

Social bullying prevalent in children's television, study finds

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Children ages 2-11 view an alarming amount of television shows that contain forms of social bullying or social aggression. Physical aggression in television for children is greatly documented, but this is the first in-depth analysis on children's exposure to behaviors like cruel gossiping and manipulation of friendship.

Nicole Martins, Indiana University, and Barbara J. Wilson, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, published in the *Journal of Communication* a content analysis of the 50 most popular children's shows according to Nielsen Media Research. One hundred and fifty television shows were viewed and analyzed, and 92% of the programming contained some version of social aggression—approximately 14 times per hour. There was [careful attention](#) to what was portrayed in the cases of social aggression, whether the behavior was rewarded or punished, justified, or committed by an attractive [perpetrator](#).

The findings suggested that some of the ways in which social aggression is contextualized make these depictions particularly problematic for young viewers. The study found that attractive characters who perpetrated social aggression were rarely punished for their behavior, and that socially aggressive scenes were significantly more likely than physically aggressive scenes to be presented in a humorous way. In some cases, social aggression on television may pose more of a risk than portrayals of [physical aggression](#) do.

"These findings should help parents and educators recognize that there

are socially aggressive behaviors on programs children watch. Parents should not assume that a program is okay for their child to watch simply because it does not contain [physical violence](#). Parents should be more aware of portrayals that may not be explicitly violent in a [physical sense](#) but are nonetheless antisocial in nature," Martins said.

"Martins and Wilson's research shows just how important it is to broaden our view of 'violence' beyond the physical; particularly as their findings indicate that social violence like insults and name calling occurs just as commonly in children's programming," said Amy Jordan, director of the Media and the Developing Child sector at the University of Pennsylvania and Chair of the Children, Adolescents and the Media Division of the International Communication Association.

"As a society, we need to acknowledge that our children are learning to be socially aggressive, and that one source of this learning may be the [television shows](#) they watch. We may not see physical manifestations of this type of violence, but children who are victims of social aggression from their peers may develop deep and lasting emotional scars."

More information: Mean on the Screen: Social Aggression in Programs Popular With Children, By Nicole Martins and Barbara J. Wilson; Journal of Communication [DOI: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2011.01599.x](#)

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