

**Looking Between The Lines:
The Complex Nature of Modern Cartoons Made for Children and Adults**

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Anna Maria College

HON 490: Honors Senior Seminar

Professor Blais

13 November 2023

Abstract

This thesis aims to identify the strange recent phenomena regarding modern cartoons, in which cartoons made for children appear mature in their subject matter, and adult cartoons seem childish and simplistic in their messaging. Multiple peer-reviewed articles, journals, and websites were studied to answer why this is, with seven articles and one website selected as the backbone of this argument. Through this study, it can be concluded that both children's and adult cartoons have good reasons for this sudden and abrupt switch. Children's cartoons have become more mature in response to children becoming more adult, having to grow up faster thanks to current events and modern amenities such as the internet. In turn, teaching children that concepts such as depression and differing sexualities exist can help them in the long run in either making them more inclusive and sympathetic towards other people and allowing children who might be going through these changes a sense of comfort, letting them know that this, and they are normal. Adult cartoons, on the other hand, still contain intense intellectual discussions, using extreme irony and overtly horrible characters to point out the many faults of modern humanity in a somewhat more subtle way, such as having a heavily racist character that is meant to show the absurdity of racism.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank the many professors I have had throughout my years at Anna Maria College. In particular,

I would like to give a special thanks to Professors Leblanc, Blais, Manos, and Dowd, whose excellent teaching has both allowed me the expertise needed to write this thesis in the first place and has made my college education something I will look back with glee and longing for many years to come.

Also, a big thank you to my family and friends, particularly my Mom, Dad, Andy, and Joe. I am eternally grateful that I got to be a part of your lives and for the life that you have gifted me. Super special thanks should be given to my little brother Joe. Words cannot describe just how proud I am to be your brother.

You are a true inspiration to me.

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I. Introduction

Entertainment can come in any form imaginable for any skill and interest level. It is a vast subject, fitting just about anything that someone considers fun or exhilarating. Some people play sports, while others drive cars. Some people read books, while others build machines. Even something as simple as taking a walk can be considered entertainment. Most importantly, some people think it is best to pass the time by watching cartoons.

Cartoons have a long and storied history, dating back over one hundred years. Like any other form of media, they have grown, changed, and evolved. Cartoons are an endless cavalcade of imagination, taking on any art style, genre, and subject matter. However, like most things, rules have been implemented to categorize the medium better and sort what is best for each type of audience, the most obvious being the separation of children's and adult cartoons.

It seems surface-level. Children's cartoons are safe, slapstick-filled, and childish romps across imaginary lands, with no real substance outside of getting a laugh out of the audience and teaching a lesson to the impressionable youth. Meanwhile, adult cartoons are more serious by nature, tackling more heavy-hitting subjects that the adult audience can handle and even relate to, such as gay relationships, depression, or even nihilism. It seems so clear-cut that it seems too obvious to even talk about. However, one can imagine the shock and confusion when one learns that, in actuality, these roles are often switched.

Suppose someone were to pay attention to the television animation industry for the past few years. They might have noticed a sly switch in priorities to their animated programming that persists today. Children's cartoons are still colorful and funny but incorporate more mature subjects into their programming, including all issues listed beforehand. Adult cartoons still bring up serious matters, but more often than not, treat them as jokes, making fun of these subjects rather than treating them with

respect. Suddenly, out of nowhere, children's cartoons became more adult than their adult counterparts, and vice versa. In this dazed state of confusion, one can only ask how and why this happened.

Overview Of Study

Most research consisted of secondary research from seven peer-reviewed essays and one company-owned website, each painstakingly analyzed. All sources were gathered from the Anna Maria College collection of databases, with the most relevant articles coming from Academic OneFile and Google Scholar.

The main bulk of this thesis will be split into two distinct parts for ease of reading. The first part will focus on children's cartoons that feature more mature messages and themes. Several shows made within the last 10-20 years will be analyzed, such as Cartoons Network's *Adventure Time*, Steven *Universe*, and Nickelodeon's *SpongeBob SquarePants*. Each of these shows will be analyzed for what messages they use, how they go about sharing these messages, how subtle they are, and the purpose of these messages in terms of the show's storyline and real-world application. It will also focus on any potential reason why these shows for children even decided to tackle such mature and, at times, highly distressing subjects. A few specific examples of episodes from these shows will be explicitly analyzed to better understand why this show may be like this and why they choose the messages they choose.

