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How Do Violent News Stories Affect Viewers?

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Abstract

Television news broadcasts have been airing since the mid-1930s, and has since then, implemented itself into viewer's everyday lives. In the 1980s, Cable News Network, or CNN, introduced the 24-hour news cycle. Because of this, there was a sharp increase of violent news being reported. In this study, the researchers chose to study both the emotional and physical reactions to the violent news media. Specifically, the researchers explored the possibility that too much violence could affect their mental and physical health. Participants from this study hailed from a faith-based institution of higher learning in an urban area of the Midwestern United States. The study found that there is a relationship between the violence in news media and mental and physical effects of the body.

Introduction

The twenty-four-hour news cycle was first introduced by Cable News Network, or CNN, in 1980. Before CNN, the news would only come on twice a day, which would be once in the morning and then once more in the evening. Families would gather around the television at night, usually between 6:30 pm and 7:30 pm. They would watch either Walter Cronkite or Edward Murrow, and learn about what is going on in the world. Now, because of CNN and the introduction of the twenty-four-hour news cycle, it was all news all the time. Even though there had been an increase in the amount of news that was being shown, there was also an increase of alerts regarding shootings, plane crashes, terrorism, crime, war, and human rights violations (Gregoire, 2015).

This study was designed to shine a light on the potential physical and emotional reactions to violent news content. Televised news is still one of most common forms of mass communication that there is. Knowing this, there is potential that viewers could be overexposed to violent news content. The study explored the relationship between violence in the news and how one responds physically and emotionally to stimuli.

Another purpose to this study was to explore if there was any potential evidence that supports George Gerbner's "cultivation theory". This theory involves the belief that viewers will watch so much violent content that they become fearful of the outside world (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorelli, 1986.). This theory will be further discussed in both the literature review and the discussion sections. The hope is that this study will encourage further research regarding how violence affects viewer's daily lives.

Literature Review

The intent of news media was always to inform their viewers of what was, or is, going on around the world. At least that is how it used to be. It used to be that viewers would sit in front of their television, roughly around 6:00-6:30 p.m., to watch the evening news broadcast. However, CNN debuted in the early 80s, and forever changed how we watched news on TV. Instead of a half hour, or a full hour, newscast, viewers were introduced to twenty-four hours of news. In addition, we were exposed to all kinds of news stories. Some of them were good, but a lot of them were really bad and violent.

Violent news stories have been prevalent before the introduction of the twenty-four hour news cycle, but have risen dramatically since then, and some would say that the exposure to so much violence could cause people to believe that the world is worse than they had previously thought (Gerbner, 1986). People can get so focused on what they see in the news that it skews their reality. Fear starts cultivating inside people the more they watch violent programming, and the more fear that they experience, the more negative perceptions they have regarding others (Gerbner, 1986.). An example of people feeling less trustworthy of others is the tragic event of 9/11.

According to Lett (2004), the news reports of the 9/11 attacks had negative effects. Images of the towers coming down, along with people dying, made Americans more fearful of the violence that was to come. The constant reporting of the attack had detrimental effects regarding the relationship between the United States and the international community. “Effects such as animosity towards foreigners, fear of flying, or general fear of day-to-day survival, which have occurred at previous points in U.S. history (e.g. World War II, Cold War), may develop in viewers' minds” (Lett, et al., 2004, p. 40). Lett believed that it was important to

determine if there is a relationship between televisions news viewings during the 9/11 attacks and perceptions of violence and social relationships (Lett, et al., p. 40, 2004).

Up to this point, cultivation theory really only focused on global perceptions of violence instead of just one event in particular, which is why Lett's study was so important (Lett, et al., p. 40, 2004). Once again, cultivation theory involves the belief that the particular shows that people watch can change their perceptions of reality. "...so examining violence in terms of a specific event rather than general television portrayals is merited" (Lett, et al., 2004, p. 40). The second reason why Lett's study was important was that previous studies only focused on fictional television shows. According to Lett (2004), studies have shown that there are differences between physicians in fictional and non-fictional program types. Because of this, it was important to determine the effects that non-fictional violence, particularly related to events like 9/11, had on viewers. Lett decided to study these effects on college students. The results of her study were staggering!

Lett discovered that there was a relationship between negative personal emotions and television news viewing. The more hours of televised news reports viewers watched after the attacks, the more negative emotions they reported, and this lead to increased negativity towards Islamic peers. In contrast, heavy users were more positive towards Muslims in general. "One potential explanation for the positivity toward Islamic individuals in general may be television portrayals that overtly attempted to portray the terrorists as extremists and separate them from mainstream Islam" (Lett, et al., pg. 41. 2004).

In addition to studying the effects of negativity towards Muslims, it was important to study the impact of television news exposure using children. Ed Cairns (1990) studied the impact of television news exposure using a child's perception of violence in their

neighborhoods. Researchers took estimates from children of local levels of violence in three different areas (high, low, and no-violence). They used a four-way variance through a two-way interaction for this study, which included age, sex, area, and news exposure (Cairns, 1990). What they found was very significant. The first interaction showed that girls from areas where violent crimes were both high and low had a perception that violence was pretty low in their neighborhoods. The second interaction showed that there was some relation between the high amounts of violent crime in the high-level neighborhoods and TV news exposure. (Cairns, 1990).

