

# Parental Awareness of Sexual Themes in Cartoons and Mediation in Children's Exposure in Anambra State, Nigeria.

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**Abstract:** *Cartoons are usually associated with children but some cartoons contain sexual themes and children stand the risk of being influenced negatively. This study therefore was embarked on to find out if parents in Anambra State are aware that cartoons with sexual themes exist and whether they mediate their children's exposure to cartoons. This study was hinged on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and adopted the quantitative research design, the survey precisely, with the use of questionnaire as the research instrument. Data were sourced from 379 respondents and were analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings showed that most respondents are unaware that some cartoons contain sexual themes and they mostly do not mediate their children's consumption of cartoons. The study concluded that parents in Anambra State are unaware that cartoons with sexual themes exist and so, they do not mediate their children's cartoons viewing. Against this backdrop, the study recommends that concerned individuals should help create awareness through various platforms and that parents should check their children's cartoons viewing.*

**Keywords** – Awareness, cartoons, children, sexual themes, parental mediation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The mass media, as agents of socialization, have the ability to influence attitudes, opinions, beliefs and predispositions both positively and negatively. This power tends to intensify when it comes to children who according to Livingstone (2007) are the vulnerable audience of the media and as such are highly susceptible to negative media influence. The consciousness of the aforementioned has prompted studies on parental mediation in order to assess parents' efforts in minimizing the negative media (television) influence on their children.

In a typical Nigerian family, morals are of high essence. Parents strive to cling so much to moral values and expect their children to follow in their footsteps. Regrettably, television exposure has its way of coming in-between parental efforts on moral values instillation and children's cognitive and social development. Nowadays, children's physical activities are to a large extent, limited by excessive watching of television. In the United States of America, an average child with a facility of a TV and a satellite connection at his home watches approximately 18,000 hours of television from kindergarten to high school graduation (American Academy of Pediatrics, 1999 cited in Oyero & Oyesomi, 2014). In Nigeria, children watch television and home videos for long hours immediately after closing from schools about 2.00pm till late hours in the night (Kadiri & Muhammed, 2011). According to Parents Television Council [PTC] (2006), children are especially impressionable, and they learn social norms and behaviours as readily from television as from their peers or parents. In line with Gerbner and Gross (1976), children's perception of reality and adoption of norms and values would be strongly influenced by excess exposure to televised contents; therefore, parents are expected to be in charge of what their children the media content consumed by their children. "Cartoons are common features of Nigerian television stations, just like other television stations. Hardly does a day pass without one television station or the other in Nigeria airing cartoons" (Okoro & Onakpa, 2016, p. 233). Cartoons can also be accessed more frequently through cable stations like Cartoon Network, Disney Channel, Jim Jam, Nickelodeon etc. In Nigeria, children watch cartoons at least 1 to 3 hours every weekday and 4 to 6 hours during weekends (Odukomaia, 2014; Oyero & Oyesomi, 2014). Studies in India also show that children spend 3 to 4 hours watching cartoons daily (Yousaf, Shahzad & Hassan, 2014; Tripathi, Kumar, Vashisth, Gangwar, Sharma & Mittal, 2016). "Practically, children today are getting much opportunity to watch cartoons at an early age of six months and by the time they reach the age of three; they become great fans of many cartoon characters" (Shanthipriya & Prabha, 2017, p.31).

Parents in Nigeria feel very comfortable exposing their children only to child-friendly television contents such as cartoons because they believe that they keep them busy and enhance positive learning (Oyero & Oyesomi, 2014). However, like some other entertainment programmes, cartoons also pose a threat to children's moral upbringing, thus, no longer totally safe for their consumption. The twenty-first century has ushered in contents in cartoons that are fit for the adult's embrace (Habib & Soliman, 2015; Oldenburg, 2005; PTC, 2011) yet, they are very much appealing to children because According to PTC (2011), children are instinctively and intuitively drawn to cartoons and typically presume they are meant for young audiences. For McQuail (2005),

television is rarely the only source of social learning and its influence depends not just on parents but also on other sources in society such as friends, teachers, churches and so on but Josephson (1995) noted rather specifically, that parents are the best mediators of their children's television viewing. In the same vein, Vilchez-Martin (1999) cited in Torrecillas-Lacave (2013) contended that the effects that television exposure may have on children depend on the quality of parental mediation and that effective parental mediation contributes to children becoming critical media consumers.

### *Statement of the Problem*

Parents who strive to protect their children's innocence depend on children friendly entertainment programmes and cartoons appear to be one of such. However, the worrisome development of including indecent themes such as explicit sex or sexual innuendos and nudity in some cartoons has, to a large extent, the potential to thwart such parental efforts. These adult-themed cartoons are numerous and are surprisingly, aired on various television stations. They are also available in film shops and are highly affordable making it easier for parents who use Digital Versatile Disk (DVD) players to buy for their children. Consequently, children stand the risk of being frequently exposed to age-inappropriate contents.

Given the proliferation of sexual contents in cartoons, a supposed child-friendly television entertainment programme, it would only be a matter of time before life imitates fiction, and children begin to copy these indecent acts. Against this backdrop, this study was prompted by these questions: Are parents in Anambra State aware of the inclusion of sexual contents in cartoons? Do they mediate their children's cartoons consumption? And how do they do so?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Conceptualising Cartoons*

Speak of cartoons and a lay man would quickly refer to those very colourful images or depictions that move and speak on television. Some researchers also share this view. Thompson (2010) for instance, defined cartoons as movies made by using animation instead of live actors, especially humorous films intended for children. Oyero and Oyesomi (2014, p.94) described cartoons as "the making of movies by filming a sequence of slightly varying drawings or models so that they appear to move and change when the sequence is shown". However, there are other forms of cartoons that are not movies and Okoro and Onakpa (2016) identified them as: comic strip and editorial cartoons in newspapers and magazines. This study focused on cartoons as television content; in other words, animated cartoons.

