At age three, when s/he is able to talk, the child shouts for his/her favorite program. Very often, these favored programs are cartoon shows which are staple television programs. Every day of the week, there are animated programs in the free and cable TV stations available in various parts of the country¹. The range of these programs varies from action-filled stories with super heroes, hi-tech robots, and mutant saviors, to slapstick comedy with different kinds of talking animals, to fairy tales. Several foreign cartoons are not only shown in English but are also dubbed in Filipino so that children across the different income classes will be able to understand the program.

It is in this context of widely-available animation that this research study is situated. Its main aim is to look into the influence of these animated cartoon programs on pre-school children aged four to six years. Moreover, it looks into whether – and how – the family acts as a complementary influence, guiding these children's play behaviors. Specifically, this study seeks to:

1. find out the children's choices of favorite animated programs and characters,
2. determine the children's characterization of "good" and "bad" cartoon characters,
3. find out the behavioral manifestations of cartoon viewing, if any (i.e., if and how these programs and characters affect their play behaviors), and
4. ascertain the involvement and intervention of parents and other family members in the children's television-viewing habits as well as their post-viewing behaviors.

Review of Related Literature

Concern regarding television's effect on its audiences has been a recurring theme among the research studies that have been conducted since the advent of television in the 1940s. Much of this research has consistently included a children's focus.

Furu (1971) looked at Japanese television studies conducted at different time frames and found that over the years, similar concerns have been raised about television's effects on children, e.g., its tendency to promote passive behavior, hinder critical thinking, and deaden sensitivity to values. Wartella (1988), who likewise documented research conducted from the earliest years of television, also found that the issues of debate regarding the short- and long-term effects of TV viewing on children's values and behaviors have not changed much over time.

Wartella's and Furu's researches indicate that concerns pertaining to television effects are not specific to a particular culture, affirming a claim that Wilbur Schramm made much earlier. According to Schramm (1961: 30), "We are unable to prove that cultural differences have any effect on television viewing by children, independent of the effects of (television's) relative availability and attractiveness." Schramm's cross-cultural study was the first extensive investigation into television, family life, and values. Findings of his multi-method and multi-sample study conducted in 1961 still adequately describe the trends of the present decade.

Several studies on TV consumption and/or effects among children focused on age as one of the intervening variables. One of these is Aljishi's (1986) study on the effects of television on social behavior among pre-school children in Bahrain. While differences were found in the cooperative and aggressive behaviors of children after exposure to pro- and anti-social behavior programs, its long-term effects could not be ascertained.

Some studies have found that despite their young ages, children are not dumb audiences. Luna (1991) found that children aged 4 to 12 years are able to identify the value of “crime-does-not-pay” from programs with the same theme. A study by Tripon (1990) concluded that children can identify when violence in a cartoon is not truly vital to make the story interesting.

The comparative views of children and parents about children’s TV programs have also been investigated. For instance, a 1972-73 study of viewing habits and preferences of children from different European regions revealed that their most frequently watched and favored children’s programs were cartoons, for the reason that they were funny. But while the children’s preferences were for comedy, parents claimed they encouraged their children to watch general interest and informational programs, principally for educational reasons (Berry & Asamen 1993). A local study similarly established children’s preference for cartoons, averaging two to three hours of such viewing daily (Espeleta 1991). The same study revealed that regardless of the negative effects of television, parents found Philippine TV a good vehicle for learning and entertainment.

Overall, the research literature indicates that concern regarding the relation between television and children has been and will remain an important area of media research – considering the continuing ubiquity of television in homes, the changing character of TV technology, and its place in people’s lifestyles. This study aims to be more sensitive to TV viewing issues concerning a particular subgroup of children generally understudied, the pre-school children. The researcher sees this study particularly significant at this time when many choices for both educational and entertaining materials are readily available to young impressionable pre-school children, and when the changing lifestyles leave children to explore the television by themselves.

Study Framework

Theoretical bases of the study

This study focuses on how (1) animated cartoon programs influence the play behaviors of pre-school children and (2) the family, as an environmental factor, intervenes in the formation of such behaviors. Two classic theories are used and fused, namely: the Functional Theory of Herbert Kelman and the Triadic Reciprocal Determinism of Albert Bandura.