The second half will focus on adult animated cartoons that appear childish, with the main subject of study being FOX's *Family Guy* and Matt Stone and Trey Parker's *South Park*. Much like in the first half, these shows will be analyzed for the mature subjects they tackle, with the main focus this time being on why they treat these subjects with a distinct lack of respect, often relying on stereotypes, foul language, and defecation for humor. Particular analysis will be placed on the times these shows attempt to bring up serious matters with seriousness yet often fall flat, making the attempt to spread the message feel tacked on or confusing in its execution, using examples from various shows. Finally, all will

be wrapped up with a short conclusion on the findings and a brief question and analysis on why cartoons vary so much in tone and subject matter while simultaneously wrapping up and answering the thesis question.

Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of this thesis is to understand this phenomenon better. There is no real scientific or mathematical basis that can be formed as to why these shows choose to show the subjects they want to present for obvious reasons. The reason this question is so important is found right in the question itself, simply being an explanation, both narratively and psychologically, as to why children's and adult cartoons decide to be the way they are,

There are many reasons why this information could be critical. Firstly, in a narrative sense, it could give us a better understanding of the shows themselves, analyzing them like a Shakespeare play or George Orwell novel. The primary purpose of studying a piece of work is understanding the message; these shows are no different. *Adventure Time* has a reason why its characters are not perfect role models for kids to look up to. *Steven Universe* has something to say with its portrayal of LGBTQ+ relationships. Even *Family Guy*, while not always sticking to the landing with its messages, still serves a specific purpose and function. Additionally, all these shows, and the genre as a whole, may offer clues to the nature of this cultural movement.

There is also a psychological aspect to both types of shows. In these shows, teachers teach a lesson but could also teach them to the people who need it most. Some children might be experiencing moments of their lives that they have little control over or figuring out things about themselves they cannot quite understand, such as living with an abusive parent or finding out they are gay. Mature Children shows might tell kids they are not alone, teach them that these concepts exist and are natural, and give them the courage to stand up for and be themselves. Equally, adults can deal with many

problems, too many to list. Life can get stressful with so many moving parts, so sometimes you want a dumb cartoon that's only supposed to make you laugh instead of facing your problems for a bit. These are just a few of the psychological aspects these shows could have on people.

Definitions

Hyper-Irony= a form of irony brought to its absolute extreme, used in modern adult cartoons to mock and criticize the less than agreeable aspects of society, such as racism and sexism, by directly partaking in the horrible acts themselves.

Limitations

The most notable and potentially damaging limitation is time. This entire thesis is required to be written in a single semester, meaning all research, preparations, and actual writings are to be written in 15 weeks. This creates a wide plethora of potential problems, such as the overall stress of writing something so expansive in such a short amount of time, an increased risk of incorrect information, bad formatting, or even something as simple as spelling mistakes. This can also create a need to get things done in a sense. There might be moments when a required assignment of part of the thesis needs to be done, meaning there is this sense of urgency in completing it, increasing the risk of collecting sources that are not useful or even counterintuitive to your points because you need to turn something in.

II. Methodology

All information gathered to support and create this thesis was inferred from multiple peer-reviewed studies and analyses from the Anna Maria College database, including Academic OneFile. A large amount of research was gathered from Google Scholar as well. My search for relevant information included keywords such as “animated sitcom,” “cartoon,” “themes,” “intended audience,” and subject matter.” Multiple specific animated TV shows were also searched for, including “Adventure Time,” “Steven Universe,” “SpongeBob SquarePants,” and “Family Guy”. Each search term was used in as many combinations as possible to ensure a broad enough search for relevant information. All cartoons analyzed are shows made within the last ten years or shows that remain relevant in the modern age even long after they were made. Most articles were made within the last ten years, ranging from 2013 to 2022, with a single outlier of an article made in 2009.

The best outcome from this specific methodology is finding relevant information easily. Simply searching these various keywords in as many databases as possible yielded more than enough evidence needed to form my thesis, with every single peer-reviewed study and analysis being found within the same day, all within a few hours. Of course, the main pitfall with using this form of methodology comes from the fact that finding data is easy, but accessing some of it can be a problem. While most data from the school database come freely and can be accessed quickly, using Google Scholar means that some data is often locked away behind paywalls. It was often debilitating how often I would find an article’s abstract and think it would be perfect, only to realize that I needed a paid subscription to the website to access the full article, with no database in Anna Maria’s library having access to it.

III. Results

For decades, cartoons have delighted watchers of all ages, from the lighthearted childish slapstick of *Tom and Jerry* and *Looney Tunes* to the more experimental and hard-hitting emotionally driven adult cartoons, like Netflix's *BoJack Horseman*. However, an interesting scenario has cropped up in the modern age, as the two main camps of cartoons have seemingly switched places. Cartoons made for children have begun introducing more serialized and serious shows dealing with heavier topics. Cartoons made for adults are less serious, carry less weight in their emotions, have become more episodic, and feel less meaningful in some ways. There has to be a reason why this large-scale switch has happened. Every cartoon is made by different people, and they all have their reasons for making the shows they want to make, but there has to be some correlation.