Historically, cartoons have been a part of cinema from the time the first motion pictures were made in the late 1800s (Au, 2014; Michelsen, 2009; Oyero & Oyesomi, 2014; Tripathi, et al., 2016). They were initially so short because people would be watching these shorts in the movie theatres before their feature film (Oyero & Oyesomi, 2014). When cartoonists could put their shows on TV, they began to get longer, creating the half hour block shows that are on Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, and the Disney Channel today (Kharma & Hussien, 2016).

The manner by which cartoons were made has dramatically changed over the years with the advancements in technology (Michelsen, 2009). Additionally, cartoon producers have widened their horizons by improving on story lines to accommodate adult audiences. Studies have shown cases of the inclusion of explicit sex scenes, sexual innuendos and adult jokes (Habib & Soliman, 2015; PTC, 2006, 2011), which is obviously not safe for children's consumption, thus, the essence of cartoon ratings system.

### *Cartoon Ratings System: Parents' Guide to Age-Appropriate Contents.*

Movies with live actors are known to have TV ratings, so do cartoons. "The ratings structure is designed to be a system of parental guidelines adopted and implemented by television broadcasters and networks, cable networks and systems, and television program producers" (PTC, 2011, p.13). There are several TV ratings available depending on the rating system of a particular country. These TV ratings are shown as codes and can only be understood by those who have been exposed to their meanings. The researcher reviewed the ratings systems in Nigeria and the United States of America out of many countries whose films are highly consumed in Nigeria.

The National Film and Video Censors Board classified the Nigerian TV ratings system as follows: "G", movies suitable for all viewers, "12" or "12A", movies suitable only for 12 years and over; "15", movies suitable only for 15 years and over; "PG", movies with the need for parental guidance; "18", movies suitable for only adults; "RE", movies distributed only in specially licensed premises. According to the Motion Picture Association of America, the American film ratings system is comprised of six categories namely, TV-Y and Y7 (young audiences); TV-G (general), TV-PG (parental guidance), TV-14 (14 years and over), and TV-MA

(mature audiences only). They sometimes come with content descriptors to indicate the presence of specific types of content, “S” for sexual situations, “V” for violence, “L” for coarse or crude language, and “D” for suggestive dialogue.

These TV ratings should be present in all programmes to guide parents to make better choices for their children’s entertainment. All movies and children television stations are expected to show the ratings of contents before airing or showing the contents proper. In some cases, the TV ratings pop out and fade continuously during programmes or are kept static on screen until the end. Unfortunately, PTC (2011) in their content analysis of primetime cable cartoons, they have failed parents in this regard. Their study shows that “only 15% of the TV-PG shows and 36% of the TV-14 shows that contained sexual content had an “S” descriptor warning parents” (p.16).

Cartoons that have sexual contents scarcely have ratings to warn parents (PTC, 2011), even if they do; deciphering the codes is also an issue. Rideout (2007) found out in her research and Oludimu (2017) also observed that most parents do not understand the TV ratings system. Being able to understand and interpret these codes is still not enough for parents to relax and not tarry a while to find out the contents proper because sometimes, these cartoons may contain things that are inappropriate for children.

In line with the foregoing, PTC (2011) stated that “Parents who rely on television ratings to select age-appropriate programming appear to be exposing their children to significantly higher levels of adult-themed content than they may realize or more than the system would indicate” (p.18). Also, Oludimu (2017) while calling on the Nigerian parents to be media-content conscious, in her article, stated that some children shows and cartoons which are considered age-appropriate may contain characters which may not be suitable for them at their ages. The implication here is that parents who are concerned about the influence of the media would need to really settle down, watch these cartoons and determine whether they are safe for their children. Children’s television contents like cartoons, according to Biggins, Chandler, Ey, Trickett, Opitz and Cupit (2011), are supposed to be life-enhancing, age appropriate and engaging; a balance of material that is educational and entertaining protect children from harm by excluding images and themes that are violent, provoke fear or anxiety, or are inappropriately sexual.

#### *Sexual Content in Cartoons*

Cartoons have been linked with violence in several studies and they have shown that children who are exposed to violent cartoons are prone to violent behaviours (Ergün, 2012; Klein & Shiffman, 2008; Odukomaia, 2014; Thompson, 2018). Violence in cartoons is a big reason to worry but PTC (2011, p.17) stated that, “similar to violence in cartoons, sex, drugs and profanity have begun to saturate the storylines of the primetime cable cartoons children and teens watch the most”.

Sexual contents include sex (inferred to or utterly explicit) and nudity (partial or pure). Sexual contents are present in cartoons that children are exposed to and according to Habib and Soliman (2015), it is a contemporary development. PTC (2011) content analysed prime time cartoons in five cartoon stations, namely: Disney Channel, Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, Nick at Nite, and Adult Swim in order to check the extent at which adult themes have crept into contemporary cartoons and their findings show that sexual contents which includes nudity, emphasizing sexual body parts (close-ups of breasts), sexual clothing (dominatrix outfits, sexy lingerie, thong panties, etc.), suggestive dancing, stripping, simulations of sexual intercourse, pornography, masturbation, paedophilia, and prostitution surpassed every form of violence.

Although cartoons with sexual themes have always been in existence (Mireles, 2010; Mockry, 2017), the way they are presented in recent times seem to be transgressive (Gibbs, 2012; PTC, 2011). Some cartoon stations like Cartoon Network, make such adult-themed cartoons to be clearly distinct from children cartoons (Adult Swim) by airing them at late night hours (Lee, 2013; Mireles, 2010) but some of these cartoons are aired earlier in the evening and they still attract children (Oldenburg, 2005; PTC, 2011). The researcher provided screenshots of sexual scenes from some cartoons for emphasis. “Ronal the Barbarian” and “Sausage Party” are obviously not for children because they are laced with sexual contents and other adult themes (Ben, 2012; Hoffman, 2016; Vejooda, 2016).