Kelman’s Functional Theory sees people’s attitudes and behaviors as the products of personal motives and social influence. He distinguishes among three processes of social influence, i.e., compliance, identification, and internalization, each of which manifests different types of opinions and actions. For this study, the process of identification is the most relevant.

Identification happens when an individual adopts an influencing agent’s opinions and actions in order to form his/her self image in reference to this person – in other words, to be like the other person. Identification can lead to two kinds of relationships: classical identification and reciprocal role. Classical identification occurs when an individual internalizes all or part of the other person. In the context of this study, the relationship between pre-school children and animated characters on television illustrates classical identification because these youngsters adopt their favorite cartoon characters’ actions in their play and/or non-play behaviors.

A reciprocal-role relationship is the product of a two-way identification process, such that each individual’s self-affirmation and self-presentation reflects his/her roles to the other. In this study, the relationship between pre-school children and their family is reciprocal since their roles define the way they feel and act toward each other. The family and child respond in reference to each other where feelings and emotions, as well as punishment and rewards, are acknowledged.

The second theory, Triadic Reciprocal Determinism, is founded on concepts of Social Cognition. This theory favors a model of causation where behavior, cognition and other personal factors, and environmental influences all operate as interacting determinants that influence each other. These different sources of influence, however, do not exert the same level of effect. For instance, parents have greater ability to affect the play behavior of the children at home in the form of disciplining them, while the media is stronger in offering entertainment.

Figure 1 presents the study’s Conceptual Framework which accommodates Bandura’s Triadic Reciprocal Determinism and concepts from Kelman’s Functional Theory. *B* signifies behavior; *P* refers to the cognitive, biological and other internal events that can affect perception and actions; and *E* represents the external environment, specifically the family and media.

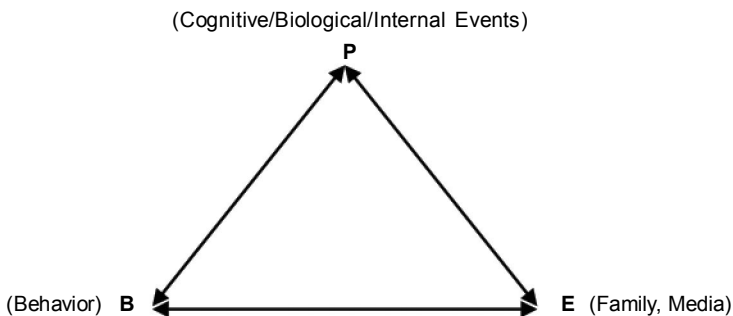


Figure 1. Conceptual Model: Modified Triadic Determinism Model

The *P* and *B* connection in the model reflects the interaction of cognition and action among the study subjects who are of a particular age. The pre-schoolers' beliefs, self-perceptions, goals, and expectations give shape and direction to their behavior.

The *E* and *P* connection shows the interactive relationship between social influences in the environment and personal characteristics. Environmental influences, which in this study are the family and media, play a great role in children's physical and cognitive development. The family, which nurtures and sustains the child, is the initial group that molds his/her thoughts and beliefs. Together with the family, the ubiquitous media, particularly television, help shape children's cognitions.

The *B* and *E* segment represents the two-way influence between individual behavior and the environment. Children's identification with social influences in the environment affects their behavior. Apart from what they say and do, inherent characteristics of children such as their age, sex, and attractiveness elicit different reactions from the social environment, i.e., a child's individuality creates differential responses from adults. Children in this study are pre-schoolers whose actions and behaviors are often observed, assessed, and corrected; thus, environmental factors determine which behaviors are developed and activated.

Operational framework

This study's variables are shown in Figure 2. *P* pertains to the pre-schooler's interpretations of TV cartoon characters and actions, which may be influenced by his/her gender. The element *E* refers to the environmental and complementary influences provided by the family and animated TV programs. *B* represents the pre-school child's play behaviors, which are shaped by the kind and strength of identification relationships the child has with his/her parents on the one hand, and his/her favorite cartoon characters, on the other.