Van Der Molen (2004) would disagree with Ed Cairns. This is because Van Der Molen reported that violent reporting does indeed affect children negatively. Media reporting is dominated by stories of violence and misery. Television seeks to exaggerate violent stories and analysis has shown that violence is the most covered topic in mass media. Even though such stories do not target children, children watch many news stories as compared to adults (Van Der Molen, 2004). Van Der Molen (2004) explains that children depend on the media stories in building their knowledge of the world. Van Der Molen also says that reports have indicated that more than a quarter of US children have a television in their bedrooms (Van Der Molen, 2004).

In addition, Van Der Molen (2004) also talks about how there are studies showing that violent stories make children more fearful. This is because children do not see the world in the same way that adults do. Their perceptions of the world change when they see acts of violence on TV. They tend to become more fearful of world that they live in at an early age. Van Der Molen (2004) believed that reducing the amount of violent news stories would be detrimental in reducing their fear of the world. In addition to effecting children, the cultivation of negative news also has an effect on those who report it.

Journalists are also affected by reporting violent news. According to Smith (2015), journalists are at a risk to be exposed to work-related traumatic events like car crashes, murder, mass casualties, war, disaster, and fires. In addition, work-related traumatic content may be consumed through violent graphics and video footage. This exposes journalists to frequent, repetitive, and prolonged, uncensored traumatic content without even leaving their desks (Smith, 2015). Journalists are resilient, even though they are constantly exposed to traumatic content. However, there is a significant minority that is at risk for long-term psychological problems like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, and substance abuse. Journalists have an extremely tough job that involves dealing with traumatizing events involving death. It affects them a lot more when they have to report on stories involving human suffering, death, and any violent story involving children. The risks for PTSD for journalist's ranges between 4-59 percent (Smith, 2015). In addition, the risk for depression ranges between 1-21 percent. Lastly, the risk for substance abuse amongst war correspondence is 14 percent. In addition, these risk factors also cause journalists to have a negative view of the world and themselves, along with feeling guilty about what they are reporting (Smith, 2015).

In addition to physiological effects, there are also physical effects related to fear. According to Mohny (2015), "Fear can have a direct and noticeable effect on the body, even if you're just heading to a local haunted house or enjoying a scary movie." Some of the physical effects include increased heart rate, rapid breathing, and changed brain activity. In addition, when a person is scared, he or she is most likely put into a position where you either fight your way out of whatever scary situation you are in, or you run. This is called "fight or flight". When this happens, blood starts flowing through your muscles, which prepares you to take action. Also, your pupils dilate in order to take in more light (Mohny. para 2. 2015).

In continuance, fear also effects the brain. Fear causes adrenaline to flow through your body, which eventually will hit your brain. It hits the small portion of your brain known as the “amygdala”. This part of the brain controls rationality. When adrenaline takes over this part of the brain, it effects your rationality. The adrenaline can make you think irrationally by making you make irrational choices that you would not normally make. The reason why this happens is because your body uses this fight or flight method to defend you against harmful situations (Mohney, para 4. 2015)

Justification

Researchers have done studies that show that news broadcasts reporting stories of violence effects viewers both physically and emotionally. There is evidence that supports a theory called “cultivation theory” that was introduced by George Gerbner (1969). There have been studies done regarding this theory that show that there is potential for people to start thinking that the world is a violent world to live in, which is the result of watching too much violent news broadcasts.

Even though there are studies supporting cultivation theory regarding adults, there is potential that viewers, especially teenagers or young children, could be exposed to more violence than they can handle. This could lead people to commit acts of violence themselves. This would be because too much exposure can lead to future behavioral problems with children. Van Der Molen (2004) stated that children watch more news content than anyone else. This is because they are curious about the world. Too much exposure to violent content will make them more fearful of the world. In addition, there is potential for children to develop behavioral problems as teenagers.

Q. How are viewers effected, both emotionally and physically, after watching too much violent news?

Methodology

The Study

The researchers selected ten participants, five of them were male and another five were female at a private, faith-based institution. All of them were college students between the ages of 18-22. The researchers used the convenience sampling method to get participants to sign up. This is because the researchers attended the same faith-based institution, and therefore had access to the population. The students came and signed an informed consent form that had all the information about the research and the researchers contact information. Then the researchers took the participants heart rate and blood pressure to determine a baseline. The researchers provided a five-minute video of news reports covering multiple stories of people committing crimes and another story about a suicide. These were all actual news footage that had been aired on national television.

The students in the study were recorded while they watched the video. After they finished the five-minute video, the researchers once again took their heart rate and blood pressure. The researchers conducted interviews with the students upon viewing the news footage. Questions were asked about how they felt about the news before and after watching the video, if they felt any sympathy for the victim in video, and if the video changed their view about the news and the world that we live on. The researchers took field notes on the spot.

The researchers measured and recorded results in three different ways including, monitoring their blood pressure and heart rate, observing facial expressions and participating in

an interview after watching a five-minute video of news clips. All these steps were accomplished after getting IRB approval because of the fact that the researchers dealt with human subjects.

The Setting

The recording of participants took place on campus in the conference room, which is located in the Communications Department. Even though there were four researchers participating in the study, not all four were in the room when the recording was taking place. Only one researcher was in the room during the viewing of the video, and another researcher entered the room to do the interview. No phones were allowed in the room, except for when the researcher who was filming had his camcorder battery die, and any landline phone was disconnected. This was done for two reasons (1) protect participant confidentiality and (2) make the participant as comfortable as possible.