The recurring presence of nudity in cartoons that are aired on cartoon stations, especially during prime time, is alarming (PTC, 2011). For example, Ben (2012) in his review of “Ronal the Barbarian” argued that it looks like what people would think of as a movie for children, but it is not because of the way male genitalia and female breasts flop around in a flimsy garb and frequently shown as a sight gag and expressed worry that parents might end up sitting their children in front of such an age-inappropriate cartoon.



**Fig. 1:** A sexual scene.  
Screen shot from “Ronald the Barbarian”



**Fig. 2:** An explicit sex scene  
Screenshots from “Sausage Party”

Although there are very rare cases of nudity in TV-Y programs, it is not enough to assume that they are totally safe for children. For example, Sunday Express (2009) reported the outrage of parents in Romania about a cartoon (Stories from Magyar Folklore) targeted at children under 5 years, that contains nudity. According to them, in one of such episodes, a servant girl wiggled her bare bottom in the face of a king in return for jewels. Regrettably, this indecent cartoon was being aired in one of their local television stations (Minimax TV) during children programming. Klinger (2006) suggested that given the shortcomings of the TV ratings system and that not all cartoons are children or family-friendly, parents should scrutinize their children’s cartoons viewing.



**Fig. 3:** A servant wiggling her bare bottom in front of a King.  
Source: Sunday Express (2009)

Nudity in cartoons is noticed more with the women. Women as superheroes, warriors or key characters are often times depicted to have some sort of nudity. For instance, “The Queen’s Blade”, is a cartoon series that has different seductive costumes for all the female warriors, such that barely cover their privates. Reviewers of the cartoon confirmed that it has a great story line, traces of action, a great deal of adventure and character development but it is also terribly erotic with rampant nudity and genitalia shots (Inglese, 2013; Martin, 2010). “The Queen’s Blade” is a famous Japanese cartoons which along with many others, are known for partial or utter nudity especially when it comes to breast exposure. Phoenix (2006) affirmed that the sexualisation of breasts in Japanese animation is a development that became very glaring in the twenty-first century. He argued that in the early years of animation, breasts were symbols of motherhood, and that children who watched the programme were more likely to perceive them as such.





Fig. 4: The barely clad warriors in “The Queen’s Blade”

Source: <https://wallpapersafari.com/>

Cartoons are not bad in their entirety. They are quite entertaining because they show facts in humorous ways, portray serious things in unserious ways and in most cases, undermine the salience of showing the aftermath of wrong doings. Adults could quickly get a grip of the idea and wallow in escapism but children might also be watching. According to PTC (2011), children are prone to see these indecent acts in cartoons as normal and acceptable because of the way they are presented. It would not be absurd for one to assume that the “Just-for-Kids” assumption would only end up turning children into adults before they become real adults.

#### *Effects of Sexual Contents on Children*

Although viewing cartoons may appear to be an innocent pastime, they can also pose an inherent risk for children because of the influx of adult themes in them. The long hours children spend watching television cartoons have consequential effects on their behaviour. According to Oyero and Oyesomi (2014), children’s cognitive abilities are not as developed as that of the adults and this has an implication on the meaning that they make out of the things they watch on television. Children take things literally and thus, would be more likely to pick up the actions they are exposed to without fully understanding the reason behind such actions. Whatever children learn while watching cartoons, they tend to act out thereby influencing their mode of socializing with other children and with the world in general (Hassan & Daniyal, 2013). According to Ergün (2012), children learn by observing, imitating and making behaviours their own; therefore, repeated exposure to sexual contents can lead to increased likelihood of interacting and responding to others, indecently.

Compared to other types of programming, cartoons can potentially trivialize and bring humour to adult themes and contribute to an atmosphere in which children view these depictions as normative and acceptable (PTC, 2011). This entry, as stated by Habib and Soliman (2015), has its side effects on the child’s brain much more than the benefit of drawing smile on their faces. They further explained the psychological effects of such adult contents on children thus:

This sexual content triggers early toddlers mind to be attracted to the opposite gender anatomy. Several sexual contents in the cartoon cause a psychological case called Novelty, in which Dopamine “Molecule of Addiction” is triggered and produced continuously without limitations this leads to brain dysfunction as the fertilization process is always on alert and triggered several times in a short interval of time and from different entries. (p.257)

According to PTC (2011, p.18), “this disturbing trend in cartoons of combining sex, with humour enables today’s children to dismiss risky behaviours and attitudes, to belittle parents’ concerns and to disparage threats to public health and safety”. Children demonstrate openly, the dynamic actions of their favourite cartoon characters that happen to have extraordinary abilities, like Ben 10 and Wonder Woman, by showing acts of violence or the use of bad words in some cases. As observed in most movies, these violent acts are often done in the open but sex is often done in closed doors or concealed areas. If children can imitate cartoon violence in the open, they can also imitate other sexual acts they see in cartoons, in the absence of prying eyes.

*Parental Mediation: An Overview*

Parents have a tasking job of protecting their children from media contents that are inappropriate or indecent for their consumption. This job is called parental mediation. Parental mediation seeks to understand how parents can prevent their children from harmful media influence and through guidance, learn to interpret the visual codes of screen media and let them evolve into critical media consumers (Sandstig, 2013). Simply put, the term parental mediation is used to describe all parenting strategies about the use of media in general. It is not limited to a specific media. Adum, Ojiakor & Opara (2015) identified parental mediation as natural parental interventions to children's media use. "How parents mediate contents may be as important – if not more important – than whether they mediate contents" (Piotrowski, 2017, p.17), thus, identifying the various mediation strategies or styles would benefit the present study.