Kids' cartoons, being more adult, feel more pertinent at first glance. Many people think it essential to shade the youth from more distressing subjects, allowing them to enjoy their childhood before being blindsided by the harsh realities of life later on. Some believe this to be so important that some have created entire rule sets for what is considered appropriate and too much to show children. From fantasy violence to crude language to even sexual situations, this board was created "to give parents more information about the content and age-appropriateness of TV programs (TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board, 2023). These kids' cartoons, however, do not hold back, showcasing and discussing just about every distressing or hard-hitting topic one could think of, including sexuality, nihilism, genocide, and even the complete annihilation of life. There are some downsides to this on the surface, but as we will be getting into, there are some significant reasons as well. The same goes for adult cartoons. The primary audience for these shows is people who can handle these harsh subjects and would probably more readily appreciate their inclusion, getting into deep thought about different aspects of life. However, they consist primarily of over-the-top humor based chiefly on stereotypes, violence, and excrement. It can often feel patronizing to want something with more meat on its bones

only to be given something so overtly childish. It can often feel like the show creators do not care. While this may be true to an extent, there may be some pertinent and vital reasoning as to why these shows feel so simplistic, with these shows being made with more purpose and, in some cases, more intellect than one would think from a first glance.

MATURE CHILDREN'S CARTOONS

As a parent, one instinctively needs to keep their children safe. This is most presently seen and best guessed to include keeping your child healthy, ensuring they do not get into dangerous and deadly situations and teaching them morals that the parent believes are important. To most, there are some concepts that one does not want to teach their children until later. Childhood is supposed to be the one point in one's life where one sees the world with wonder and amazement, unfamiliar with humanity and the world's more distressing and heinous aspects. It just makes sense to most people not to tell kids about genocide, heavily sexual subjects, and suicide until they are old enough to truly grasp the issues. As such, if a parent walked into a room and saw their child watching a TV show that has violently depressing themes, open sexuality talk, or wild changes in a character's personality, the instinct would be to turn it off, to keep the child in the dark, or "keep the veil up" sort to speak. However, letting your child peek behind this veil, even just a little bit, could be one of the most crucial parenting decisions of your life.

This sentiment might seem mad to some. Why, in any circumstance, would you allow your child to watch a show with such outwardly upsetting content? Simply put, the answer is that cartoons, especially modern ones, can be a teacher. This might seem unclear, so it might be best to use an example. When one thinks of a cartoon, one thinks of bright colors, nonsensical characters, and, in essence, stupidity. Something to make the kids laugh and destress; pure entertainment and nothing else. Upon initial observation, Pendleton Ward's *Adventure Time* sticks to this pattern perfectly. The show

takes place in a fantasy land where a boy named Finn and his talking dog friend/brother Jake fight monsters, save princesses, and hang out at their house. The first few seasons are just pure fantasy fun. However, even here, at the show's very beginning, hints to the show's true purpose are hinted at. The show takes place in a fantasy world with wizards and magic creatures, yet broken buildings and destroyed structures litter the landscape. The main princess of the show, Princess Bubblegum, is no mere damsel in distress but is both a respectful ruler of her kingdom and a brilliant scientist who can very much hold her own in a fight. These aspects differ entirely from the typical princess character (Partanen, 2016). Characters actively die on screen, sometimes in pretty gruesome ways. This all serves as breadcrumbs for the true event and the true brilliance of the show. Most kids' shows are stationary--no matter how much time seemingly passes, everyone stays about the same age. What makes *Adventure Time* so interesting is that time does move in the show, and as the children who watch it age, so does the show itself. In short, the show starts quite cartoony and over the top, with characters being quite simple, which is expected for the children watching. However, a shift occurs as the show went on throughout the years and the children begin to enter their teen years. Characters become more complex, the world becomes more fleshed out, and the characters' actions have real consequences, as the characters that were once beacons of respect begin to make mistakes that make them less respectful or, in essence, more real. In particular, the show's main character, Finn, and the target audience aged at relatively the same time starting the show around age 12 and ending around age 17-18. *Adventure Time* is a show about growing up and learning that the world and the people around you are not as straightforward or perfect as you thought. Princess Bubblegum is first portrayed as this kind and caring ruler who is willing to do everything for her citizens, only to later find that she is too protective of her citizens, constantly surveilling their every move and ruling over her kingdom less like a monarch, and more like a dictator. The Ice King used to be just some crazy old wizard who kidnapped princess, only to find out that he used to be a highly respected scientist who was slowly turned insane by one of his artifacts, having his entire