The Video

This is because the researchers knew that students would be watching videos regarding graphic news stories that were already broadcasted. Five videos were chosen and were edited to fit a time length of roughly five minutes. All of the videos were downloaded from YouTube, but came from local tv news stations, nationally televised news programs, and a documentary series that airs on Investigative Discovery, which is also known as ID. The video from ID told the story of Christine Chubbuck, a local TV news anchor in Florida, who infamously committed suicide during a live broadcast. In addition, showed a news clip of Bryce Williams, a former news reporter, murdering another news reporter and cameraman, while broadcasting it on Facebook Live. Also, a news clip from Miami told the story of how Miami Police Officers found a man, who was literally eating a man's face while high on bath salts. What made this clip shocking was

how the news anchor went into graphic details on how the assault was committed. These were the three most shocking videos that the researchers found.

The Interview

After watching the video, the students were asked a series of six questions. The questions were meant to gauge the participants experience watching the news BEFORE and AFTER watching the video. The questions were straightforward, and worded in such a way that 8th graders could understand the questions. The questions that were asked were:

1. What was your initial feeling regarding news stories before you watched the video?
2. How did your feeling or perception change after watching the video?
3. After watching the video, describe your feelings regarding the victims.
4. After watching the video, how has your perception changed towards the people who are committing these cruel acts?
5. How do you feel about violence being portrayed in the news?
6. What is your overall opinion of the video as a whole?

In order to analyze the results, the researchers used the descriptive analysis method, which allowed the researchers to analyze the average percentage of all the students heart rate, blood pressure, and the answers to the interview questions. In addition, the researchers recorded facial reactions of the students and used the descriptive analysis method to analyze those results as well.

Results

Survey Responses

The interview session allowed the researchers to determine whether or not students were affected by violence that was aired during news broadcasts. They were asked how they felt about the violence that is portrayed in news media, and 100 percent of all participants asked expressed how there was way too much violence in the news. In addition, the students were asked if their perceptions of violence in the news changed after watching the video. All of the students responded that their perceptions did change, because they did not realize exactly how bad it was getting. One student even said that they were shocked regarding how the news anchor went into gruesome detail about one of the news stories in the video.

Not only did they realize how bad the violence in the news was getting, 40 percent of the students explained how they were not just scared for their own future, but for the future of the country's children as well. The main reason why they were scared is because they were not used to seeing this amount of violence that was shown in the news. Due to the video, they came to the realization that the world is in worse shape than previously thought. When that 40 percent was asked, "Why do you fear for our country's children?", they all said that children could easily believe that violence is the norm, and that they could be taught to commit violent acts in the future. Not seeing any difference between the two genders in regards to how males and females would react to the violent video, the researchers wanted to learn if the students were empathetic towards the victims and their families. This was done by asking students if they felt any empathy towards the victims in the video. 100 percent of male students felt empathy towards the victims, and 90 percent of female students felt empathy as well. Only one female student did not feel any empathy. She explained to the interviewer that she could not show any empathy because she did

not have any connection to the victims at all. In spite of their feelings towards the victims, their views regarding the perpetrators were very different.

80 percent of male students believed that perpetrators are inspired to commit acts of violence based on what they see in the news. While they did not feel any empathy towards the perpetrators, the participants felt that the perpetrators were taught to behave violently by what they see on the news. In addition, 66 percent of that 80 percent expressed that there could be potential for a mentally unstable person to be driven over the edge by watching violent news, and commit a violent act. 40 percent of female students believed the same thing, while the other 60 percent of female students expressed that they hated the fact that these people hurt people, and did not feel any other emotion towards them other than hate.

In addition to their feelings regarding perpetrators, students were asked if their perception of violence in the news changed after watching the video. 90 percent of male students said yes. Their answers varied between "making news more believable" to "you start to believe that people recreate what they see." One student said "no" simply because they already had the perception that there was too much violence in the news. 80 percent of female students had slightly different answers.

Female students stated they initially had the impression that violence was bad on TV before watching the videos. However, after viewing the videos, they realized that it was worse than what they previously thought. Three out of the five, female students reiterated their beliefs that people could recreate what they are seeing, and also worried about the world they would be bringing children into. One female participant expressed that she was "downright scared after watching the video." She was worried about kids watching stuff like what was on the video, and if they would believe that what they are seeing is normal.

In continuance, participants were asked about their overall opinion of the video. Every male had a different response to the question. However, those responses expressed a lot of worry and disgust. One male was quoted as saying, "The video is both terrifying and shocking!" and, "It is a summary of what it is like to watch the news every single day. The news is not supposed to be like this!" says another male participant. 90 percent of females expressed that this is what they are used to viewing. One female student did not really have an opinion of the video. Based on the interviews, it was understood that the violence in the media was causing people to be very afraid and nervous. In order to continue testing their hypothesis, the researchers needed to look at the results of the tests they did regarding heart rates and blood pressure.

Physical Responses

Before and after watching the video, students had both their blood pressure and heart rate checked. Their baseline heart rates and blood pressure prior to watching the video were all within normal range. However, after watching the video, 40 percent of the ten students had a higher heart rate and lower blood pressure after watching the video. According to the American Psychological Association, this is a symptom of anxiety (APA, 2016). In addition, 20 percent of participants experienced both a higher heart rate and higher blood pressure after watching the video. According to Gibson (2016), this is a symptom of Acute Stress Disorder, or ASD.