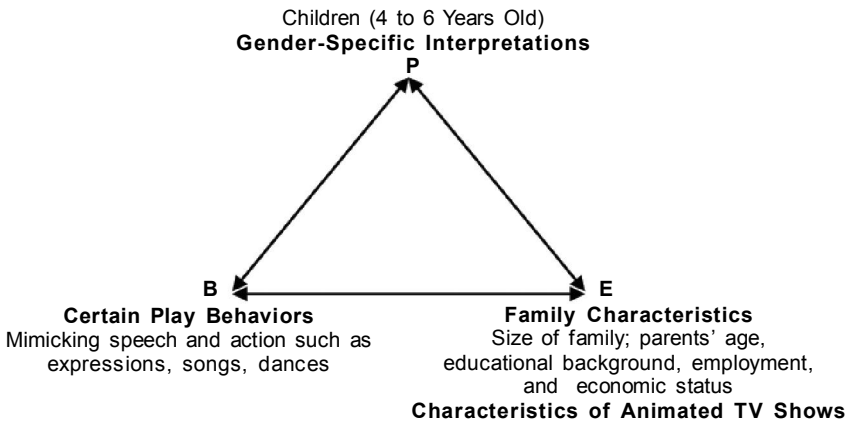


Figure 2. Operational Framework of Study

Methodology

This study followed an exploratory and descriptive design to discover and give details about viewership of TV animation programs among pre-schoolers, particularly on its influence on the children's play behaviors. Since environmental influences from home and school were recognized to interact with the children's interpretations and behaviors, there were two data sources for the study: 1) 40 children from the nursery and kindergarten levels of the Miriam College Child Study Center (MC-CSC), who were interviewed and observed during recess and play time and 2) the parents of these children.

Forty children aged four to six years², equally split between boys (20) and girls (20), were chosen from the two nursery and kindergarten classes of MC-CSC during the school year 1999-2000. Children-respondents included in the study were recommended by their teachers, following the researcher's criterion – that was, the children should be able to communicate orally.

To gather data for this study, the researcher observed and conducted casual but probing conversations with children, and distributed structured and self-administered questionnaires to their parents. Data gathering was conducted in 1999. However, this researcher believes the data are still current since television remains as the preeminent medium consumed by children – pre-schoolers, in particular. The cartoons included in this study are still aired on the free and cable channels of Philippine television. Furthermore, this researcher believes that the personal and social characteristics of Filipino pre-school children in 1999 still apply to the present, considering that the profile of MC-CSC students has largely been stable over the past five years.

Data Discussion³

Profile of the children respondents

Data on the children's personal characteristics, animated program viewership preferences, and play behaviors were gathered through self-administered questionnaires given to the parents of the 40 selected children. Despite the researcher's efforts to retrieve all the 40 questionnaires distributed to parents, only 31 were returned. Mothers (27), rather than fathers (3) were the typical parent-respondent.

The children came from families which were fairly new and generally small. A large majority were either the first- or second-born children (23 of 31) in families with one to three children (25 of 31) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Personal characteristics of children respondents

Age of the child	Total (N=40)
4	10
5	20
6	10
Birth order of the child in the family	No. of respondents (n=31)
First	11
Second	12
Third	7
Fourth	1
Number of siblings	No. of respondents (n=31)
1	2
2	10
3	13
4	3
5	1
No answer	2

The parents of the children included in the study were generally well-educated, employed, and upwardly mobile. These mothers and fathers were between the ages of 31 and 35 years. Except for one, all parents graduated with at least a college degree (30), with eight of them completing post-graduate degrees. Most parents worked in a variety of occupations, ranging from administrative and managerial positions, medical professions, education, and media. A few established their own businesses. Those who were unemployed were homemaker-mothers (see Table 2).

In sum, the parents and their spouses belonged to the higher end of the socio-economic ladder. The fact that their children were enrolled in a private pre-school was proof of their economic status.

Viewership of animated TV shows

The parents affirmed that their children watched television on a daily basis (see Table 3). In fact, the data reveal that the children had rather high TV exposure since more (19) watched from one and a half hours to more than two hours than those (12) who watched for only half an hour. It is noteworthy that girls generally had longer TV viewing hours than boys, which is consistent with the preference of girls to stay indoors more often than boys.