life and family stripped from him as he morphed into an entirely different person, who simply craves someone to love him. Even the main character Finn, who serves as the character children will relate to the most, starting the series as this plucky young adventurer who wants to kill monsters and save people, is bombarded with realizations and changes as he ages and goes through some of the most horrific events one could imagine, from finding out his biological father is not a good person, to battling genocidal world enders, to even permanently losing a limb. This is an intrinsically vital lesson to teach kids, even though most adults do not teach it to their kids. Most kids have a turning point when the world gets scary; people become less friendly, have more flaws in the world, and the people around them are perceivable. They might even find themselves doing things they regret or are outright wrong. It can be scary, confusing, even disheartening. However, having a show like *Adventure Time*, where you have a character just like Finn, going through the same horrible events like them, having life thrown all these curve balls at them, finding out these horrible and disheartening things about the people they know, but take it in stride, make it through changes but a better person, and try to make things better for their friends, family, and the world, then maybe they can make it.

Helping children has always been the key reason children's programming has existed. While this usually takes the form of outwardly educational programming, shows like these, for the slightly older demographic of kids, can help them get through some of the more complex concepts of life. Sometimes, these shows double down on teaching one specific and widespread topic, such as how Rebecca Sugar's *Steven Universe* tackles sexuality. This show is well known for including a wide plethora of sexualities from every corner of the sexual spectrum. For example, the primary alien race of the show and source of the show's identity, the Crystal Gems, all take on the appearances of females and are all identified by female pronouns. However, crystal gems do not have true sexes, with their appearances simply being how their alien race works. They even have the ability to shapeshift, meaning they can look however they wish to look, female or otherwise, making them both potential stand-ins for queer people in

general, from gay to trans (Dunn, 2016). However, since most gems appear female and respond to female pronouns, they are often used as analogs for same-sex relationships. Now, shows that promote positive messaging about same-sex marriage are not new, especially in modern cartoons. As humanity becomes more tolerant of other people and lifestyles, it is intrinsically important to teach the youth that these people exist so that children who do not swing that way become more accepting toward these people, and giving children who are gay affirmation that there is nothing wrong with them, and what they are going through is natural. What makes *Steven Universe* so unique in this department is that, in comparison to other shows of a similar ilk, which prop up the positive aspects of the queer community, this show uses the gems as a catalyst to show firsthand the kind of horrible things queer people go through. Various gems in the show face intense internal struggles, some related to same-sex partners and others to how they were brought into this world. The show does not hold back, including gems that must deal with the death of a partner, feelings like their existence is a mistake, and becoming enraptured into an abusive marriage, as even same-sex marriage can fall into the same pitfalls of abuse (Baum, 2018). This weighty subject matter does not shy away from the harshness of reality. However, as harsh and extreme as this content may be, it is a harsh lesson to teach kids. The queer community has had to put up with similarly distressing situations for decades, possibly even thousands of years. Allowing children to, at the very least, know that queer people exist and that they go through similar if not more strife than they do is the very least that can be done. As said before, shows like this have an intrinsically essential purpose. The harshness shown serves two purposes. It shows the straight what queer people go through, allowing for the spread of awareness of sympathy and compassion on their part, and it teaches young queer people, who may be in similar situations as shown in the show, that they are not alone and that things can and will get better. Frankly, this is a lesson that even adults would benefit from hearing.

As important as it is to teach children lessons like this, one must remember that these are all shows made by people just like them. These people want to tell a story, bring an idea to life, and create characters that resonate with the general audience and themselves. Sometimes, these characters could be simple, but when feeling adventurous, it does not hurt to get out of their comfort zone and add a small amount of spice and drama, even in shows that one would least expect. Unlike the aforementioned shows, which may be unfamiliar to some, Stephen Hillenburg's *SpongeBob SquarePants* needs no introduction, having long ascended past a simple cartoon and evolving into a phenomenon and icon of itself. At first, one would not expect many of the darker themes or outwardly serious tone of more modern kids' cartoons, which is correct for the most part. Sure, plenty of articles and journals have written about the show's nearly 24-year run, including the show's stance on gender norms and gender identity, which was quite surprising for a show that aired in 1999. In particular, SpongeBob's lack of typical masculine attributes, and instead having him be more jovial and outwardly emotional than was considered "standard" in the male sex, and Sandy Cheeks having less feminine traits and indulging in more typically masculine traits such as karate, and science, instead of nail painting and gossip (Burdfield,2017). However, while this is all interesting in its own right, what truly makes this show interesting is the small moments of character development. It is no secret that, compared to the previous shows, *SpongeBob SquarePants* is a much simpler show, with characters that could be described in full with singular words. SpongeBob is happy. Patrick is idiotic. Squidward is grouchy. Mr. Krabs is greedy. However, occasionally, the show ventures out of its own and even the audience's comfort zone to show how these characters might be more complex than initially portrayed. There are points when Patrick says something intelligent. There are moments when Mr. Krabs moves past his greed to do the greater good. The most obvious and famous example can be found in the fifth episode of season 1, Pizza Delivery. Most of the episode is what one would imagine, with SpongeBob and Squidward having to deliver a pizza only to get lost in the middle of nowhere. The episode consists