Reactions from Participants

The researchers observed the participants while they watched videos of five different violent acts reported on the news. The researchers were looking for the following displays of emotion: shock, sadness, surprise, disgust, sympathy, and no emotion. The results were collected by watching the individual's facial expressions as they viewed the reports. During the first news report, six of the ten students showed expressions of sadness, three of them were males and three

were females. Two of the ten individuals, one male and one female, were surprised by the news. A different male and female were shocked while watching the video. One female student showed no visible reaction at all.

Seven of ten students showed an expression of shock during the second news story. Three of the seven were males and the other four were females. Four of the students, all females, were frightened by what they saw in the second video. One of the females showed no visible reaction to the video. During the third news report, six of ten students showed an expression of sympathy, three of them were female and the other three were males. Two of the students, both males, showed sadness while watching the video. Two female students showed no emotional reaction at all.

Two of the female students expressed sympathy and shock during the fourth video. Two males were surprised by what they saw in the video. One female student showed an expression of disgust while watching the video, and one of the female students showed no visible reaction to the video. During the fifth news report, five of the ten students showed expressions of disgust, three of them were females and the other two were males. Two of the male students were surprised while watching the video and another female was shocked. Two of the male students showed no visible reaction to any of the violent news reports.

The researchers discovered that most of the student's reactions showed empathy and some of them did not have any reaction because they said they believed that violence in the news is normal to watch and they were not affected because they do not know the person who was involved in the violent act. In this study, eighty percent of females did not like to watch news because they did not like to see violence. Moreover, sixty percent of females in this study experienced a change in their feelings after watching the video. Eighty percent of females felt

empathy towards the victims on the video. Forty percent of females thought that news gives the blueprint for violence. Eighty percent of females thought that this video changed their perception on how violence is portrayed.

Facial Expressions

As far as the facial expressions that were showed during the study, they were all similar in some kind of way. There were some outliers where there was no facial expression being portrayed. The top three expressions from the participants were shock, sympathy, and disgust. Facial expressions were monitored by the researcher who was recording the participants.

The method for recording the facial expressions of the students was fairly simple. After both groups completed the study, the two researchers who recorded and interviewed the participants went back and watched all of the videos in their entirety. They tallied every emotion that relates to the facial expression that participants showed. Then, they compared numbers to make sure both were correct, and repeated the process to make sure that they did not miss anything. They then used the descriptive analysis to average out the different emotions shown.

Discussion

Acute Stress Disorder

Two out of the 10 students, or 20 percent, showed signs relating to Acute Stress Disorder. According to Gibson (2016), acute stress disorder, which is also known as ASD, is a psychiatric diagnosis that was introduced in 1994. The criteria for ASD are often related to the same criteria as PTSD. The only difference is that the criteria for PTSD involves a greater emphasis on dissociative symptoms. In addition, the diagnosis can only be given within the first month of experiencing the symptoms. ASD was also not accompanied by extensive research, and there is

some debate as to whether or not the diagnostic criteria accurately reflect pathological responses to trauma that occur within the first month of experiencing something traumatic. Also, a diagnosis of ASD is a predictor for PTSD, and studies showed there was a commonality regarding people who met the criteria for both ASD and PTSD (Gibson, 2016).

One way to check for ASD is by checking the heart rate and the blood pressure. 70 percent of the participants that the researchers studied expressed shock while they were watching the video. 40 percent of those participants showed signs of high blood pressure and high heart rates after watching the video of violent news footage. This was due to one of the videos showing a traumatizing event that involved an actual shooting during a live newscast. According to Gibson (2016), blood pressure and heart rates skyrocket when a person is under stress, which is especially true during traumatizing events that happen randomly. The students had no prior knowledge of what would be on the video. Researchers were expecting students to be shocked after watching the story of the live shooting. One student said, "I felt slightly traumatized after watching the actual shooting take place. I did not know that events like that could be aired on TV!"

Anxiety

Four out of ten students also showed signs relating to Anxiety. According to the American Psychological Association (2016), anxiety is described as, "an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased heart rate" (APA, pg. 1, 2016). This is due to the fact that when someone is having a panic attack they have a very low heart rate, but a rapid pulse. Four out of ten students that the researchers studied showed that they had both lower heart rates and higher blood pressure compared to the baseline.

When blood pressure lowers, this can cause something called "hyperventilation", which is due to the body not getting enough oxygen through the bloodstream. This causes people with anxiety to start taking in short gasps of air. This can eventually lead to full-on panic attacks. These attacks give people the sensation that they could possibly be dying. They start feeling palpitations, start sweating heavily, and have numbness in their fingers and mouth. Anxiety is also a feeling that people get when they are nervous. It is the body's natural reaction to nervousness (Gibson, 2016).

Approximately two of the five female students were frightened during the video. Anxiety, like Acute Stress Disorder, can happen during traumatizing events. According to Scientific American Mind (2016), Anxiety disorders are higher in women than they are in men. 33 percent of women will experience an anxiety disorder compared to the 22 percent of men. Scientific American Mind also states that experts believe that the difference is due to women experiencing a combination of hormonal fluctuations, chemistry in the brain, and upbringing. In addition, Scientific American Mind also believes that women feel that they are responsible for the happiness of everyone around them, which includes the family ("Anxiety Disorders Are...", 2016).

In addition, Howard (2016), states that the gender gap is a result of differences in brain chemistry and hormonal fluctuations, and it is the reason why women tend to cope with stress a lot more differently than their male counterparts. Because of this, they handle fear and shock more emotionally than males do (Howard, 2016). Eight out of ten female students were downright scared after watching the video. When interviewed, they were more emotional about what they saw compared to the male participants. Three out of those eight female students had

showed a symptom of having anxiety when their heart rate and blood pressure was drastically different the second time both were checked.