The three main parental mediation styles discussed in several parental mediation literatures are: restrictive mediation, co-viewing or co-use and active mediation (Mendoza, 2009; Piotrowski, 2017). Some researchers also added unfocused mediation as a mediation style (Martínez de Morentin, Cortés, Medrano & Apodaca, 2014; Webster, 2014).

*a. Restrictive Mediation*

Restrictive mediation, also called rule making mediation means establishing specific rules governing when their children can or cannot watch television, which programs they can see and how long they can spend in front of the set (Martínez de Morentin et al., 2014). It is an authoritative style of parental mediation which is centred on the rule-making aspect of parenting and media. In the same vein, Vandewater, Park, Huang, & Wartella (2005) opined that parents may also set limits based on media rating, such as prohibiting viewing of PG-13 movies until the child reaches age 13, or based on specific type of content they wish to keep the child from viewing.

*b. Co-viewing*

Sometimes, parents view televised contents with their children. This is a style of parental mediation called co-viewing. Co-viewing can also be called shared mediation or co-operative mediation (Martínez de Morentin et al., 2014). Nathanson and Yang (2005) defined co-viewing as the simple act of watching television with children without discussing the content. Parents can mediate looking patterns toward television stimuli during infancy by directing their child's attention to specific content during co-viewing (Barr et al., 2008). According to Adum et al. (2015), "at the point of exposure, parents become aware of the kinds of media contents the children enjoy most and why such contents gratify them" (p.8). Parents who do not practice co-viewing for children's programme such as cartoon would be in the dark and would make assumptions like Dr. Rahil Briggs, a psychologist and a parent noted in Rabin (2011), "as parents, we often assume that if it is a cartoon, it is fine for our children".

*c. Active Mediation*

Active mediation is also called Instructive mediation (Martínez de Morentin et al., 2014). Active mediation occurs once parents explain and discuss media effects with their children (Benrazavi, Teimouri & Griffiths, 2015). Here, parents have active discussions with their children concerning media contents. Parents take the opportunity to inform their children about the contents, like explaining some aspects of the programmes and the behaviour exhibited by the characters. They also take time to answer questions that their children may have about the content. Active mediation is said to be the most effective form of mediation in terms of facilitating better understanding of media portrayals as parents help children to perceive the similarities and differences between real life and television content and have a better perception of "realism" in the media context (Martínez de Morentin et al., 2014). These researchers were of the view that both co-viewing and restrictive mediation lack constructive communication between the parent and the child.

*d. Unfocused mediation*

Unfocused mediation, as can also be called the laissez faire model (Martínez de Morentin et al, 2014; Webster, 2014), or non-mediation. This involves allowing children to watch what they want when they want. From research, there are cases where parents provide their young children with their own media sets in their bedrooms for reasons of relaxation or other practical gains like watching their own shows or work at home without getting interrupted or to help their children fall asleep (Takeuchi, 2011; Haines, O'Brian, McDonald, Goldman, Evans-Schmidt, Price, Sherry & Taveras, 2013; Vaala & Hornik, 2014). Some parents watch contents meant for adults with their children (Oludimu, 2017; Torrecillas-Lacave, 2013). Unfocused mediation can pass as no mediation at all and is not expected of any parent.

Parental mediation, like every other constructed phenomenon or theory, is not devoid of criticism. Clark (2011) argued that parental mediation is so rooted in negative media effects that it largely overlooked the ways in which parents attempt to utilize media for

positive familial and developmental goals that may not be directly related to the media, and have not always paid sufficient attention to the social pressures shaping parental decision making in regards to mediation. However, this study had already been restricted to the negative – indecency in contemporary cartoons, which has the potential to influence or affect children negatively. Therefore, the choice to evaluate parental mediation becomes justified as its weakness identified by Clark (2011) becomes an advantage.

#### *Parents' Awareness of the Quality of Media Contents and the Practice of Parental Mediation*

Studies have shown that parents' awareness of the quality of media contents that are safe or unsafe for their children's consumption determines to a large extent their predisposition to practice effective mediation (Springer, 2011; Torrecillas-Lacave, 2013; Webster, 2014). Being aware of TV ratings is a stepping stone to determining appropriate television contents for children and being able to interpret them is a plus but there has been a rise in scepticism about the authenticity and dependability of TV ratings. There are records of inconsistencies between the TV ratings and the contents they carry (Anatsui & Adekanye, 2014; PTC, 2011).

Torrecillas-Lacave (2013) observed that some parents know the programming schedule and therefore, are very selective in their children's consumption of television but they are unaware of the contents because they fully trust the appropriateness of contents advertised as children's programming (through TV ratings). PTC (2011) argued that one of the remedies to the rate at which children are influenced negatively by the media is for parents to be more aware of and involved in the media consumption of their children on the basis that a programme is not suitable for a child just because it is a cartoon and carries a content rating that suggests it is appropriate for children. When parents realize that their children are viewing a televised content that is deemed inappropriate regardless of the TV rating initially showcased, their mediation strategy would positively be influenced (Torrecillas-Lacave, 2013; Webster, 2014). Therefore, awareness of new ideas in the growth of television entertainment in recent years like the inclusion of adult themes in children's programmes such as cartoons or the introduction of adult cartoons in order to accommodate adult audiences, can facilitate the rate of effective mediation among parents.

