The Effect of Watching Pleasant and Aggressive Videos on Wellbeing

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Introduction

Psychologists have attempted to understand and measure the effects that exposure to media violence has on children and young people (American Psychological Society, 2013). The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry identified that, on average, children in America watch approximately four hours of television each day (American Academy of

Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2014). Research states that watching violence on television can lead to children's desensitisasion to the behaviour they are exposed to and they are more likely to accept violence as a way of solving problems. They further claim that excessive viewing of violent material during childhood, can increase indirect and direct levels of aggression. Similalry, Tanwar and Priyanka (2016) supports that violent media exposure may contribute to an increase in actuarial aggression amongst children following exposure to violent and aggressive online material, whether that be through the use of the internet, television, or video games. They also suggest that the impact of violent and aggressive media content poses a threat to public health.

Research has also shown that being exposed to aggressive material may not only potentially affect an individual's aggression but may also cause negative consequences to mental health and overall wellbeing (Judge, 2018). This is supported by many researchers, who suggest that exposure to violent content can have a negative effect on a child's behaviour overtime and subsequently negatively affecting their welbeing (ABC Health & Wellbeing, 2006; Children's Health, 2019; Lobel, et al., 2017). Conversley, there are arguments to suggest that potentially violent content, such as video games, have no impact on a child or young person's mental health and wellbeing. For example, Johnson et al (2013) argue that there are positive effects when young people utilise video games. Such as reporting that moderate use of videogames can contribute to emotional stability as well as reducing levels of depression and emotional disturbances. They also suggest that by playing video games, children are able to 'let off steam' as a response and have a coping mechanism for when they experience problems with their peers or families. Interestingly, it appears largely dependent on the type of material that is being watched as to whether an individual will experience a sense of elevated wellbeing or increase in aggression. Moss (2018) explored the effects of watching nature videos on partipants emotions, and found similar results to Green

and Keltner (2017), in that participants reported increased feelings of compassion and empathy when exposed to pleasant material (Moss, 2018). Alternaitvely, watching aggressive content can influence an individual's level of aggression and expression of anger (Englehardt et al, 2011), indicating further that our state of being may be infleunced from the content we are exposed to. Aiming to explore this phenomenon further, with a focus on both wellbeing and aggression, the present pilot project, studies the potential strength of influence that pleasant and aggressive videos have on our feelings of aggression and wellbeing.

Methodology

Participants

Respondents were randomly selected using a convenience sampling method. Overall, 43 people responded to the advertisement and were subsequently recruited to participate, with the final sample consisting of 24 female and 19 male participants.

Materials

The experiment was comprised of 2 parts; watching videos of aggressive and non-aggressive content over the period of five days and of a survey that contained two measures, aggression, and wellbeing. To measure aggression, The Buss & Parry (1992) aggression questionnaire was utilised, which consisted of 29 questions and was used to identify how respondents rated themselves with regards to hostile, verbal, and physical aggression. Questions included *'If I have to resort to violence to protect my rights, I will', 'When people are especially nice to me, I wonder what they want', and 'I tell my friends openly when I disagree with them'.* Respondents scored themselves on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = extremely uncharacteristic of me, 5 = extremely characteristic of me). This measure demonstrated high internal reliability (a = .82).

To measure levels of wellbeing, the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale was used, which consisted of 14 questions. The questions included *'I've been feeling*

optimistic about the future' and *'I've been feeling relaxed'*. Respondents were asked to rate themselves on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = none of the time, 5 = all of the time). This measure demonstrated high internal reliability (a = .9).

Procedure

The study was conducted over a five-day period. Before being exposed to any material, each participant was randomly assigned to a 'control group' (n = 17), 'happiness group' (n = 14), or the 'aggression group' (n = 12). Each day, respondents were exposed to online material in the form of a video depicting aggressive behaviour (aggression group) or content to evoke laughter (pleasant group). The control group was not exposed to any of the videos. On day 1 and day 5 of the study, participants were required to answer a questionnaire rating themselves on wellbeing and aggression, after watching the video that was relevant to their group.

Results

Looking at the group that was exposed to aggression, participants reported higher levels of aggression on day 5 (M = 84.28, SD = 18.90), compared to the self-reported scores on day 1 (M=78.25, SD = 16.79). The sample failed to meet the assumptions for normality and homogeneity of variance, therefore, a Wilcoxon test was utilised for analysing the data and comparing the aggression group with the control group. The Wilcoxon test identified a non-significant effect, T = -7.46, p = .45, r = 0.4. Cohen's d indicates a small effect size. This result suggests that even with exposure to aggressive online material, individuals do not rate themselves significantly more aggressive over time. The results indicate that in the current sample, there is no difference to be observed when exposed to videos depicting aggressive behaviours.

Looking at wellbeing, participants reported higher wellbeing scores on day 5 (M=104.11, SD = 16.51) compared to day 1 (M = 101.38, SD= 16.11). When assumptions were tested for parametric testing, the sample failed to meet the assumptions for normality

and homogeneity of variance. The Wilcoxon test demonstrated a non-significant effect between time one and time two, T = -.14, p = .88, r = .04. Cohen's d indicates a very small effect size, suggesting any differences between groups is minimal. This result suggests that in the current sample, there is no difference to be observed when exposed to pleasant videos.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that experiencing exposure to aggression or pleasant material does not necessarily mean there will be an alteration in feelings of wellbeing or aggression over time. The results from the present study cannot provide support to certain aspects of the previous literature, such as the observable differences in self-reported wellbeing and aggression levels when compared over time. The present study's results also do not align with previous research that demonstrates wellbeing and aggression as aspects that significantly increase with exposure to material depicting either aggressive or non-aggressive content.

The present study did, however, demonstrate an observable effect regarding wellbeing and aggression, as participants reported higher scores at the end of the 5-day study period compared to the start of the experiment. This could possibly suggest that the effect these videos have on wellbeing and aggression observed in previous research, is valid, but accumulates over a longer period than the present study utilised. Future research should attempt recruitment of a larger sample size; it is possible that the effect size and the outcome of the analysis could have been affected by the small sample size. Moreover, future research exploring this area, should aim to increase the timeline of the experiment, as this may help identify more significant changes in feelings of wellbeing and aggression over time and indicate a potential timeline as to how long it takes an individual to have a significant change in wellbeing and aggression levels.

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