Table 2. Characteristics of parent respondents

Age	No. of respondents (N=31)
25-30	3
31-35	15
36-40	9
41-45	2
46-50	1
No answer	1
Relationship to the child	No. of respondents (N=31)
Mother	27
Father	3
No answer	1
Educational attainment of respondents	No. of respondents (N=31)
Undergraduate	1
College graduate	30
Highest educational degree obtained	No. of respondents (N=31)
Master's degree	4
Doctor of Dental Medicine	1
Doctor of Medicine	2
Doctor of Philosophy	1
Employment status (respondents)	No. of respondents (N=31)
Employed	23
Not employed	8
Employment status (spouses)	No. of respondents (N=31)
Employed	28
Not employed	3

Table 3. Daily TV viewing hours of children

No. of hours	Boys	Girls	Total
30 minutes	8	4	12
1.5 hrs - 2 hrs	4	9	13
More than 2 hrs	4	2	6
TOTAL	16	15	31

Home viewing situation

The children's television viewing was normally in the company of others, as reported by the children themselves (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2) and confirmed by their parents (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2). Interestingly, more children (5) said they watched television alone than parents (1) who admitted that their children did watch alone⁴.

Table 4.1. Incidence of presence of companions while televiewing, as reported by children

	Boys	Girls	Total
Yes	3	2	5
No	16	16	32
Sometimes	1	2	3
TOTAL	20	20	40

Table 4.2. Companions while televiewing, as reported by children

	Boys	Girls	Total
Siblings	15	14	29
Mother	3	7	10
Yaya	3	4	7
Father	3	3	6
Cousins	0	1	1
Neighbors	1	0	1
No answer	1	0	1

Table 5.1. Incidence of having companions while televiewing, as reported by parents

	Boys	Girls	Total
Yes	0	1	1
No	16	13	29
Sometimes	0	1	1
TOTAL	16	15	31

Table 5.2. Companions while televiewing, as reported by parents

	Boys	Girls	Total
Siblings	11	11	22
Mother	7	10	17
Yaya	6	4	10
Father	2	5	7
Cousins	3	3	6
Someone trustworthy	1	0	1

The TV viewing companions were most often siblings (29 and 22, as reported by children and their parents, respectively). The general case, then, was unsupervised television viewing since these sibling-companions were children themselves, who probably share the same or similar viewing behaviors and value perceptions as the children-respondents.

Adult-supervision was nonetheless provided in some instances since mothers-as-TV-companions was the second most common TV viewing situation. But then again, more parents (17) than children (10) reported mothers as TV-viewing companions. *Yayas* or nannies (as reported by 7 children and 10 parents) were a distant third, while fathers were even rarer TV viewing companions (six and seven, respectively).

Comparison of TV viewing companions of the boys versus the girls showed that more girls had mothers staying with them during TV exposure. While the data are not statistically significant, it may be suggestive of the more special treatment that traditional Filipino parents/families give their daughters. That is, because girls are considered sensitive, vulnerable, and frail, they need to be more protected. On the other hand, it may be that more mothers stay with their daughters while watching TV because they find their little girls more receptive to companionship, more welcoming of cuddles and hugs than their sons.

Behaviors while watching TV

The parents observed that their male and female children manifested similar behaviors that ranged from quiet attention to active imitation while watching TV (see Table 6). These behaviors indicate that children attend to television programs with different levels of intensity.

Favorite cartoon shows

Comparison of children's and parents' responses revealed that parents were generally able to identify the cartoon shows favored by their children (see Table 7a). The cartoon shows *Akazukin Cha-Cha*, *Popeye*, *Little Lulu*, and *Mojako* were identified by both children and parents as favorites. Parents claimed they knew their children's favorites because they watch these shows together or because they simply took the time to ask their children what their favorite programs were.