#### *Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)*

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) was developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). TRA examines the relationship between attitudes, subjective norms and actual behaviours (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). It is a theory that states that "People consider the implications of their actual behaviours before they decide to engage or not engage in a given behaviour" (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980, p.5). According to TRA, a person's performance of a specified behaviour is determined by his or her behavioural intention to perform the behaviour, and behavioural intention is jointly determined by the person's attitude towards using and subjective norm concerning the behaviour in question. Attitude is the result of the consideration of cost, benefits and consequences of the behaviour. Attitude is built by the trust or belief that is acquired from direct experiences or external information. If the individual has positive beliefs about behaviour outcome, they will have a positive attitude toward behaviour, and vice-versa. Subjective norm, according to the theorists is mainly the person's perception of social norms. It is usually influenced by personal belief toward how and what people (family and friends) think or consider as important.

The TRA has been criticized based on the premise that not all behaviours are under an individual's control including spontaneous actions, habitual behaviours and cravings (Raingruber, 2014). It has also been criticized by some other researchers on the grounds that it is not falsifiable (Greve, 2001; Ogden, 2003; Smedslund, 2000). According to these critics, a theory must be falsifiable to be a good theory and since TRA is not falsifiable, then it is not a good theory regardless of how researchers believe it to be useful. In contrast, Trafimow (2009) argued vehemently that the theory makes risky predictions, and hence, is falsifiable under reasonable standards of falsification. Also, the theory of cognitive dissonance has it that belief or perceptions may not necessarily align with one's actions and because this inconsistency causes dissonance, one would strive to achieve consonance by changing one's actions, changing one's cognition or delve into self-justification (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959).

This theory clearly centres on self-responsibility and is relevant to this study because parental mediation is a behaviour that is under a volitional control. TRA is a theory used to predict such behaviours. Therefore, parental mediation in children's exposure to cartoons in Anambra state could be determined by parents' attitudes towards cartoons and their subjective norms as predicted by the TRA theorists. Parental attitudes towards cartoons could develop from several factors like their awareness of age-inappropriate contents such as sex in cartoons. Some parents may or may not effectively mediate their children's consumption of cartoons because of their belief of what is right and wrong (subjective norm).

### III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the quantitative research design, precisely, the survey method. It was conducted in Anambra State in the South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria and Parents who have children of ages 2-17 made up the population of the study. Because the total

population of parents who fall within the stated category is unknown, the sample size was determined using William Cochran’s sample size determination formula. According to Cochran (1963) the equation below yields a representative sample:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Where  $n_0$  = sample size

Z = the value of Z found in the statistical tables which contain the area under the normal curve obtained as 1.96 for 95% level of confidence.

p = estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population which is normally obtained as 0.5

q = 1 – p

e = the desired level of precision obtained as 0.05

Therefore:

$$n_0 = \frac{1.96^2 (0.5) (1 - 0.5)}{0.05^2} = 384$$

The study adopted the multi-stage probability sampling technique. Anambra State is made up of 3 senatorial districts: Anambra Central, Anambra North and Anambra South. Each senatorial district is made up of 7 LGAs. The first stage of selection was from the LGA level. This was done using the simple random sampling; the lottery or ballot method, precisely. The LGAs in each of the senatorial districts were coded 1 to 7 and the researcher picked 2 papers of the corresponding numbers each, representing 2 LGAs for each of the Senatorial districts. Awka South and Idemmili South were the selected LGAs to represent Anambra Central senatorial district; Onitsha South and Ogbaru were the selected LGAs to represent Anambra North senatorial district; and Aguata and Nnewi North were the selected LGAs to represent Anambra South Senatorial district making them 6 LGAs in total.

The second stage involved selection of a community each from the 6 selected LGAs. This was also done using the lottery method. Ifite-Awka, Oba, Odoakpu, Okpoko, Ekwulobia and Otolo were the selected communities representing Awka South, Idemmili South, Onitsha South, Ogbaru, Aguata and Nnewi North LGAs, respectively.

The third stage involved getting to the respondents in the selected communities. This selection was done using the purposive sampling technique because the respondents are parents who have children of ages 2 to 17. Thus, they were selected from virtually anywhere, households, market places, offices, churches etc. Before issuing the research instrument (questionnaire), the researcher introduced herself and politely inquired the parental status of individuals to know if they qualify as respondents for the research. The descriptive statistics was used for data analysis with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

#### IV. ANALYSIS OF DATA

The sum of 384 copies of questionnaire were administered in the selected communities in Anambra State but 379 copies were retrieved. Thus, the researcher analysed data generated from 379 respondents.

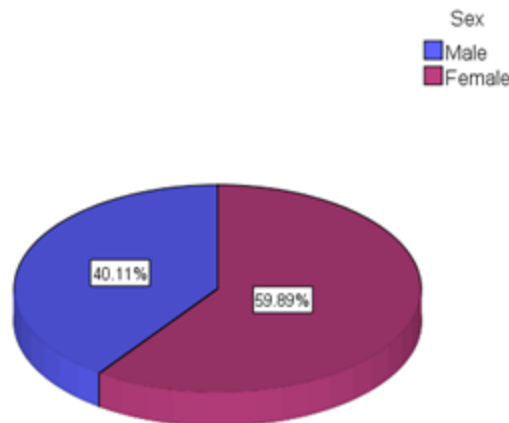


Fig. 5: Sex distribution of respondents



The above Pie chart shows that there were more female than male respondents. Specifically, 59.89% (227) of 379 respondents were females while 40.11% (152) of the respondents were males. All the respondents are parents or caregivers of children who are from 2-17 years old.

**Table 1:** Marital status of respondents.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Single	7	1.8	1.8	1.8
Married	324	85.5	85.5	87.3
Divorced	20	5.3	5.3	92.6
Widowed	28	7.4	7.4	100.0
Total	379	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 above shows that majority of the respondents are married. The married respondents were precisely, 324 in number making up 85% of 379. Respondents of other marital status made up the remaining 15%. In descending order, 28 (7.4%) respondents are widowed, 20 (5.3%) respondents are divorced and 7 (1.8%) respondents are single. This indicates that data were sourced from mostly married people.

