

Banet-Wiser, S. (2007). *Is Nick for kids? Irony, camp, and animation in the Nickelodeon brand. Kids rule! : Nickelodeon and consumer citizenship.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Synopsis

As described in this chapter, Nickelodeon is notorious for producing transgenerational content by utilizing irony, camp, and double coding. With its gradual transition from live comedy shows to creator-driven animation, the network has been able to show the various ways in which animation can stretch the boundaries and limitations of representation (p. 181). The author described how animation was generally separated into two distinct categories – the first which was geared towards an “innocent” child audience, and the second which was designed for adults that kept a more complex edge. Although this was true for most networks, Nickelodeon was committed to blurring the line between the two categories by producing shows, such as *SpongeBob SquarePants*, that employed a sense of ironic playfulness to deliver ambiguous and surprising content/characters that could be enjoyed by a diverse audience. Nick set itself apart from competing networks, such as Disney, by showing an active disinterest in entertaining a simple family audience, and, instead, focusing on airing shows, such as *Ren and Stimpy*, that encouraged self-reflexivity (of characters and the constraints of TV) and mocked typical conventions. Its Us vs. Them philosophy (and rebellious nature) gave it a basis to act contrary to conventional wisdom and to establish a successful channel dedicated to children’s programming.

Key Concepts

- **Double Coding:** “a program has two levels of code to its logic so that it appeals to different audiences” (p.181); “appealing to both adults and children, but in different ways” (p. 188)
- **Camp:** a style that is predominantly about artifice and exaggeration and exists in tension with consumer culture (p. 191)
- **Irony:** “the subject matter of camp that refers here to any highly incongruous contrast between an individual or thing and its context or association” (p.192)

Key Quotes

- “The channel’s commitment to creator-driven cartoons was as much a part of its claim to “respect” kids...as was Nickelodeon’s promise of positive gender and racial representations. These...strategies... came to characterize not only Nickelodeon programming but the channels overall brand identity” (p.186).
- “Brand culture is the primary means through which subjectivity and citizenship are understood and experienced, camp and irony become practices of consumer citizenship...These aesthetic styles encourage a focus on individualism and consumption habits as political activity” (p. 192).
- “Nickelodeon wants to be hip, but not that hip; while dedicated to “respecting” and empowering its audience, the channel defines respect and empowerment within the terms of the general market” (p. 198).

Essential Question

- How can Nickelodeon remain the vanguard among children’s networks now that imitation and a sharing of people has “watered down their look”?