Table 6. Intensity of televiewing behaviors of children

Intensity of attention to program	Behavioral category	Example of behaviors	
		Boys	Girls
Full attention	Quiet attention	Sitting or lying down quietly, sometimes accompanied by eating	Concentrated watching, with some verbal comments every now and then
Moderate attention	Persistent inquiring and chatting	Asking questions and (incessant) talking about what is shown with companions	Answering characters on screen and talking about what is shown, at times carrying on conversation and inquiry with companion
	Active imitation	Mimicking actions and movements of characters, including dancing	Mimicking actions and speech of characters, including singing and dancing
Minimal or irregular attention	Fooling around	Playing games, drawing, doing other unrelated things while watching	Playing with toys, drawing while watching

Table 7a. Top ranking cartoon shows, as reported by children

Rank	Title	Boys	Girls	Total
1	Akazukin Cha-cha	0	7	7
2.5	Popeye the Sailorman	4	2	6
2.5	Scooby Doo	4	2	6
3	Little Lulu	2	1	3
3	Ghost Busters	3	0	3
3	Mojako	2	1	3

However, there were again slight discrepancies between the responses of the children and their parents. For instance, while *Dexter's Laboratory* was not mentioned by the children, it ranked number one in the accounts of the parents. And while parents said that their sons enjoyed *Akazukin Cha-Cha*, none of the boys mentioned this show. Furthermore, the children mentioned two cartoons (i.e., *Scooby Doo* and *Ghostbusters*) that parents did not account for (see Table 7b).

Table 7b. Top ranking cartoon shows, as reported by their parents

Rank	Title	Boys	Girls	Total
1	Dexter's Laboratory	4	7	11
2.5	Akazukin Cha-cha	6	2	8
2.5	Little Lulu	3	5	8
3	Popeye the Sailorman	6	1	7
3	Mojako	3	3	6

These discrepancies may be attributed to memory lapses on the part of both parents and children and to the airing time of these shows (i.e., the cartoons are aired at a time when parents are not around).

The children's gender appears to be related to their choices of favorite cartoons. Girls liked *Akazukin Cha-Cha* and *Little Lulu* where the protagonists are girls; while boys chose *Popeye*, *Scooby Doo*, and *Ghostbusters* where the protagonists are males. At their ages, these children's gender-specific preferences are evidences of enculturation by the social environment.

Favorite and least-liked cartoon characters

The children's choices of favorite cartoons and favorite and least-liked cartoon characters reveal something about their perception of values.

Characters that were liked were perceived as good. All are protagonists (e.g., Akazukin Cha-Cha, Popeye, Scooby Doo, Little Lulu, Dexter, etc.), have identifiable pleasing physical characteristics (e.g., pretty hair and dress, blonde hair), admirable abilities as well as positive traits and qualities (e.g., has power, does magic, strong, intelligent, etc.). Other bases for liking a specific character had to do with the role played, words uttered, things owned, and emotions elicited from the viewers (see Table 8).

Least-liked cartoon characters, on the other hand, were perceived as bad (see Table 9). Most of these characters are antagonists, e.g., Blutto, The Ghosts, Momoja, Tazmania, etc., with unappreciated physical qualities (i.e., ugly, weird-looking) and unacceptable behaviors (i.e., pushing, boxing, stealing money, doing bad).

Since these children are very young, it is not surprising that their value judgments are rather simplistic and bi-polar. The cartoons themselves – i.e., the drawing of the protagonists as 'pretty' and the reverse ('weird' or 'ugly') for the antagonists, along with the endowment of desirable qualities ('powerful', 'strong') on protagonists and unacceptable social behaviors (violence such as pushing, boxing, and stealing) on antagonists – reinforce such straightforward and effortless interpretation.