mainly of shenanigans of Squidward being his grumpy self and attempting to eat the pizza. At the same time, SpongeBob tries to save it for the customer with his usual optimism, all while trying to find civilization. Eventually, the house is found, and SpongeBob finally delivers the pizza. However, upon discovering they forgot his drink, the customer becomes violently enraged with SpongeBob, insulting and screaming at him before slamming the door in his face. It is at this moment when the normally cheerful and happy-go-lucky SpongeBob breaks down into tears on the sidewalk, wailing in anguish, only for the normally pessimistic Squidward, who would typically find such a moment entertaining, is so appalled by the customer and his actions, that he grabs the pizza, knocks on the customer's door, and slams it into his face. On the surface, this does not seem like much, yet seeing Squidward openly defend SpongeBob, proving that on some level, he truly does not hate him, adds a lot to his character. It brings to mind what *Adventure Time* would do many years later, showing that there is more to people than simple character traits, and everyone is more complex than what would appear on the surface. It proves that even in a show like *SpongeBob SquarePants*, treating children with the respect and belief that they can understand and grasp complex concepts can go a long way to making them great adults.

CHILDISH ADULT CARTOONS

Speaking of adults, it can seem counterproductive to make TV shows for children that heavily feature and promote darker subjects with respect and care, only to turn on the adult cartoon counterparts and be met with the complete opposite. Adults can no doubt handle darker subjects or, at the very least, create media that handles darker content, considering humans have been telling dark stories to each other since the dawn of storytelling. This is not to say that darker adult cartoons do not exist because they very much do. A wide plethora of adult-orientated cartoons exist that portray darker subjects with the same level of respect and care as previously mentioned children's cartoons and even go beyond them in terms of sheer disturbance. However, when it comes to the adult cartoons that win the popularity vote, they always seem to be the same animated family sitcoms that regurgitate the same

flatulence, violence, and stereotype jokes that one would make on a middle school playground. In comparison to their counterparts for the younger generation, these adult cartoons seem to have no message and instead feel content to pander to the lowest common denominator simply. However, just like its younger counterpart, there is very much a reason for this, as these shows use and rely on motivation, irony, and perception to give them a welcome reason for being like this and may even prove to make them much more intelligent than initially perceived.

This is not the first time someone has asked why so many adults are so attracted to these same animated sitcoms, with many people throughout history asking the same thing. Most notably, in 2020, an experiment was held in Hungary where over 800 adults who watched animated sitcoms were given questionnaires directly asking about their viewing habits, all “to investigate the motives of animated sitcom viewing” (Zsila, 2020). Most of the responses were what you expect, including sheer entertainment factor and social criticism about the world around them. However, the most notable reason so many are drawn to these shows is relaxation. This adds an interesting perspective on the importance and role of not only adult animation but all animation. Adult animation can talk about serious subject matter, with even more options that even the most respectful children’s show cannot show without changing a few aspects to make it less noticeable. However, one must ask if this is something people want to see. It is no secret that life can be difficult, especially as time marches forward. Just about anything, from work problems, divorces, depression, and even things that remain out of one’s control, such as governmental dilemmas and wars, can put quite a lot of stress on the average person. Most people turn to entertainment to temporarily remove themselves from the stress of the real world, and for most people, that comes in the form of television. Coming home after a long and stressful day, only to turn on the TV and find out the people in the show are dealing with similar problems, sure might be relieving to some, letting them know they are not alone, but to others, it simply reminds them of the sorry state of the world around them. Sure, these crass adult sitcoms may not be

the most intellectually stimulating most of the time. It has been proven that shows that tackle more serious matters have their place, but having a show to turn off your brain and forget about life's troubles, even if just for a few minutes, can, more often than not, help a lot for one's mental state.