Responses to Watching Violence

The research study suggests there is a strong physical and emotional impact on people while they watch violence on the news. Additionally, various physiological changes occur within an individual, which illustrates the impact when one is exposed to extreme violence. Violence in the media greatly impacted the feelings and perceptions of the students in this study. According to Ragonesi and Antick (2008), violent media content changes the perception of its viewers when it comes to how violent the world actually is. This falls in line with Gerbner's cultivation theory, which is because perception does not reflect reality. The researchers were hoping that the students would show empathy towards the victims of violence after watching the video. However, the impact not only affected the students that have been interviewed, it also affects people in general (Ragonesi & Antick, 2008).

Emotions and Perception

After watching the video, the participants had changed their perceptions towards the victims, towards those committing these cruel acts, and the violence portrayed. Their initial feelings and empathy towards the victims had also changed. According to Carlyle (2014), the impact of watching violence on the news, had caused some people to commit a violent act. "Media portrayals of IPV have a significant influence on public perceptions" (Carlyle, Orr, Savage & Babin, 2014). Carlyle (2014) also stated that they had tested people to examine reactions and the impact. As a result, they found that most people had a feeling of sympathy, so they supported public health to help victims of intimate partner violence (Carlyle, Orr, Savage &

Babin, 2014).

Researchers discovered that most of the participants' reactions showed empathy and some of them did not have any reaction because they said they believed that violence in the news is normal to watch and they were not affected because they do not know the person who was involved in the violent act. In this study, eighty percent of females did not like to watch news because they did not like to see violence. Moreover, sixty percent of females in this study experienced a change in their feelings after watching the video. Eighty percent of females felt empathy towards the victims on the video. Forty percent of females thought that news gives the blueprint for violence. Eighty percent of females thought that this video changed their perception on how violence is portrayed.

At the onset, Student A stated that a majority of the news involved violence, which alters the way one perceives the world; it makes one worry about the community, the world, and the future. Student A was empathetic towards the victims. However, he felt that the people committing the acts were not in a stable state of mind because of what they watched. Even though Student A's opinion over negative news did not change, he wondered why the public keeps watching news when they know that it is not a very true representation of society.

Student B stated that he expected to experience violence even before turning on the news as media stations place greater emphasis on showing violent acts taking place in society. Student B, who also empathized with the victims, did not watch news because he knows the negative impact it has on an individual's life. Just like Student B, Student C did not watch the news because of its focus on violence instead of the positive. However, he did identify with the victims in the video. Student C added that since the news is often untruthful, he chose to stay away from or not to believe the stories they cover.

Student D believed that the news shows a lot of violence to increase viewer ratings. However, she was utterly shocked because she had never witnessed any deaths on the news before. She was appalled by the violence she sees on the media, which affected her reaction. She stated that even though people engage in violence because of stressful situations, the prevalence of violence in the news worsens the situation. Student E holds the view that violence is prevalent in the media, which explains why she does not watch any news. She feels that violence in the media has gotten worse in recent years. She expressed empathy after watching the video. Student F hated watching the video with the violence. However, she felt that that news represents the occurrences in society; they never exaggerate the violence.

What Students D, E, and F were describing was a theory called “cultivation theory”. This theory was developed by George Gerbner in the late 1960s. This is the theory that the more we watch a certain type of content on TV, the more positive/negative thoughts we have of the world (Gerbner, 1986). If we watch nothing but positive TV shows, we might think that the world is a great place to live. The same thing can be said when it comes to watching violent content. The more violence we see on television, the more we are likely to view the world as a violent world to live in (Gerbner, 1986). Both the violent and non-violent stories cultivate inside our minds, which changes the way we view the world. George Gerbner would also explain that these three participants were suffering from a syndrome called “The Mean World Syndrome”. This is due to watching so much violent content that they believed that it has gotten worse.

Some students did not feel empathy towards the victims because they did not know them. Student G believes that violence on the news is normal because everyone knows that bad things happen. Her perceptions did not change at all. Overall, she was disturbed by the video and the bad choices that the people who committed these cruel acts made. Participant H was also very

disturbed by the video. Unlike Student G, Student H showed empathy towards the victims. She does not like the news and often wonders what makes people do horrible things. She is concerned that future generations will think murder is ok. In addition, she believes violence is often “glorified”.

The reason for Student H’s concern relates to cultivation theory as well. This is what is once again called “The Mean World Syndrome”. This is the fear that the world is a very violent place. Her fears of people becoming murderers in the future is unfounded. In fact, the heaviest of viewers believe that their chances of being a victim are one out of ten, when in reality, it is more like one out of one hundred (Gerbner, 2016). Her view is an irrational view, but as it was explained in the literature review, fear makes people think irrationally. Gerbner explains that when fear cultivates, it makes people think irrationally. When people think irrationally, they often look to the news to prove that they are right when it comes to thinking irrationally (Gerbner, 1986).

She has the fear that Student I offered a similar perspective stating that people often react to what they watch and see; he stated that news provides a negative side of issues, ignoring the positive. His perceptions did not change because he always sees violent news through the media. He believes that, “80% of the news he watches is about violence.” Student I expressed some empathy and felt frustrated about the reporter that was shot and killed.

Other students choose not to watch the news. For instance, Student J felt that people can be really dark and bad. She did not show much emotion while watching the video and she stated that if she did not witness the violent act in person, she would not feel as much empathy for the victims.