**Table 2:** Age bracket of respondents' children.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 2-6	187	49.3	49.3	49.3
7-12	118	31.1	31.1	80.5
13-17	74	19.5	19.5	100.0
Total	379	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 represents the age bracket of respondents' children. Respondents who have children of age bracket 2-6 were the highest at 49.3% of 379 respondents while those with children of age bracket 7-12 made up 31.1%. Respondents with children of age bracket 13-17 were less available and consequently, made up just 19.5% of the study sample.

**Table 3:** If respondents see nudity in cartoons.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Never	223	58.8	58.8	58.8
Rarely	127	33.5	33.5	92.3
Often	29	7.7	7.7	100.0
Total	379	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 shows that majority of the respondents, precisely, 223 (58.8%) have never seen nudity in cartoons, 127 (33.5%) rarely see nudity in cartoons while only 29 (7.7%) often see nudity in cartoons. None of the respondents see nudity in cartoons very often. This indicates that most parents in Anambra State have very little exposure to nudity in cartoons.

**Table 4:** If respondents see explicit sex in cartoons.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Never	288	76.0	76.0	76.0
Rarely	74	19.5	19.5	95.5
Often	17	4.5	4.5	100.0
Total	379	100.0	100.0	

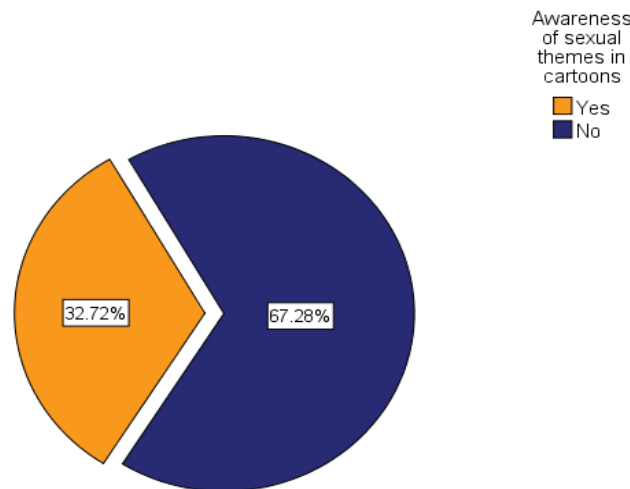
The data presented in 4 show that 288 (76.0%) have never seen explicit sex in cartoons, 74 (19.5%) rarely see explicit sex in cartoons and only 17 (4.5%) do see explicit sex often in cartoons. None of the respondents see explicit sex in cartoons very often. This implies that most parents in Anambra State have never been exposed to cartoons that contain explicit sex.

**Table 5:** If respondents see sexual hints or references in cartoons

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Never	244	64.4	64.4	64.4
Rarely	95	25.1	25.1	89.4
Often	40	10.6	10.6	100.0
Total	379	100.0	100.0	

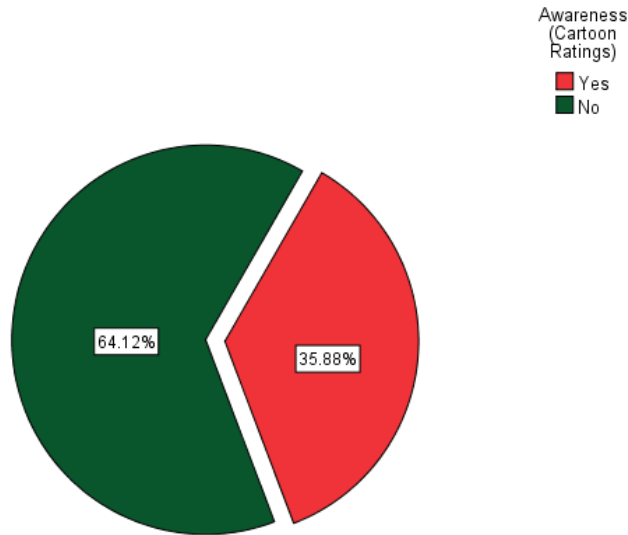
Table 5 above shows that 244 (64.4%) have never seen any sexual hint or notice any sexual reference in cartoons, 95 (25.1%) rarely see or notice sexual hints or sexual references in cartoons while 40 (10.6%) do see or notice sexual hints or references often in cartoons. None of the respondents have noticed sexual hints very often in cartoons. This is a clear indication that there is also, very little exposure to sexual hints or references in cartoons among parents in Anambra State.

Tables 3, 4 and 5 measured parental exposure to sexual contents in Anambra State and from all indications, there is a very minimal exposure to sexual contents among parents in Anambra State. This is due to the fact that in each of the aforementioned tables, over half of the respondents admitted to have never seen any sexual content in cartoons. Tables 3-5 checked awareness of sexual contents from exposure to cartoons. Figure 6 is a pie chart that checked awareness through information sources.



**Fig. 6:** Pie chart showing how informed respondents are about sexual themes in cartoons

Figure 6 shows the response to the item of the questionnaire which was aimed at finding out if parents have read or heard from any source that cartoons contain sexual themes. Data gathered shows that 67.28% which represents 225 of 379 respondents have not read nor heard that cartoons contain indecent themes while 32.72% representing 124 of the respondents have been exposed to such information. This implies that most parents in Anambra State have never read or heard from any source that some cartoons contain sexual themes.