Table 8. Most-liked cartoon character

Cartoon Program	Character	Reasons
Akazukin Cha-Cha	Cha-Cha	she's beautiful and good
		she has power and does magic
		her hair and dress are pretty
	Lea	she saves all her friends
Popeye the Sailorman	Popeye	he does not want to marry
		he likes spaghetti forever
		he eats spinach
		he is good
Scooby Doo	Scooby Doo	he is strong / he fights
		he helps others / saves Olive
		he gets scared
		he is nice/good/fun
Little Lulu	Lulu	he likes to catch ghosts
	Tabby	he does not bite
Ghost Busters	Egon	he is a dog
Mojako	Mojako	she is kind to her friends / good
		I just like him
Bugs Bunny	Bugs Bunny	he is funny
		he is funny
		he is funny
Dexter's Laboratory	Dexter	he is cute
		he is good
		he can stick out his tongue and catch many people
Batman	Batman	I like carrots
		he is funny
		he strikes Elmer
Georgie	Georgie	he is intelligent
		I want to be Batman
Pooh Bear	Winnie the Pooh	I will eat the enemy
		I will kill Joker and tie him in jail
		she plays a lot
Addams Family	Uncle Fester	she is good/helps her mother
		he is good
		his favorite is honey
Casper	Casper	he is funny
		he is able to burn himself
		he hangs inside his closet
Sky Dancers	Angelica	he is good
		he is good
Madeline	Madeline	her hair is blonde
		her dress is pink
Ranma	Ranma	she is good
		she is pretty and small
		he defends the planet from the Chinese when he is a boy

Table 9. Least-liked cartoon character

Cartoon Program	Character	Reasons
Akazukin Cha-Cha	Enemies	they are bad
	Maureen	she has pink hair she liked Cha-Cha's friend
Popeye the Sailorman	Blutto (Brutus)	he is bad: he fights Popeye he boxes and pushes Popeye
Scooby Doo	The Ghosts	they are ugly
Little Lulu	Tabby	he is bad: he hurts others
Ghost Busters	The Ghosts	they look weird
Mojako	Momoja	he is the enemy he is bad: he fights Mojako
Tazmania	Tazmania	he is scary
Bugs Bunny	Elmer Fudd	he is bad: he tries to kill Bugs Bunny
Batman	Joker	he is a bad guy: he steals money he is wrong
Georgie	Father of the friend	he fights with the dad of Georgie
	Grandpa	he is bad: he fights
Addams Family	Mortisha	she is always in black my papa does not want me to imitate her she is over-acting
Sky Dancers	Sky clown	he fights with the Dancers
		he hits them and kidnaps them

Imitation behavior

Asked whether they imitate the cartoon characters, more (25) children-respondents were quick to say “no”, adding that they “watch only” (see Table 10).

Table 10. Whether children imitate the cartoon characters

Response	Boys	Girls	Total
Yes	4	7	11
No	14	11	25
Sometimes	0	1	1
No Answer	2	1	3
TOTAL	20	20	40

The children's reasons for not imitating the characters indicate that the children are able to distinguish fantasy from reality. According to them, the shows are "just cartoons", making it impossible for them to imitate characters which are animals, are unnatural, or come from out of this world. For example, the children said:

Lulu is only a cartoon girl. I'll become weird too. Hindi naman ako aso. (I'm not a dog). I cannot (imitate) because my tongue cannot stick out (the way the cartoon character Mojako uses his tongue to catch the enemy).

The children also acknowledged authority (i.e., their mothers, fathers, siblings, and teachers) who told them that it is bad to imitate what is seen on TV:

*Mommy said not to gaya (Mommy said not to imitate).
Sabi ng kapatid ko (My sibling said).
Kasi po masamang manggaya sabi ng daddy ko (My dad said it's bad to imitate).
Ayaw ng papa ko gayahin, ayaw ng papa ko na maarte masyado ako (My dad doesn't want me to imitate and become very frisky or frivolous).
Kasi po ayokong umalis sa nanay at tata ko (Because I do not want to separate from my mother and father).
Kasi sabi ni teacher hindi pwede ginagaya (Because teacher said not to imitate).*

Additionally, non-imitation can be attributed to the children's ability to distinguish good from bad:

*Because sometimes he is doing bad.
Kasi badyon, (maski) magaling magbaril
(Even though he shoots a gun well, that is bad).*

as well as to their self-realization:

*I don't fight with people.
I don't want to hurt other people.
I don't want to get hurt because she (the cartoon character) runs fast.
Ayokong gayahin/Basta hindi lang ginagaya (I just don't want to imitate).*

Among those who claimed that they do imitate the characters, there was some value judgment involved. Imitation behavior, which took the form of the character's speech, actions, and dancing, was reserved only for the characters perceived to be good and not bad. The admired qualities of the good characters

were imagined by some children to be theirs and thus were incorporated in their play behaviors. As shown in Table 10, more girls (7) than boys (4) admitted imitating cartoon characters; however, given this study’s small sample size, the effect of gender on imitation behavior cannot be ascertained. Further research can explore if there is any connection between these variables.