Data suggests a strong correlation between impact and the violence experienced in the news. Most importantly, the research suggests people experience various physiological changes when exposed to extreme violence. Most of the students, if not all, feel that the media places greater emphasis on showing violent acts that take place within the community. The majority of the participants expect to see something violent when they watch the news. A pattern was established among the participants. The research found that the people who had the most drastic physiological reactions are those who found violence on the news to be the most appalling. In contrast, the students who perceived the violence shown in the news as part of daily life had minimal physiological reactions.

Emotional Reactions and Perceptions

People have all sorts of different emotional reactions when watching violent things throughout the news channels. Some of the most common reactions include fear, surprise, disgust, sadness, sympathy, and joy. Since the researchers study showed some graphic news videos, the emotional reactions of the students were mostly negative, with one student not showing any emotion at all. Hashemi (2014), talks about the effects of violent television news and the emotional experiences that people dealt with.

Hashemi (2014), states that there is a “widely held belief that emotions are caused by information processing that links an individual’s situation and specific events to goals, needs, and concerns on the one hand, and capacity to adapt, on the other.” An individual’s personal experiences will play a big role in determining their emotional reactions to whatever the violent news may be. If a person watches a lot of violent things in the news or on movies, there reaction would be quite different than to someone who rarely ever exposes him or herself to watching any sort of violent things on the television (Hashemi, 2014).

As for the researcher's study, when the students were all done watching the videos, their perception had changed towards the victims, and towards those committing these cruel acts, and the violence that was portrayed. Their initial feelings and empathy towards the victims had also changed. According to Carlyle (2014), the impact of watching violence on the news, had caused some people to commit a violent act. "Media portrayals of IPV have a significant influence on public perceptions" (p. 148). Carlyle (2014) also stated that they had tested people to examine reactions and the impact. As a result, they found that most people had a feeling of sympathy, so they supported public health to help victims of intimate partner violence.

According to Schwab, Spurk, and Unz, (2008), "TV news viewers show more sadness and fear expressions when watching TV news portraying unintentional violence compared to TV news without violence or TV news portraying intentional violence" (Schwab, et al., p. 148). Another interesting point that they believe is that "TV viewers show more facial expressions when watching news visually portraying violence than news verbally portraying violence" (Schwab, et al., p. 148).

Limitations

There were several limitations that the researchers faced. Most notably, the number of students that participated in the study was very low. There was originally supposed to be twenty students for the study. However, only ten of them confirmed. Ten students for a study are extremely low, and unfortunately, that does not allow for analyzing a large sample of data.

Suggestions for Future Research

Q. How are viewers effected, both emotionally and physically, after watching too much violent news?

How does the cultivation theory affect people positively and how does it affect relationships, both positively and negatively? Figuring out the answer to this question is one of a few suggestions that the group would give for future research regarding this study. Researchers could also do a study on how cultivating fear can lead to potential health risks like cardiovascular disease or heart disease. The reason for this is because fear and shock are known for causing stress, which can cause these diseases. In addition, doing a more in-depth study on how violent content effects journalists would allow researchers to shed more light on how people who report the news that viewers see on TV are affected. With all of this technology that our society has, it is pretty hard to ignore stories that the media reports. There are many different ways in how people react when they see news reports about violence. Some are accustomed to it, but the majority of people find it disturbing. Based on the researchers' study, the majority of the participants showed expressions in a negative way. Some of the main expressions were shock, sympathy, and disgust. It was a very interesting study to do because violence in the media can often be a very touchy topic for many people. In a lot of cases, people's personal situations can affect how they will react to different violent acts in various media outlets.

Appendix

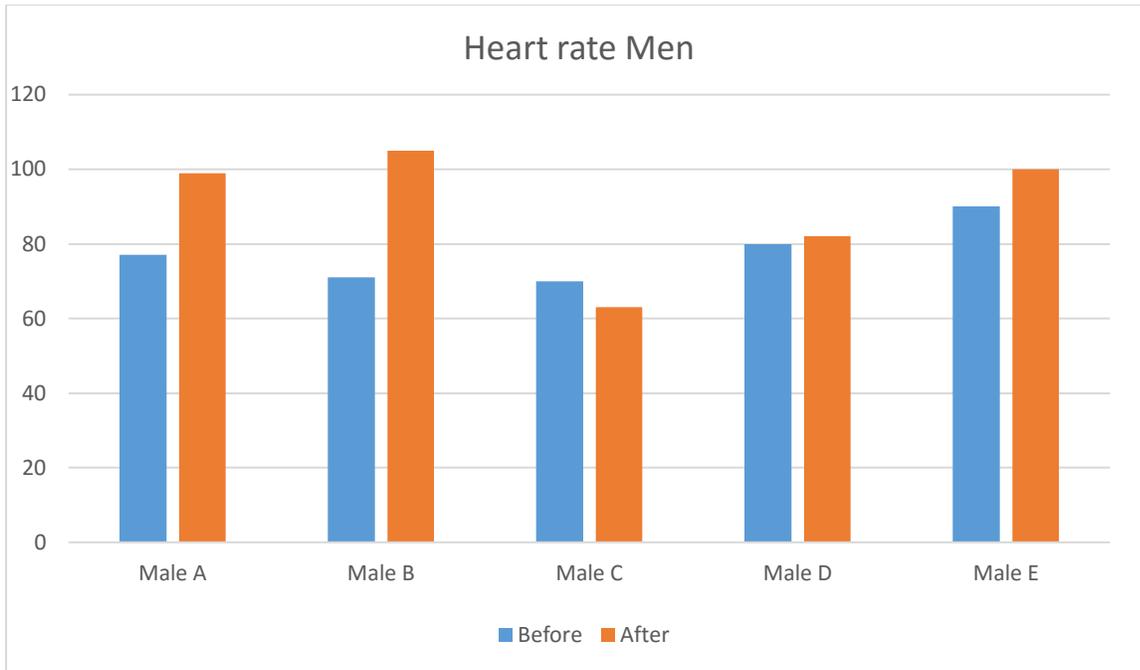


Fig. 1 shows the heart rate of male students before and after watching the video.

