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Subliminal Messages

Every day, we see all types of messages, signs, advertisements, news, and cartoons. We all understand their message or what they may be trying to convey to us as the audience and consumers. Or do we? Entertainment has developed for years and years, has been a significant part of our growing economy, and has ultimately taught us the rights from the wrongs of everyday life. What is appropriate and what is not? Ultimately, people have recently questioned a big multi-millionaire company that so many have grown up on for many of these questionable sublimated messages.

History of Nickelodeon

The Nickelodeon brand was launched in 1979 as a show for kids and children to enjoy and be entertained to pass the day. This program was defined as sketch comedy for kids. Though Nickelodeon had many viewers, its show ratings didn't skyrocket until about 1993. Production for Nickelodeon introduced a new writer named Dan Schneider, who ultimately became Nickelodeon's "golden boy" (Taylor), producing many new eye-catching, fun, engaging shows. He was a producer in shows such as "All That," lasting from 1994-2005 "The Amanda Show," 1999-2002 "Zoey 101," 2005-2008 "Drake and Josh," 2004-2007 "iCarly," 2007-2012 "Victorious," 2010-2013 "Sam and Cat," 2013-2014, and so many other shows that are nostalgic today. These shows were made for younger audiences, and Nickelodeon's age demographic was

from two to seventeen. Many kids, tweens, and teenagers enjoyed these shows, giving Dan Schneider the pedestal to create and invent all of these new shows consistently.

“Quiet On Set”

On March 17th, 2024, a documentary series, “Quiet On Set: The Dark Sides of Kids Television,” was released by Maxine Productions. This series consisted of five one-hour episodes. The series sheds light on the dark truth about what Nickelodeon was, how it was run, those who were abused, the abusers, and the many underlying subliminal messages we may not have noticed as child viewers. The first episode of this series covers how the writers came up with characters in the “Amanda Show,” the jokes made, why they were created, and the treatment of child actors of color and women behind the scenes. Jenny Kilgen and Christy Stratton were the only two females in the writing room. Dan Schneider had hired these two women as their work was picked as the funniest in a pile of other pitches for new show skits. They both explained the many toxic and inappropriate sides Dan had and how he would treat them in the work environment. “Christy Stratton, a female writer on staff at *The Amanda Show*, states that “working for Dan was like being in an abusive relationship.”(Stratton) Stratton and her fellow writer Jenny Kilgen allege that the female writers on staff were forced to split their salary and were threatened by Schneider for reporting the matter to the Writers Guild. Additionally, Kilgen claims that when she returned as a writer for Season 2, she was offered a contract that forced her to work for 11 weeks unpaid. (According to *Quiet on Set*, Schneider denies Kilgen’s claims, stating that he “had no control over salaries.”)(Branigin and Chery). Jenny Kilgen even went as far as suing Dan Schneider for his inappropriate behavior, only to find out her efforts had no effect. Though this document already had begun with the treatment Schneider had portrayed, others had perceived many other concerning factors.

Furthermore, this documentary gradually escalates as there is a shed on child predators and inappropriate jokes and fetishes glorified subliminally. Due to the cons, Dan Schneider was speculated to have a weird and uncomfortable relationship with child star Amanda Bynes due to the constant physical affection and having Amanda personally work on new ideas for the show. Child predators were discovered while working on Nickelodeon sets and had unfortunately abused many children. These confirmed predators were Brian Peck, Ezelle Channel, and Jason Handy. These three men were employees who worked behind the scenes, getting child actors from stage to stage, alone with no parents, leaving these children under no protection behind closed doors. Child actors such as Brian Hearne, Kyle Sullivan, and Giovannie Samuels were critical speakers, as was MJ, Brandi's mom, and their experience with these backstage employees. Kyle Sullivan goes into detail about his bizarre experience on Nickelodeon; Sullivan was a character on the hit show "All That," and explains that "the set on "All That" was dysfunctional... You could just get away with more." (Sullivan) He then describes how a lot of the child labor laws were being ignored, as well as the physical labor they were taking on. He tells a specific skit where they had to consume large amounts of sugar and coffee, and the sugar would clump into a white goo, leaving actors disgusted and uncomfortable. Sullivan explains, "The show was full of uncomfortable sketches, and Dan got a kick out of walking on the line." (Sullivan) means barely breaking the boundaries with appropriate and inappropriate jokes. Brian Hearne, an African American child actor at the time, explains that he was outcasted many times compared to the other white actors on set, making him a "drug dealer" in one of the first episodes of "All That." Other than the separation Dan created with some actors, they felt they had close bonds and relationships with PAs such as Brian Peck and Jason Handy as they chaperoned kids

from set to set. These PAs had various opportunities to get close to these actors and break many of those boundaries. Even stating that Handy “ appeared to be a very nice person.” (Samuels)