Play behaviors

Play follows TV viewing, as claimed by all children-respondents. It was more normal for children to play with others than not have any companions during play. Most of the boys and girls mentioned their siblings, yaya, cousins, friends, neighbors, and classmates as play companions.

TV viewing was apparently not the only type of entertainment the children liked, as evidenced by their preferences for different games and toys (see Tables 11, 12a, 12b). Boys were more inclined to playing outdoors, and being more involved with technology. On the other hand, girls were involved in more imaginative and imitative role playing, including singing and dancing. Such play and toy preferences may also be a product of the parents’ social construction of gender expectations, i.e., girls are encouraged to stay indoors while the boys are allowed outdoors and to be more adventurous.

Some parent-respondents claimed that the games and toys their children enjoyed were not connected with their TV animation viewing. According to a parent, the children’s toy and game preferences were influenced by the hard-sell advertising spots in children’s entertainment and educational programs, and by playmates and/or schoolmates.

Table 11. Kinds of games children enjoy

Games	Boys	Girls
Outdoor games/ sports	football/soccer	soccer
	basketball	ring around the rosey
	touchball	
	baseball	
Indoor games/ sports	Domino	chess
Role play	ginagaya si Popeye (imitating Popeye)	bahay-bahayan/ginagaya si mommy at si daddy (playing house)
		parang si "Lulu" (imitating Lulu)
		cowgirls-cowboys
Others		collecting books
		kilitian (tickling each other)

Table 12a. Favored toys, as reported by the children

	Boys	Girls
Role play-related	stuffed toy	doll
	dinosaurs	telephone-telephone, cooking-cooking
	soldiers	toy house
	cars, rocket, train, truck	
	robot	
Creative/Artistic	Lego, blocks	Lego
	clay	
Cartoon-related	Batman, Spiderman, Superman, Star Wars, Winnie the Pooh	Sky Dancers, Winnie the Pooh, Barbie, Tweety
Technology	Play Station	

Table 12b. Favored toys, as reported by parents

	Boys	Girls
Role play-related	toy cars and anything with wheels	play houses
	dinosaurs	all sorts of dolls (Barbie, Polly Pocket, Abby)
	toy swords and guns	paper dolls
		toy make-up and jewelry
		stuffed toys
		cooking sets
Creative/Artistic	blocks and shapes	blackboards
	Lego	Lego
Cartoon-related	action figures	Lisa Frank
	robots	Sanrio stuff
Educational	books	books
	puzzles	
	board games	
	chess	
	domino	
Games/sports	bikes	
	balls	

Parents' observation of play behaviors

Most parents claimed that their children manifested behaviors picked up from TV animation programs. Basically, the children's behavior manifestations were imitations of what they saw and heard on television, including wholesome singing and dancing as well as their rough and violent play actions (see Table 13).

Table 13. Behavior manifestations, as reported by parents

Behavior manifestations of what is heard	mimicking the way certain characters talk, e.g., Sylvester the Cat, Little Lulu
	picking up dialogues from the cartoons and using them when talking to people
	imitating certain phrases used by cartoon characters, such as "snap-out-of-it", "oh, no!", "see ya!"
	memorizing jokes and repeating them
	talking with the accent of cartoon characters
	singing theme songs of the shows
Behavior manifestations of what is seen	making faces like favorite characters
	imitating actions of the main characters, including: self-defense stances, eating spinach like Popeye, helping classmates like Robin Hood
	imitating the princesses, e.g., the way they dress; asking her own princess stuff

Parental interventions to guide children’s play behaviors

TV can be an educational medium but children need parental guidance when watching it. The data suggest that parents are not passive observers of how TV animation viewing is affecting their children as most of them reported that they take an active part in reinforcing the characters’ positive traits and countering their negative traits. Specific steps that the parents reported that they take to guide the children’s TV viewing include:

