

Running Head: Amazing Athenia

Why children need Amazing Athenia.

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For decades children have been entertained by watching cartoons. Television is one way that society imparts cultural norms on its members. Children learn about various aspects of society through the characters and storylines in cartoons. How male and female characters behave in cartoons informs children about gender roles. Studies have found that children tend to imitate behavior that they see modeled, particularly the behavior of same-sex models (Bandura, 1977 and Courtney and Wipple, 1983). What kind of gender specific behaviors are cartoons modeling for children? One recent study states the following: "Cartoons, in their current state, are depicting significant differences in the status, behavior and capabilities of female and male characters. Thus cartoons tell cultural stories that can't help but inform young minds about who they are to become." (Spicher and Hudak, 1997).

Given that cartoons tell children about what it means to be male and female in our society, it is important to create shows that depict both male and female characters from diverse perspectives. Amazing Athenia is one such show. The purpose of this paper is twofold; first, to demonstrate that there is a need for shows such as Amazing Athenia and secondly, to explain how Amazing Athenia can enhance children's social and cognitive development.

#### Influence of Television on Children

American children spend more time watching television than they do engaging in any other activity besides sleeping (Hutson, Watkins, & Kunkel, 1989). On average, children between the ages of 2 and 5 years of age spend four hours a day watching television (Lande, 1993). One concern over the amount of television that young children are watching relates to what children are learning from the programs they are watching. By the time of high school graduation, most children will have spent more time watching television than they have in the

classroom, thus television is a potential site of tremendous learning and education. Television is a far reaching and powerful medium which can convey cultural knowledge to both children and adults. The question is, “What is television teaching?”

Studies have shown that repeated exposure to the same television message can cultivate beliefs that are consistent with the dominant social reality presented on television. Furthermore, both adults and children who watch more than the average amount of television are more likely to believe that the real world is like the world presented on television (Calvert & Hutson, 1987). Elementary school children who were heavy television viewers were more sex-typed in their beliefs than those who were light viewers. Heavy viewers were also more likely to stereotype personality attributes on the basis of gender, and hold stronger sexist attitudes (McGhee & Frueh, 1980).

Although children are exposed to a variety of media, including books, video games and the internet, the research cited above suggests the television is a highly influential source of information about gender roles. Therefore it is essential that children have access television shows that portray males and females from diverse perspectives. Amazing Athenia is one such show. This show was developed in order to present a strong female hero, Athenia solving problems typically encountered by male superheros, such as saving a village from a rampaging snow beast. In the pilot episode that was developed for this project, Athenia demonstrates clear thinking under pressure in order to solve the problem. The ability to think clearly and rationally under pressure is typically portrayed as a masculine trait in the media (Thompson and Zerbinos, 1995). Additionally, Athenia solves the problem in a way that reflects a predominantly female way of reasoning (Gilligan, 1982). Rather than engage in a physical confrontation with the snow beast, which is a typical strategy for male superheroes (Thompson and Zerbinos, 1997), Athenia

solves the problem by thinking of a way to calm the beast. She uses music to soothe the snow beast and lure it away from the village. This saves everyone from harm, including the beast. Additionally, she investigates the cause of the snow beasts rampage and discovers the beast's cave/home had been destroyed by a group of villagers who were trying to build a tunnel through the mountain. She works with the villagers to develop a solution for the tunnel (a tram over the mountain) and to rebuild the beast's home. Again, demonstrating an ability to solve the problem in a way that shows concern for everyone.

#### Cognitive Theory Behind Amazing Athenia

This paragraph discusses Piaget's stages and how Athenia must use logical and reasoning to solve problems. In addition, she must help the village overcome their egocentric thinking in order to see the snow beast's perspective. Discuss egocentrism. Finally, discuss how symbolic thinking is incorporated into the plot of the show.

Next paragraph discusses Vygotsky's ideas and how scaffolding is worked into the plot...

#### Conclusion

Recap why Amazing Athenia is needed and conclude by making a case for more shows like this.

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