Predators

Though many felt there were welcoming arms and a safe atmosphere on set, others believed things were too good to be true. “Jason Handy, a production assistant. Handy was often responsible for escorting the child actors around on set. In the docuseries, a woman, identified as MJ, spoke about her daughter, identified as Brandi, as a victim of Handy. MJ claimed to have received inappropriate emails from him. Further, MJ noted, “We as parents were not allowed on the set.” She recalled Handy being “very charismatic, very charming.” (Mahato) On one episode of the Amanda Show, guest 11-year-old Brandi connected with Handy via email for future opportunities that he had promised to Brandi. MJ, Brandi’s mother, explained that she felt the emails were innocent and was giving Brandi the chance for upcoming shows by communicating with Handy. Unfortunately, one day, Handy sent Brandi a nude photograph of himself masturbating. “He [Handy] said he had sent it to her because he wanted her to see that he was thinking of her.” (Mahato). “MJ claimed she never reported the incident to authorities but took Brandi out of the industry.

Nonetheless, law enforcement arrested Jason Handy in 2003 after receiving a tip about inappropriate material present at his house. Police found over 1700 images of children in compromised positions”(Mahato). Investigators also found a plethora of inappropriate pictures of young girls in various poses and baggies of girl’s underwear with their names on them. A few months later, another behind-the-scenes employee was prosecuted for sexually assaulting and raping another child star. This dialogue coach was Brian Peck. Up until this docu-series, no one

knew who or what indeed happened between the child star that was abused as well as what Brian Peck, the abuser, had entirely done. According to the documentary series “Quiet On Set,” this actor was Drake Bell. Drake Bell was originally from the hit series “The Amanda Show,” where he met Brian Peck, a dialogue coach trying to help with his acting and speech. Drake Bell’s father, Joe Bell, began to notice Brian’s inappropriate behavior towards him and explained to many producers and staff that he did not want his son alone with Brian. Slowly, Brian Peck made child actor Drake Bell believe that his father wasn’t good for developing his career and that he could help him get ahead. Eventually, Bell fired his dad from being his manager, and he moved in with his mom, who was not as involved as his father was in his acting career. Eventually, Bell began spending the night at Peck’s house, where he usually slept on the couch. One morning, Peck began touching Drake inappropriately. This abuse went on for many months before Peck became so obsessed that it drew concern from others. Eventually, Bell broke his silence on the matter and arrested Brian Peck. After investigation and trial, Peck was sentenced to 16 months in prison. Drake explained to those who were supporting Brian Peck during the trial, “You will forever have the memory of sitting in this courtroom and defending this person, and I will forever have the memory of the person you are defending violating me and doing unspeakable acts and crimes, and that’s what I will remember” (Bell)

It wasn’t until 2018 that Dan Schneider was fired from production at Nickelodeon. In an interview by Boogie, who played “T-bone” in *Icarley*, Dan Schneider was allowed to address the docu-series “Quiet On Set.” In this interview, Dan explains himself and is allowed to explain himself. He explains that “over the past two nights of watching the series, I was embarrassed in the past behaviors that I regret, and I owe some people some pretty strong apologies.”(Boogie) As he goes on, there are other subjects, such as the writer’s room and those who have worked for

him or around him. Dan consistently apologizes and explains that he is embarrassed and would take it back if he could. Boogie then begins to question Dan and the inappropriate humor he had in the shows, explaining, “Currently where we are, some people think that some of those jokes are inappropriate for children.” (Boogie) He then asks Dan what his thoughts are on that. Dan explains, “All these jokes that you’re speaking of that the show covered over the past two nights, every one of those jokes were written for a kid audience because kids thought they were funny.”(Schneider). “And now we have some adults looking back at them 20 years later through their lens and saying “that’s inappropriate for a kid” (Schneider). Schneider then explains that if that is how people feel, there is no problem with cutting those jokes out of the show. Boogie then looks taken aback and is impressed that Dan would choose that alternative for his popular shows. Dan explained that there was more than just him creating these popular shows; he had to get everything approved by his bosses to air a joke, make a set, and put out wardrobes.

Boogie then asks about the two female writers who had to share one salary; Dan explains that he had no control over wages. Dan explained that usually, when it is a first gig for new writers, it is common for any gender or race to share a salary since they are getting this first opportunity. Regarding diversity, Dan explains that he has even gained awards based on incorporating different races into his shows and movies. Near the end of this interview, Boogie gives Dan a final opportunity after addressing a lot of the information presented on “Quiet On Set,” Dan explains “in the future, he believes there should be a licensed therapist on set for the specific reason of making sure that those kids wanted to do this job, what it’s going to mean to be famous and on social media, so that way they could opt out if they do not want to be on that show.” (Schneider) Schneider explained that he would continue to create his shows in a more positive and welcoming environment.

Many of these actors were abused on and off-screen. Many young actors were put in uncomfortable situations where they felt they couldn't speak up for themselves or have a voice. Writers and editors never got a break and were expected to fulfill Dan Schneider's duties, or there would be threats, consequences, and or humiliation. We never fully understand the damage and effects that these child actors faced growing up and being pushed into situations they couldn't control. We never see what subliminal messages are presented until it is too late.

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