THE RUNAWAY NINJA TURTLES-WHY WERE THEY SO VIOLENT?

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[Assignment: In a short essay, make a point about television or other forms of popular culture. Organize your paper as a cause and effect (causal analysis) essay.]

(1) "Cowabunga, dude!" The words came blasting from the little green, human monsters that I was babysitting. I had been babysitting for only five hours, and yet it seemed as if I had been there for an eternity. Alex had already been sent to the bad boy chair four times. Nicholas had been ordered to play alone in his room for an hour. Natalie had her television privileges taken away from her for the morning. The baby, Erin, had absorbed the atmosphere of the house; she was fretful and difficult, and this was only the beginning of the trouble. Before their mother left, she had given the children specific directions not to ride their bicycles in the street. They obviously didn't understand. Now, I was upstairs attempting to rock a hollering baby asleep. Over the baby's crying, I heard a scream from downstairs.

(2) "Cowabunga! Now you're mine!" Alex, dressed in his Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle costume, flung his 60 pound body against Natalie, his older but unprepared sister. The two of them had been fighting about which movie they were going to watch. "Alex, get off of your sister right now. I've had enough of your trouble-making today." He completely ignored what I said, and grabbed his younger brother.

(3) "Come on, Nicholas. Let's go before the bad guys get us. Ninja's away." Apparently, I was the enemy. Before I could stop them they were out the door and riding in the street on their getaway bikes. I had already punished Alex for that once today. I set the baby down to chase after them, but she yelled so loud that I had to take her with me on the hunt for the runaway turtles. I would have tried to chase them down, but that was impossible. I couldn't find my shoes anywhere, and the road they were riding on was rocky gravel with broken glass scattered in places. The baby in my arms had to weigh at least 35 pounds. Therefore, all I could do was yell.

(4) "Alex and Nicholas, you'd better come back right now!" They looked at me and laughed. My patience was wearing thin.
"You two have until the count of three to get back here or else you will be in big trouble!"
"You can't get us!"
"Yeah, we don't have to come back."

(5) I had taken enough of this little war. However, before I knew it they had stopped and gotten off their bikes. But instead of turning around, they were picking up rocks and sticks.
"I'm going to count to five and when I get done counting you two boys had better be back here on the driveway. One, two, three, four, five!" They rode up to the driveway where I was standing. One hit me in the calf with the stick. The other threw rocks at me. They kept on riding past the driveway yelling "Cowabunga."
The neighbor on the hill saw the whole thing and tried to reason with the kids.

"Lisa's getting pretty mad. You'd better listen to her."

"She's not tough. We can beat her up!" Luckily, the neighbor grabbed their bikes before the boys could get away.

After hearing Alex's words, I braved the gravel with my bare feet and pulled Alex off his bike.

"Nicholas, help me! Use your Ninja powers." It was the longest fifty yards that I had ever walked. I had the baby in one arm and Alex draped over my other shoulder. Alex was flailing his arms and legs all over the place. Every once in awhile he'd attempt to bite me. In the mean time, Nicholas was using his Ninja powers on my backside hitting me with all of his four-year-old superhuman strength. Natalie, who had been in the house recovering from her brother's hit, opened the door. Alex broke free from my hold for one second, and he was already on the run. He ordered Nicholas to get his num-chucks and rifles. Before I knew it they were out of the back door, and on their bikes once again.

What influenced the two young boys to behave this way? They were raised in a Christian home. They were never physically abused or first-hand witnesses to any physical abuse. They were taught to treat others kindly, not with violence. I have observed that every time I am babysitting for them, they are watching movies. "Karate Kid," "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles," "Ghostbusters," and "Superman" are some of their favorite tapes, and they have viewed each one of these over twenty times. Daniel and the turtles are their heroes. Although these characters are the good guys, their goal in each movie is accomplished by using violence. The teenagers in Richard Harley's essay refer to "Saturday Night Live" as an arbiter of good taste. I think the situation Harley recounts is indeed true. Movies and television do have a profound influence on the behavior of children, and the movies are full of violence, so young children see nothing wrong with behaving like their favorite heroes.

I'll never forget the first time the kids saw "Karate Kid." They absolutely loved the movie. They begged me to bring it over every time I babysat them for the following month. There was one specific scene which caught their attention. During a Halloween party, the hero Daniel dressed as a shower, was being chased by five skeletons. When Daniel tried to climb a fence to get away, they pulled him down and threw him on the ground. The first guy kneed him in the stomach. From there, they took turns hitting poor Daniel even when he was almost unconscious. Mr. Miagi did save Daniel by using his Karate expertise and hurting the five skeletons. After watching this scene for the first time, the boys ran and put on their karate outfits. They insisted on watching that part again. It wouldn't have been so bad, except that they practiced on their sister and me. Natalie got hit on the jaw, and I was nailed in the stomach. But the boys were not contrite. It was almost as if others' pain meant nothing to them. In the movie they saw people hurting people all the time, so they no longer seemed able to view pain and violence as meaningful or serious.

The most recent movie to catch their attention is "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles." The turtles are portrayed as funny and friendly.
characters. Even I like them. However, the kids I babysat for were fascinated with the turtles' weapons and with their fighting techniques. There was one scene which really caused the boys to go karate jumping around the room. Raphael, a turtle, kicked one of the masked "bad guys" in the stomach. He then quickly back kicked another masked "bad guy" and swiftly struck yet another with a steel pole. On the day of the events recorded earlier, the boys were dressed in their Ninja turtle outfits. They were playing out the part of the turtles when they used the wooden sticks on my legs much as a turtle would have used a steel pole. They were invincible and I was to be the conquered enemy. Although they are young and they are only playing, I feel that they have lost their sense of reality to a point where others are in danger. I went home that night with bruises.

(11) Children have always looked up to heroes. They have always tried to act, look, dress, and be like their idols. More and more young children are finding their idols from movie characters. And more and more of these favorite movie heroes accomplish their goals by using violence and aggression. Would children be as aggressive if their hero were Big Bird? Children are beginning to see physical aggression as commonplace. Although their heroes are doing it for the good of others, children aren't always mature enough to distinguish between when violence is necessary and when it is not. Not all children are affected by these movie characters in this manner and not all movies have a lot of violence. But there are enough violent movies out there which are affecting enough kids to make us think: Should our children be idolizing characters who say "Cowabunga, dude" as they wipe someone out?