



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on September 9, 2011

Parents Group Warns of Sleazy Network TV Cartoons

The Parents Television Council (PTC), a conservative watchdog group, has released a new study of network cartoons that are being viewed by kids, and, predictably, the findings are grim. In *Cartoons Are No Laughing Matter*, PTC used data from the Nielsen research group to identify the network cartoon shows most viewed by tweens and teens from ages 12 to 17. Based on those findings, "PTC examined 123 episodes of animated programming that aired on Adult Swim, Cartoon Network, Disney Channel and Nick at Nite for the presence of sexual content, violence, drugs and explicit language between March 21, 2011 and April 14, 2011," the report stated. The findings were disturbing, to say the least, with nearly 1,500 documented incidents of explicit language, drug use, violence, and sexual content during the time period studied.



Noted the report: "On average, young viewers were exposed to adult content once every two minutes and 19 seconds. TV-PG rated animation featured sex, drugs, or profanity every two minutes and 31 seconds." Researchers said that some of the most explicit and objectionable content was found on Adult Swim, "which used to begin airing at 11:00 pm ET and now begins at 9:00 pm ET (8:00 pm CT)." The network shares air time with the Cartoon Network, which has long been considered a child-safe channel.

Among the findings of the PTC report:

- There were a total of 680 sexual depictions (outdoing the 674 incidents of violence in all its forms) during the period studied, which included "simulations or obscured scenes of sexual intercourse, pornography, masturbation, pedophilia, and prostitution," the report noted.
- "There were a total of 208 incidents relating to drugs," researchers found, "including cocaine, marijuana, crystal meth, psychedelics, and alcohol. Eighty percent of the drug-related incidents were depictions rather than references."
- As for offensive language, researchers identified "565 incidents of explicit language on shows rated TV-PG and TV-14."

The study also found a sleazy complement of advertising to go with the offensive animated shows, including ads for TV-MA shows (a rating indicating a program is not appropriate for kids), and "R"-rated movies (essentially, movies that contain overt sex, nudity, and graphic acts of violence). Tim Winter, president of the Parents Television Council, said that his group's findings "should be vexing for every



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parent. The term ‘adult’ not only describes the nature of the cartoon content itself; it also describes the products being marketed to kids.”

Winter noted that sex, drugs, and profanity have taken over much of today’s animated TV shows. “We’re not talking about cartoon characters slipping on banana peels and ramming into doors,” he said, referring to the pratfall humor that has been part of cartoons and comedy for decades. “Our data demonstrates that today’s norm is profanity-laden storylines involving everything from rape and cocaine to STDs and crystal meth. There is now more sexual content on these cartoons than violence — even when counting traditional ‘light’ cartoon violence.”

Of course, most parents are fully aware that cartoons have become more risqué and “adult-oriented,” especially those produced for older viewers and aired later in the evening. But Winter said that parents might be shocked “at just how adult the content” has become —and how often teens and pre-teens are watching it. Many parents “don’t even realize Adult Swim appears on the same channel as the decidedly kid-centric Cartoon Network and begins airing at 9:00 pm Eastern/8:00 pm Central,” Winter pointed out.

He advised that today’s parents “need to understand just how explicit these cartoons are so they can make better viewing decisions for their family.” Additionally, he said, cable companies must give parents more opportunities to unsubscribe from cable networks they don’t want their families exposed to. “As it stands now, every parent who subscribes to cable so their kids can watch Disney or Nickelodeon is also forking over cash every month to Adult Swim,” he said. “Parents, not cable companies, should decide which cable networks they want to pay for.”

Winter also called for a restructuring of the system that rates shows so parents can be forewarned of offensive content. “In addition to cable choice and more responsible programming decisions by the networks,” he said. “the entire television content ratings system needs to be overhauled. The current system fails parents and families when it comes to accuracy, consistency, transparency, and accountability.”

Graphic: Scene from Adult Swim’s Family Guy.



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