While some might be satisfied with this explanation for adult cartoons' childishness, others might not be quite as satisfied. This is because the more famous adult animation has quite the reputation for being juvenile in the most abhorrent ways. In shows like Seth McFarlane's *Family Guy* and Matt Stone and Trey Parker's *South Park*, on top of the flatulence and violence on display, these shows will often portray non-white people in a rather unflattering light. Pretty much every minority put on display on these shows are shown as highly racist caricatures and stereotypes of these real peoples. Some of these stereotypes feel more spiteful than others, but the outside message is clear and repulsive. It is no wonder why these shows have been challenged and fought against for as long as these shows have been on the air, as understandably, non-white people do not like being portrayed in such an openly hostile way. To some, these stereotypes make these shows downright unwatchable in how mean-spirited they can sometimes feel. It makes one wonder why anyone, especially in the modern age, would feel the need to put such inherently evil opinions into their show. One explanation for this is that these stereotypes are a joke, but the mainstream audience has misunderstood the joke at hand. Irony and satire play a large part in not just animated adult programming but adult content altogether. Adult cartoons like *Rick and Morty* rely on intense irony and satire for comedic effects, and this is no different here. To explain it simply, these shows intend not to make fun of the minority but the stereotype itself (Hughey, 2009). They are making fun of the stereotype's mere existence and the absurdity of the stereotype using intense amounts of irony. Essentially, these shows are saying, "Man, isn't this messed up?" or "Can you believe we were allowed to do this?" On top of this, these stereotypical jokes and racist remarks are usually made by characters who are inherently bad people whose word is not to be taken as fact. Characters like *South Park's* Eric Cartman are intensely malicious characters who are

intensely racist, bigoted, and sexist, with the joke usually being on them at the end. These characters, who spew racist remarks by the dozen, rarely, if at all, have their schemes or plots succeed, with themselves becoming made the joke by the end. Sure, it is not the most effective form of criticism towards racism, and if done incorrectly, it could cause confusion with the true message of what the creators are getting at being muddy, or it could create another racist character that actual racists praise as a hero. If mishandled, "Instead of satirizing racial patriotism, these shows can impersonate it" (Hughey, 2009). However, it is a rather creative, heavily ironic, and adult approach that only the cynic-fueled realm of adult animation could dare pull off.

This all might seem confusing. The purpose of the kids' cartoons' use of more adult themes and subjects was clear cut and simple: to teach kids about more complex subjects or help them grow by furthering their understanding of the world and people. The only difference between them was how they went about it and what they wanted to teach. Meanwhile, these adult shows seem all over the place in what they want; their messages are unclear, and their reasons for existing are unfocused. How can *Family Guy* be a simple show with simple humor for people to laugh at and nothing more, and a complex and ironic critique of stereotypes and modern human problems? This right here is what makes these childish adult cartoons so interesting. Simply put, they are more open-ended. These shows are made in a particular way, in that their messaging and purpose are made purposely vague so that the audience can make it what they want it to be (Zenor, 2014). Even if the cartoon itself is made with a direct message in mind, people will often see it how they want to see it. For example, *Family Guy's* creator, Seth McFarlane, genuinely believes the show to be highly intellectual and that "one has to have superior intelligence to understand such satire" (Zenor, 2014). Despite this and the role he has as the show's very creator, many still believe *Family Guy* to be simple fun or downright racist. If one wants *Family Guy* to be a simple show to laugh at, it has plenty of simple and overtly childish jokes to turn off one's brain and enjoy. If one wants something more substantial from *Family Guy*, one could find

underlying messages and critiques of modern society throughout even the most mundane and idiotic episodes. While the children's cartoons serve the role of a teacher, these adult cartoons serve more the role of a friend, sharing your interests, laughing at what one laughs at, and sharing deep intellectual conversations simultaneously. *Family Guy* can be brilliant, low-brow, a guilty pleasure, or even a bad and racist show, depending on who is watching (Zenor, 2014).

IV. Discussion

Cartoons are a staple of human expression, dating back over a hundred years. Despite its relative freshness in human civilization, animation has made its name and cemented its place in the entertainment industry. Like most aspects of humanity, art can be split into two distinct groups: children and adults. Children's content tends to be lighthearted, allowing comedy and adolescent humor, such as flatulence and slapstick violence, to allow them time to rest and relax between school while covertly teaching them life lessons. On the other hand, adult content is much more mature in nature, still teaching lessons in a sense but including more realistic and disheartening subject matter that adults are more likely to run into in life. However, while this is the standard, it is not the rule, as proven by more modern cartoons flipping the roles of this media, with children's cartoons tackling more distressing subjects and adult cartoons acting more childish in their humor.

