

# Foul content found in children's cartoons

## Study cites 'staggering' violence, verbal abuse, sexual situations

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Children's cartoons still abound with slapstick comedy, but more than a few contain bullying, put-downs, vulgar words and sexual innuendo, a study says.

Many parents assume children's programming is safe and child-friendly, said L. Brent Bozell III, founder and president of the Parents Television Council (PTC), which yesterday released its first study on children's programming.

"But this is clearly no longer the case," he said. A review of 443.5 hours of Saturday-morning and after-school shows for children ages 5 to 10 showed "staggering" amounts of violence, as well as verbal abuse, offensive language, antisocial attitudes and behaviors, excre-

tory content, disrespect for adults and sexual content.

Cartoon violence isn't new, Mr. Bozell said, but "[c]artoon characters weren't pulling their brains out through their noses four decades ago. Bugs Bunny didn't call Elmer Fudd an idiot. Satanic demons didn't populate the world of bad guys."

Children younger than 8 are developmentally incapable of distinguishing between fantasy and reality, said Dr. Michael Rich, director of the Center on Media and Child Health at the Boston Children's Hospital. Repeated exposure to media violence can lead to "fear and anxiety, desensitization to the suffering of others and increases in aggressive attitudes, thoughts and behaviors," he said.

The PTC study reviewed about 100 shows on ABC, NBC, Fox, WB, Cartoon Network,

ABC Family Channel, Disney Channel and Nickelodeon for a three-week period last summer. It found a per-hour average of 7.86 instances of violence, 1.93 instances of verbal aggression, 1.49 instances of "disruptive or problematic" attitudes and behavior and 0.62 instances of sexual content.

Jim Dyke, executive director of TV Watch, a group that urges parents — not the government — to decide TV viewing habits, said PTC "has a history of making sensational claims in order to push government control of content."

Most, if not all, TV shows carry ratings and 109 million households have televisions with V-chips, TV Watch said. Parents can block undesired shows with V-chips, cable and satellite controls.

Cartoon Network, which is in

88 million homes, offers parental guidelines and show ratings on its Web site ([www.cartoonnetwork.com](http://www.cartoonnetwork.com)) and refers parents to the National Cable & Telecommunications Association's "Take control. It's easy" Web page ([www.controlyourtv.org](http://www.controlyourtv.org)) about parental controls.

Mr. Bozell called such industry responses "tragic."

The PTC results are "very troubling," said Sen. Sam Brownback, Kansas Republican. It may be time for federal agencies to investigate whether broadcast companies again are targeting children with adult materials, he said.

Mr. Brownback also urged Congress to pass legislation to boost fines for TV indecency violations. A House-passed bill raise fines to \$500,000, while a Senate bill would raise them to \$325,000.