

Media influences on aggression

There are a variety of explanations and theories on how the media influences aggression. One way the media influences aggression is through imitation. Imitation is the observational learning from people or characters that are 'models'. Bandura investigated this in his bobo doll study. The participants were 36 girls and 36 boys from the Stanford Nursery all between 3-5 years old. They were divided into groups where they either watched an aggressive model hitting and kicking the bobo doll whilst the other group was exposed to a non-aggressive model being playing with a toy ignoring the bobo doll. It was found that the children exposed to the aggressive model were more likely to act in physically aggressive ways than those who were not exposed to the aggressive model. This can be linked to media influence on aggression as for instance when someone identifies with a video game or movie character this can lead to an increase in demonstrated behaviour due to identification.

Another reason how the media could influence aggression is due to desensitisation. Research shows that repeated exposure to video game violence increases aggressive behavior in part via changes in cognitive and personality factors associated with desensitization [1]. Drabman and Thomas (1975) showed young children a film which was either violent or non-violent but exciting. The participants were then asked to monitor the behaviour of two younger children via a TV link. When the confederates started hitting each other, the children who were exposed to the violent film were slower to call for help [2]. This shows that media influence does desensitize violence which can be debated to be a positive or negative thing.

The media may also influence aggression through changes in social norms. This can be seen as for example technological progress increase access to violent material which means that technology can lead to increased exposure and normalisation of violent content. Changes from a traditional society where the exposure was minimal, and violence was seen with disgust whereas today it is very available and part of TV culture.

Media influence on aggression can be amplified if there is no real-world counter to behaviour seen in media. This can be explained as people who repeatedly view stereotypes such as overweight characters being displayed as bullies shown for instance by Dudley Dursley in Harry Potter, Nelson Muntz in The Simpsons, Bluto in Popeye and many others which portray overweight characters as aggressive. If these media Stereotypes are not counterbalanced by for instance knowing someone overweight who is not a bully this can lead to displaying negative prejudgements classifying overweight characters as mean and potentially violent bullies. This could mean that media can indirectly influence aggression by portraying aggression onto others due to a lack of real-world counter behaviour to stereotypes.

Nelson Muntz



Dudley Dursley



Bluto



However, an important factor that can go against explanations of media influence on aggression is that individual differences are being ignored. Individuals who have different character traits such as being shy or adventurous might have different experiences whilst viewing media. When for instance someone who is naturally more adventurous and sees a violent scene their reaction might be to want to know what happens and to ask questions about behaviour witnessed whilst a naturally shy person is more inclined to look away or even become less aggressive as research has also found that there is no link between violent video games and youth aggression [3].

Further, there is a lot of supporting evidence that media does influence aggression. Participants who previously played a violent video game had lower heart rate and [GSR](#) (galvanic skin response) while viewing filmed real violence, demonstrating a physiological desensitization to violence [4]. Research shows that [violent video game](#) exposure increases aggressive thoughts, angry feelings, physiological arousal, aggressive behaviours, and decreases helpful behaviours [5]. “Violence in the media has been increasing and reaching proportions that are dangerous,” said Emanuel Tanay, MD, a retired Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Wayne State University [6]. The evidence strongly suggests that exposure to violent video games is a causal risk factor for increased aggressive behavior, aggressive cognition, and aggressive affect and for decreased empathy and prosocial behavior [7].

To further evaluate, a study done by Berkowitz and Alioto aimed to find whether viewing previous aggression which participants saw as justified would lead to an increase in giving fake electric shocks and longer duration compared to others who have not. It was found that

the group who did watch previous aggression depicting revenge did give longer and more fake electric shocks thinking they were real. This disinhibition has led to real life applications such as the American army using video games as a recruiting tool. Since generally violence is not the norm soldiers in the military will have to be desensitised and able to give a disinhibited response to ensure resistance to psychological harm.

To conclude, this report demonstrates the various effects the media can have on aggression and research supporting the theory. Although a study has shown that there is no link between video games and youth aggression the majority of research disagrees.

Sources:

[1] <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0146167205277205>

[2]

<https://revisionworld.com/a2-level-level-revision/psychology/social-psychology/explanations-media-influence>

[3] <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022395611002627>

[4] <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022103106000825>

[5] <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/violent-video-game>

[6]

<https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/child-adolescent-psychiatry/violence-media-what-effects-behavior>

[7] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20192553>