To acquire research, both Google Scholar and Academic OneFile were scoured to find relevant and valuable information. In the end, multiple academic journals were found online, each speaking about mature messages in children's cartoons, childish humor in adult cartoons, and the positive aspects of cartoons. All of these articles were analyzed, with the less essential articles or articles that seemed less helpful at a glance being weeded out. In the end, seven articles and a website were chosen as the backbone of the thesis. These articles were all used to back the importance of what both aspects of modern children's and adult cartoons want to achieve in their actions.

CONCLUSION

While the way both children and adult cartoons go about their messaging and purpose, the actual initial function and purpose of these shows have not changed at all. The primary purpose of children's cartoons, outside of the inherent entertainment factor, is to teach the youth. Initially, when children's cartoons were created for teaching, they were either practical aspects of life, such as shapes

and numbers, or more simplistic emotional lessons, like treating others with respect and not taking things from others. However, times have changed, along with the youth and what they need. Today, adults have a better understanding of the things that can affect children, both good and bad. Children are just as capable of having depression, sadness, anxiety, or sexual confusion, just as much as any adult. While some may argue that showing these concepts to kids makes them grow up too quickly and destroys childhood innocence, it is a sad truth that the modern world and the internet have already done the job. Telling kids that life can be harsh but can get better, being sexually different is okay, and people are more complex than you think teaches them lessons that are far more important than any other lesson they could be taught. In short, what children need to learn has changed, and in turn, so has what children's cartoons need to teach.

Similarly, adult cartoons have not changed much in some sense. Sure, adult cartoons are very much capable of speaking of much more distressing subjects than their child counterparts, with even the mature kid's cartoons never going as far as to show things like rape or suicide without cushioning the blow a little. These more childish matters, while on the surface might be nonsensical humor or offensive and racist, further investigation reveals this stupidity to be very much purposeful. In essence, these adult cartoons best portray the inherent stupidity of these stereotypes, as well as the nonsensical decisions of the government and world, by showing the viewer firsthand just how stupid they can be, all while still allowing the viewer to enjoy the show as a nonsensical, humorous cartoon. The depth is not gone; it is simply better hidden, using a layer of simplistic and childish humor to showcase, criticize, and laugh at how childish the modern world can be.

To bring it all together, not much has changed. While the subjects taught or what is humorous have certainly changed, the central core purposes of these cartoons have not. Children's cartoons still teach children important life lessons that will ring true for their whole lives. Adult cartoons still speak on challenging subjects and criticize less than agreeable decisions and choices made by various peoples and

governments. Like all facets of life, cartoons and precisely what is to be taught or criticized have changed with the times. Humanity is not static; hundreds of thousands of small changes and manipulations to history are being made every single minute. Humanity always runs forward and constantly changes, going from barely lifting our feet off the ground to landing feet first on the moon in only 60 years. A lot can change about the world around us and the places we live in a very short amount of time, with our entertainment especially being no exception.

LIMITATIONS

I met many limitations while writing this thesis. Above all else, the absolute most pressing limitation was time. This thesis was written over about five weeks, each week corresponding to a prominent part of the thesis, from the Introduction, Methodology, and Results to this very Discussion section. Writing a paper in five weeks does not sound all too bad, but when writing a thesis paper, this is a very, VERY dishearteningly short amount of time. Having to write what is, in some ways, the very paper your entire academic life, from kindergarten to college, has been building up to in only five weeks can be very stressful. One has to be very careful in their discussion, writing in depth about your topic and findings while also knowing you are on the clock, creating this strange middle ground where you must be thorough and not be thorough enough to make the deadline. This does not even bring into account finding the sources and refining your work into multiple better drafts.

Another limitation, while not directly correlated with the class itself, would certainly be my current semester. Without going into too much detail, this semester, in particular, has been hectic, being my senior year. I have been met with a seemingly never-ending deluge of papers, journals, and projects, all on top of writing my thesis. As much as I would prefer not to admit it, this semester has caused a fair amount of personal stress in having to do such a large amount of work all in four months. It is not the

end of the world, and I can handle stress, but like most people, I would prefer a less stressful environment, even if it is not entirely anyone's fault and simply the work of happenstance.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper's subject creates an exciting form of continuing in that just because this paper was met, cartoons will not stop. This paper only analyzes cartoons made within the last twenty years at the very most, with the selection of cartoons chosen for this thesis being relatively small and controlled. Hundreds of cartoons for kids and adults are made within the analyzed time frame. One could choose any one of these cartoons and analyze them to see if they fit within this thesis's conclusion. One could find cartoons that support the conclusion but might find cartoons that do not fit in and could be considered "true" child and adult cartoons that stick with their more standard molds.