**Fig. 7:** Respondents' awareness of cartoon ratings system

Figure 7 is a pie chart shows that 64.12% (243) of the respondents are not aware of the cartoon ratings system while 35.88% (139) of the respondents are aware that cartoons are rated. The chart implies that most parents in Anambra State are unaware of the cartoon ratings system. Rideout (2007) found out that most parents in the United States of America are aware that the TV ratings exist but do not understand all the codes but that is not the case here. Probably, most parents in Anambra state, Nigeria at the moment, are yet to reach such level of sophistication that was found among parents in the USA as at 2007.

**Table 6:** Respondents' assessment of the cartoon ratings system.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very reliable	65	17.2	17.2	27.4
Reliable	39	10.3	10.3	10.3
Unreliable	18	4.7	4.7	32.2
Undecided	14	3.7	3.7	35.9
Not Applicable	243	64.1	64.1	100.0
Total	379	100.0	100.0	

Data in table 6 show how reliable respondents think the cartoon ratings system is and among the 139 respondents that indicated being aware of the cartoon ratings system, 65 believe that it is very reliable, 39 believe that it is just reliable, 18 believe they are unreliable while 14 are undecided. Anatsui and Adekanye (2014) and PTC (2011) affirmed that the ratings system is becoming less trustworthy and that some programmes do contain more than the ratings indicate yet the table shows that majority of the respondents appear to trust it. It indicates that most parents in Anambra State who are aware of the cartoon ratings system are unaware of the lapses in the ratings system.

**Table 7:** Respondents' most practiced mediation strategy.

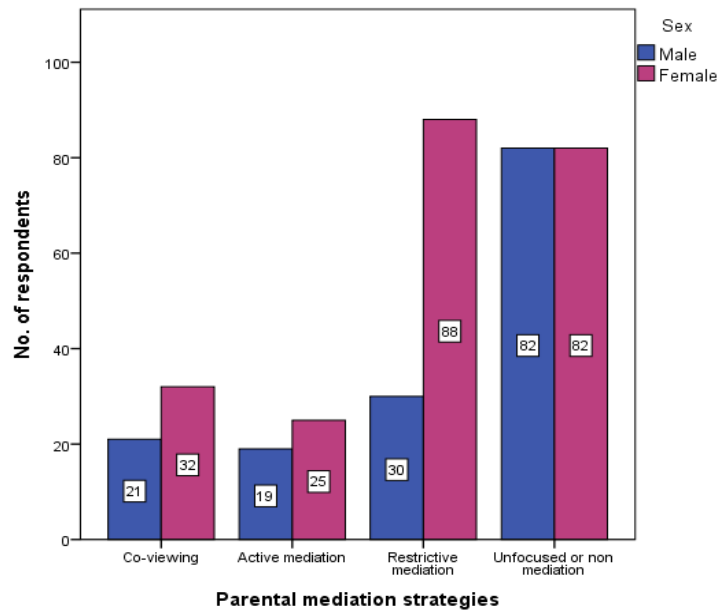
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Co-viewing	53	14.0	14.0	14.0
Active mediation	44	11.6	11.6	25.6
Restrictive mediation	118	31.1	31.1	56.7
Unfocused or non-mediation	164	43.3	43.3	100.0
Total	379	100.0	100.0	

The data in table 7 show that 53 (41.0%) practice more co-viewing the most, 44 (11.6%) practice active mediation the most, 118 (31.1%) practice restrictive mediation the most and 167 (43.3%) practice non-mediation the most. Non-mediation is most practiced by respondents followed by restrictive mediation and co-viewing. Active mediation is the least practiced mediation strategy among respondents. This indicates that most parents in Anambra State do not mediate their children's exposure to cartoons.

**Table 8:** Response to practicing mediation based on people’s recommendations

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	47	12.4	12.4	12.4
	No	284	74.9	74.9	87.3
	Undecided	48	12.7	12.7	100.0
	Total	379	100.0	100.0	

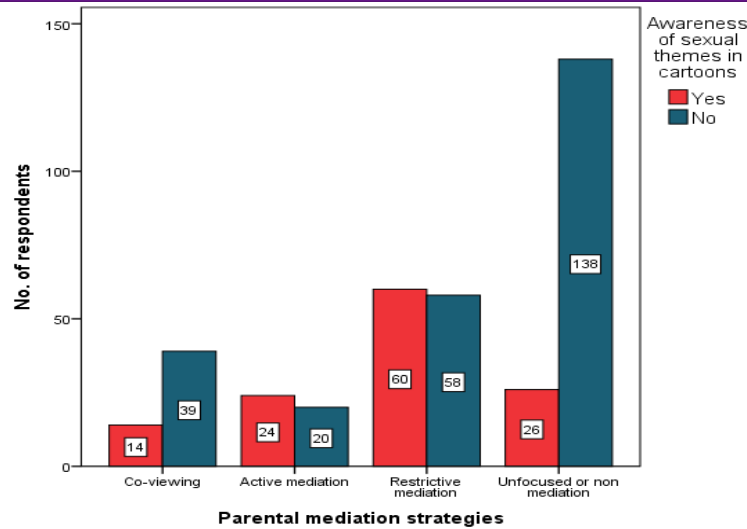
Table 8 above measured whether respondents indulge in any of the mediation practices based on what they were told or based on perception of what is expected of them. Out of the 379 respondents, only 47 indicated that they do so based on people’s recommendation while 284 do not indulge based on people’s recommendation. This implies that most parents in Anambra State indulge in any of the mediation practices not based on people’s recommendations but based on their perception or evaluation of what is right or expected of them from society. This evaluation of societal expectations conditions the mind and regulates behaviour and the proponents of TRA called it the “subjective norm”.