- *Explaining that animation differs from reality and hence should not be imitated;*
- *Limiting television exposure, e.g., not allowing violent shows/movies and programs geared for older children;*
- *Disallowing viewership of certain cartoons, for example, Japanese cartoons (except Akazukin Chacha) because of their violent content and display of negative traits, i.e., revenge and jealousy, and Popeye because of its violent content and wrong grammar;*
- *Making sure that the child watches TV with somebody who can explain what is going on and who can turn the TV off when there is something that the child should not see;*
- *Telling children the right thing to do;*
- *Immediately correcting negative behavior and explaining why the behavior is bad;*
- *Making sure that the children understand the values imbibed in the story, if it teaches a good moral lesson.*

However, the parents acknowledged that they cannot totally protect their children from TV's negative effects. For example, they admitted that "when it comes to cartoons we cannot really monitor them as we are often at work".

Conclusion

This study's findings show unequivocally that pre-school children pick up cartoon language and behavior and manifest them in their play behaviors, thereby exhibiting classical identification with their favorite characters/shows. The findings also show evidence of gender-guided play preferences. At the same time, there is evidence for reciprocal identification since familial/parental influences show strongly in the pre-school children's judgment of positive and negative traits and behaviors of animated characters.

The results also reveal that parents move to abate the negative influence of animation on their pre-school children's behaviors. Specifically, they reinforce the positive messages of the animation programs and promptly counter the negative ones "so that these will not be absorbed permanently" and so that children will not grow up believing that problems and conflicts can be easily resolved through violence, as the animation programs seem to want the children to believe.

However, all is still not rosy in familyland. The parents realize their limitations as their jobs keep them away from home during the times their children are in front of the TV. Thus, it is not always the case that the parents are around to help the children process the kind of reality that is portrayed in the media.

Recommendations

Parents set standards for behavior that they expect their pre-school children to comply with, accept, and internalize. However, television animation, with its attractive sound and visual production techniques, present alternative standards that compete with, and even undermine, the parents' rules.

Recognizing the potentially harmful influence of TV animation and considering their own limitations in controlling TV exposure, parents need support so that they can properly guide their young children. Apart from providing their children with stimulating outdoor and indoor activities – rather than purely media-oriented play – parents should also embark on efforts to discuss with their children those TV programs that do not parallel their concept of morality.

Schools exist as partners of the family/home. As such, they need to strengthen their media education efforts in helping children make better choices

among the media and materials available to them. Among other things, schools can develop and regularly update the curricula materials for Media Education programs for both children and adults. Moreover, schools can consider offering regular workshops and conferences as well as producing newsletters on home-school partnership.

It goes without saying that the media should take steps to be more responsible in providing better quality entertainment programs, both animated and non-animated shows. At this time when both parents work outside the home, the media do not serve just entertainment alone – they become a virtual reality for children.

Adults – whether parents, teachers, media professionals – need to respect children and listen to how children at their most tender years make sense of the world they live in. This is the first step to helping them.

Notes

- ¹ Currently, child audiences in the Metro Manila area can choose to watch from 13 free TV channels and anywhere from 41 to 70 local and foreign channels, some of which have programming that are purely child-oriented, e.g., cartoon and educational shows (Pernia & Mateo 2004).
- ² The researcher recognizes differing developmental levels of children between the ages of four to six. However, since the CSC pre-school is comprised of children from four to six years old, they have been taken as a unit.
- ³ The complete study from which this article is derived considered the school as another complementary influence in the lives of Filipino pre-school children, aside from TV animation programs and family. However, for this journal article, focus is on TV animation programs and family only.
- ⁴ Discrepancies between reports of parents and children, however slight, consistently show parental reports as stricter.

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Ma. Margarita A. Acosta is a full-time faculty member of the Miriam College (formerly Maryknoll College) Communication Arts Department, where she obtained her AB Communication Arts degree in 1986. She earned her master's degree in Communication, majoring in Communication Research, in 1999 from the University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication. She is currently completing her course work for a Ph.D. in Child and Family Studies at Miriam College.