Why even stop at shows from the chosen timeframe? The concept of animation has been around for over one hundred years, with possibly millions of individual shows being made from decade to decade. Each show from each decade could be analyzed to see how well they fit in and also serve as a glimpse into what was considered standard animated content at the time and what was considered a kid's or adult show. One could even analyze future shows, bringing in cartoons made ten or twenty years from this moment, and see how things have changed from the creation of this thesis. Honestly, as long as humanity keeps creating cartoons, this discussion can continue with close to an infinite number of examples.

V. Appendix

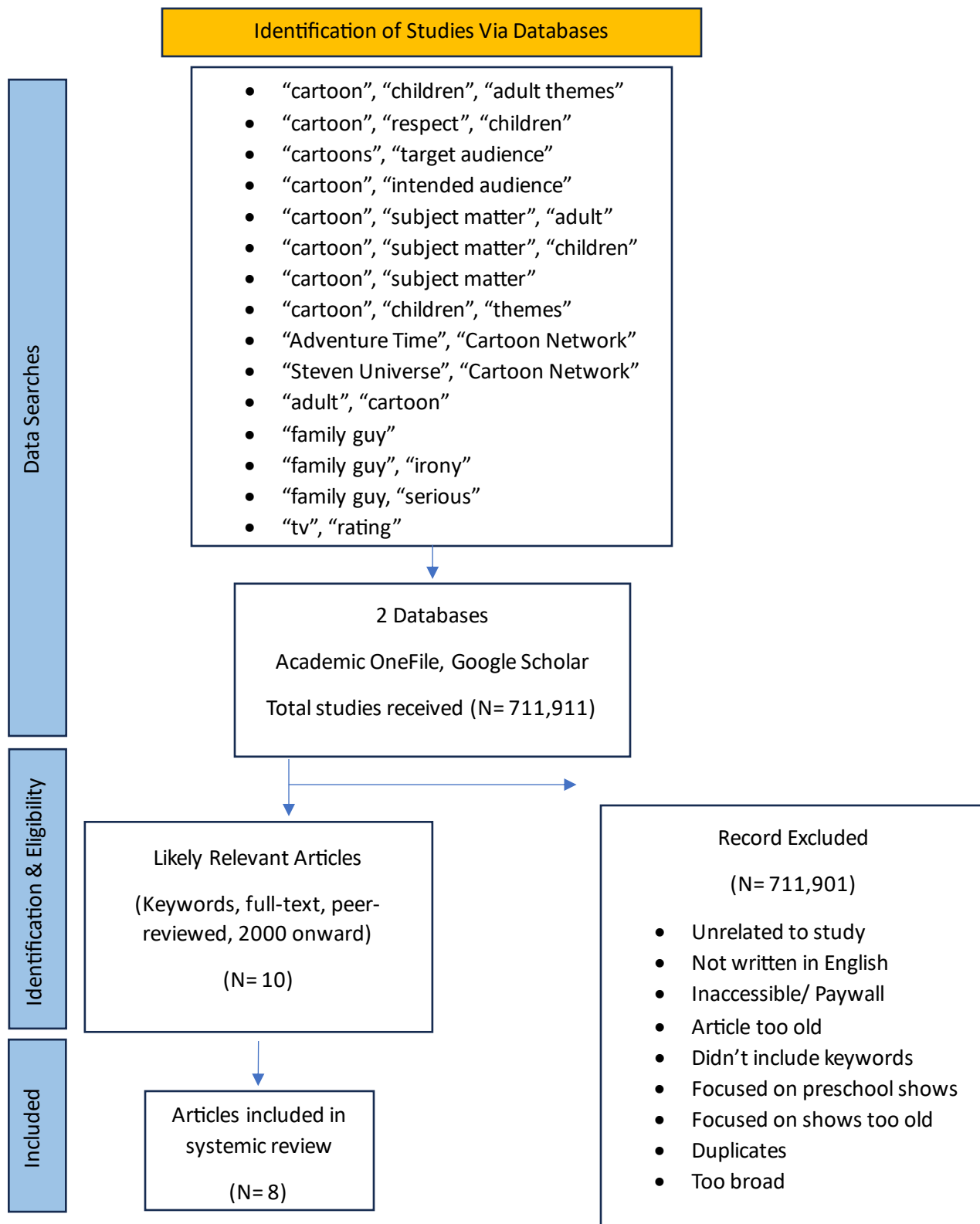


Figure 1 PRISMA Flowchart

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