

Subject : ELEMIS
 Date : 26-10-2010
 Source : The Standard 英文虎報
 Page : 16
 Circulation : 120,000

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Standard 英文虎報

Tuesday, October 26, 2010

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Vicious circle

Watching too many violent games or TV programs can desensitize young boys

TENAGE BOYS WHO repeatedly watch vicious television programs, films and video games are likelier to become insensitive to violence, according to a study that claims new insights into this body debated field. The study was published last week in a British journal, *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*.

Researchers have long fretted that screen violence may have a brutalizing effect on teenagers. Their worry is that part of the brain which controls emotions and responses to external events—essentially a “brake” on wrongful behavior—is still in a vulnerable, developing stage during adolescence.

But investigations have been hampered by lack of evidence about what actually happens to brain functions, especially in the key area known as the lateral orbitofrontal cortex, or OFC, when a teenager watches a violent scene.

Jordan Grafman of the US National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke and his colleagues enrolled 22 boys between the ages of 14 to 17 in a study aimed at getting this clinical data.

The youngsters each watched a series of short, four-second clips of violent scenes from 60 videos. The scenes had been chosen by a previous panel of teenagers to rank as low, mild or moderate violence. They were shown in random order to the volunteers in three lots of 20 clips.

The boys watched the clips as they lay in a functional magnetic-resonance imaging, or fMRI, scanner, which monitors brain activity. Their fingers were attached to sensors that measure the

skin's electrical conductance and varies in accordance with sweat—considered a useful guide of emotional response to a stimulus.

The longer the boys watched more violent images, the less they responded in terms of lateral OFC activity and in skin response, the investigators found. This tendency did not happen when the boys watched images of only low violence.

“We found that as the boys were exposed to more violent videos over time, their activation in brain regions concerned with emotional reactivity decreased, and that was reflected in the data from the fMRI and in the skin conductance,” Grafman said.

Desensitization was most marked among boys who had the most exposure to violent media in their daily lives, as measured by questions in their initial meeting with the researchers. Grafman said violent images stimulate structures in the brain which are typically activated when people are being aggressive. Without a mental guardian to exercise emotional restraint, this boosts the risk that aggression becomes seen as acceptable behavior.

“The implications include the idea that continued exposure to violent videos will make an adolescent less sensitive to violence, more accepting of violence and more likely to commit aggressive acts since the emotional component associated with aggression is reduced and normally acts as a brake on aggressive behavior.”

The study recruited only boys. Previous studies have found that females are less likely to respond to visual violence than males, possibly because of differences in brain connections.

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE



MediCare
 By Dr. Ben Fong
 Specialist in Community Medicine

Malignant Retirement (Case I)

Mr. S enjoyed good health and only presented to the clinic with minor ailments all these years. He suddenly came with a two week history of rectal bleeding of fresh blood. The history, symptoms and signs were suggestive of haemorrhoids. The rectal examination and proctoscopy did not show any other abnormalities. However the bleeding did not improve upon treatment. Therefore, he was referred to a surgeon for colonoscopy, which revealed a growth in the upper rectal region. Hence surgical excision was performed and Mr. S was referred for further treatment by irradiation.

Unfortunately the malignancy was advanced and had already spread to other organs. Despite attempts to treat the cancer, Mr. S passed away six months after the first appearance of bleeding. Mr. S had spent his working life in outdoor construction works, which involved long hours and risk from height. Both Mr. and Mrs. S were looking forward to Mr. S's retirement when they could spend more time with their grandchildren and traveling together. The malignancy was detrimental to the couple.

Looking back into this case, Mr. S appeared to have the bleeding just at the time, but it occurred just a few months before his retirement. Although the couple were looking forward to the turning point of life, Mr. S was a quiet person by nature and did not discuss much about his plans, his expectations, nor his worries. It was highly likely that he was suffering from lots of stress, both consciously and subconsciously, resulting in impairment of his bodily functions, including immunity. We cannot categorically draw such remarks to the cause and results of the malignancy, but stress-induced diseases have been shown by studies. Moreover, the chronological coincidence as in this case is worth taken note of with concern by people near retirement and their families.

Information provided by Dr. Ben Fong (Physician, General Practitioner)

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Seriously masculine

ALL MEN REALLY should smell like Biotherm's Force (HK\$295 for 50ml or HK\$395 for 100ml). The brand's first fragrance for men is inspired by spring water. It has spicy citrus top notes with accents of sweet lime.

It settles down into a burst of woody aromas like cedar and Haitian vetiver fused with amber and patchouli. Underlying it all is spring water with mineral, cardamom and, quite uniquely, aubergine.

Says the fragrance's designer Bruno Lovanovic: "I always have a precise image in my mind. Here, it's spring water. The scent of aubergine, once renowned as the preferred drink of artists, pulls it all together."

Where: Biotherm outlets

Yummy body treats

IT'S NEVER TOO early to start saving up for Christmas. If you're looking for something for your dearest friends—or maybe as a treat to yourself—leading UK spa brand Elemis has eight gift boxes for men and women on offer at discounted prices.

The ultimate indulgence is the Time Radiance pack (HK\$4,680) with a 100ml jar of Elemis' best-seller, the Pro-Collagen Marine Cream. But if finances are tight, there is also the Enriching Body Treats

(HK\$498), which has yummy treats containing lavender, lime, ginger and ylang-ylang.
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