**Fig. 8:** Most practiced parental mediation strategy by sex of respondents.

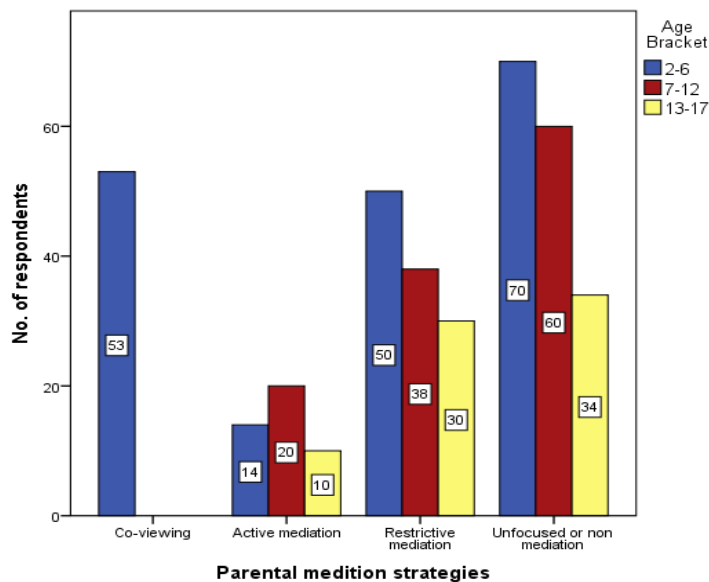
Figure 8 shows that more female (32) respondents than male (21) respondents practice co-viewing the most, more female respondents (25) than male respondents (19) practice active mediation the most and more female respondents (88) than male respondents (30) practice restrictive mediation the most. For those who practice unfocused mediation the most, there is an equal indication (82) by male and female respondents. This implies that mothers than fathers practice parental mediation in Anambra State.





**Fig. 9:** Most practiced parental mediation strategy by respondents’ awareness of sexual themes in cartoons.

Figure 9 above measured respondents’ awareness of sexual contents in cartoons and their practice of parental mediation through exposure to such information. Majority of the respondents who have not read or heard that cartoons contain gross indecency, precisely, 138 of them, practice non-mediation, 58 of them practice restrictive mediation, 20 practice active mediation while 39 practice co-viewing. Among those respondents who have read or heard that cartoons contain sexual themes, 60, which is the highest, practice restrictive mediation, 26 of them practice non-mediation, 24 practice active mediation and 14 practice co-viewing. This clearly indicates that respondents’ awareness of sexual contents in cartoons influences the mediation strategy they adopt the most which is as the TRA proponents predicted. However, 26 of the respondents who are aware of sexual contents in cartoons are seen to practice non-mediation which is a clear case of cognitive dissonance. Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) made this prediction of inconsistencies between belief and action.



**Fig. 10:** Most practiced parental mediation strategy by age bracket of respondents’ children.

Generally, the unfocused mediation is practiced most by respondents with children of all age brackets. Particularly for the three main mediation strategies, the graph shows that 53 respondents with younger children (2-6 years old) practice co-viewing and others do not, 14 practice active mediation, 50 practice restrictive mediation. Respondents with older children do not practice co-viewing, 20 of them with children (7-12 years old) practice active mediation and 30 practice restrictive mediation. For respondents with children aged 13-17, 10 practice active mediation and 30 practice restrictive mediation. This implies that parents of children aged 2-6 mediate their children’s exposure to cartoons more than parents of older children and adolescents in Anambra State.

*Discussion of findings*

Having carefully analysed the generated data, these were the core findings:

There is a very low level of awareness of sexual contents in cartoons among parents. Majority of the respondents admitted never to have seen nudity, explicit sex and sexual hints or sexual innuendos. Also, majority of them have not read nor heard from any source that cartoons can contain sexual themes. This finding may have been influenced by the fact that this is a contemporary trend as noted by Habib and Soliman (2015). Most respondents are also not aware that cartoons are rated and majority of those who are aware think the ratings system is very reliable while research has it that they are not to be trusted (Anatsui & Adekanye, 2014; PTC, 2011).

Most respondents practice non-mediation more than others, followed by restrictive mediation and co viewing. Active mediation is the least practiced for cartoons viewing. The implication here is most parents in Anambra State do not mediate their children's exposure to cartoons. This also goes *in tandem* with the findings of Torrecillas-Lacave (2013) which states that parents ignore what their children watch especially kids' programmes like cartoons. Also, most of the respondents indulge in any of the mediation practices based on the perception of what is expected of them from society. This is in accordance with the TRA which included subjective norm (a person's perception of social norms) as another predictor of behaviour.

More mothers than fathers mediate their children's cartoons viewing and this goes in line with Rahayu (2012). Parental awareness of sexual contents in cartoons determine the mediation strategy they adopt which is in accordance with the Theory of Reasoned Action which explains that attitude influences the intention to adoption of behaviour. Parents of children aged 2-6 mediate more than parents of older children and adolescents. this means that sex of parents, parental awareness of sexual contents in cartoons and the age bracket of children are some factors influencing parental mediation in children's cartoons viewing in Anambra State.

#### V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With careful examination of the findings of this study, one can rightly conclude that there is a very low level of awareness of sexual contents in cartoons among parents Anambra State. Parents mostly do not mediate their children's consumption of cartoons. Mothers than fathers in Anambra State practice parental mediation. Lack of awareness of sexual contents in cartoons prompt the adoption of non-mediation while awareness of sexual contents in cartoons prompt restrictive mediation and active mediation. Also, parents of younger children mediate their children's cartoons viewing cartoons parents of older children and adolescents in Anambra State.

This study recommends that parents should be more proactive in the lives of their children and quit leaving them to the television. They should mediate their children's consumption of cartoons because children can also make meaning out of what they see or are frequently exposed to and not all cartoons are children-friendly. Also, concerned individuals should help create awareness through various fora or platforms, especially through religious organisations which are seen as the highest section in society that uphold morals to high standard.

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