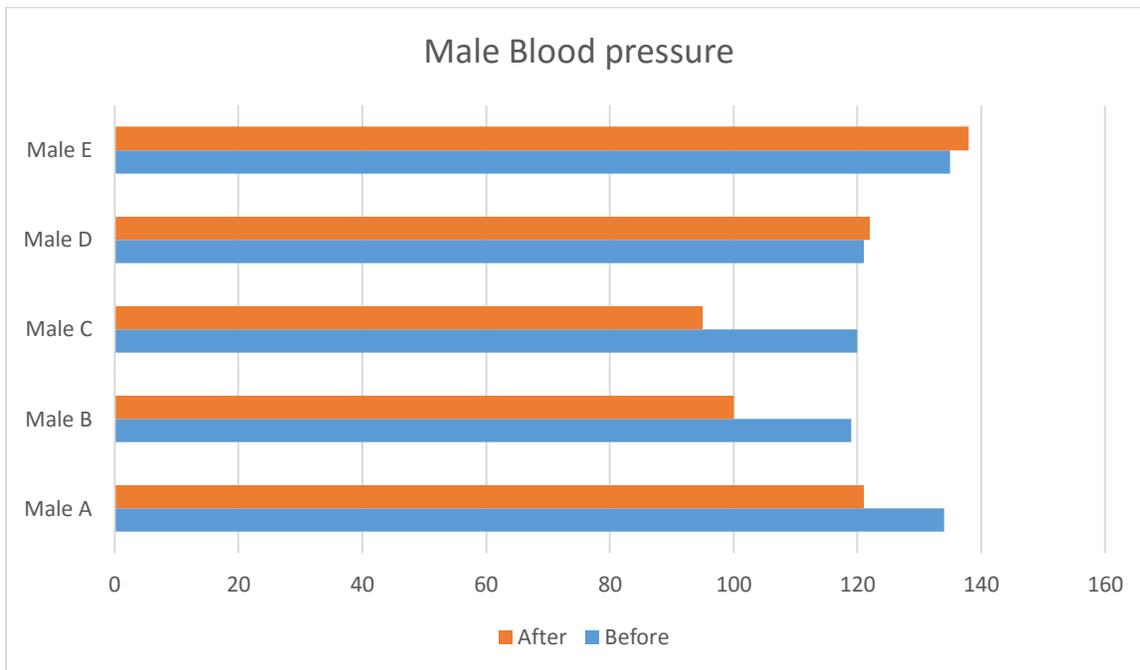


Fig. 2 Shows the males blood pressure before and after watching the video.

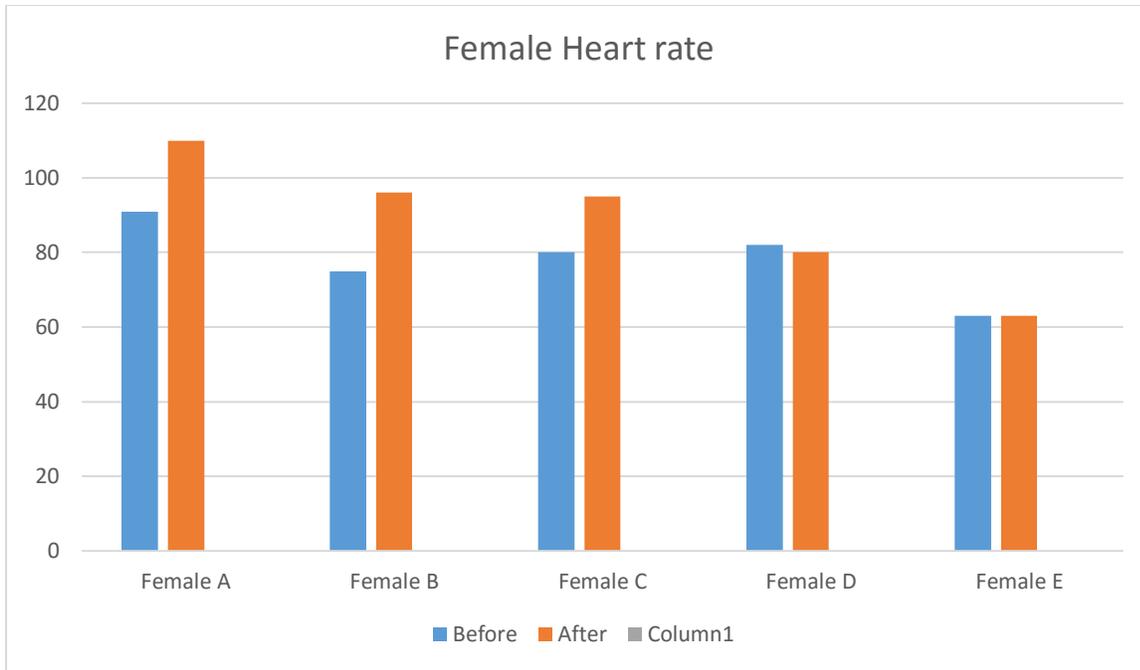


Fig. 3 Shows the female students heart rate before and after watching the video.

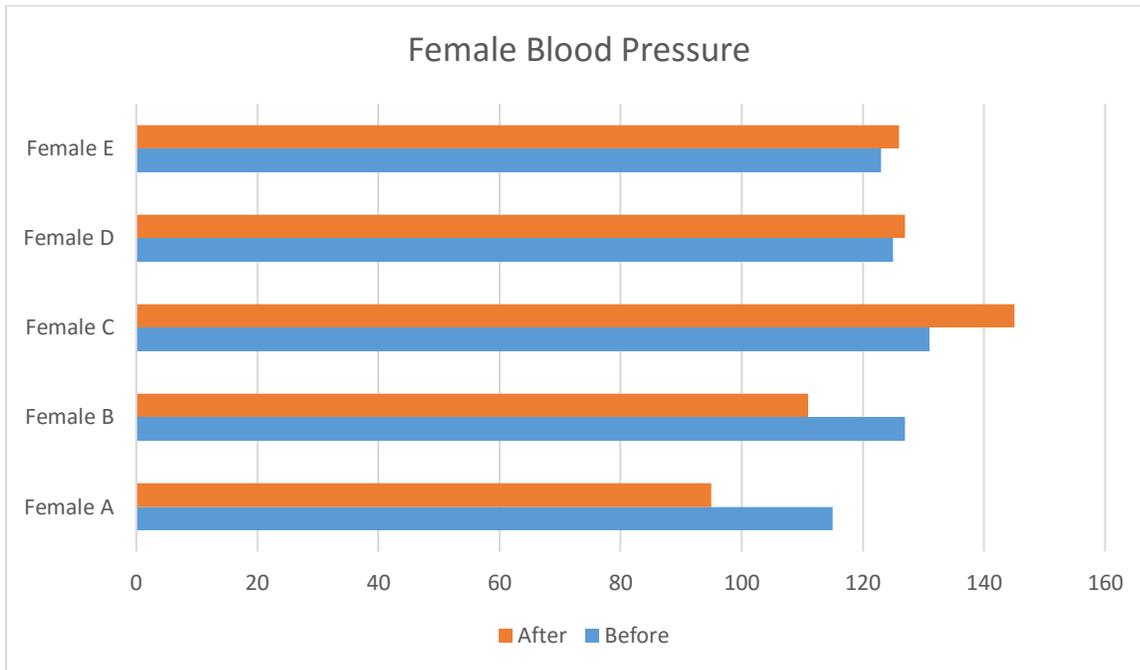


Fig. 4 Shows the female blood pressure before and after watching the video.

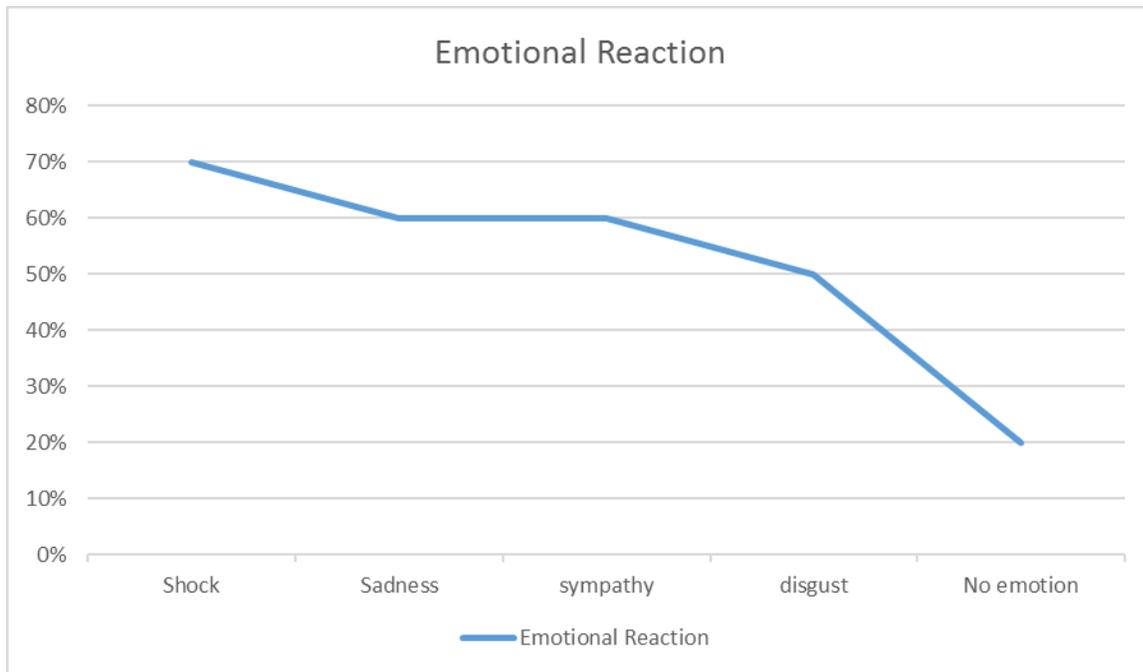


Fig. 5 Shows the range of emotions that the students were feeling while watching the video.

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