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The Effect of Short-term Exposure to Film Violence on Emotional Facial Processing

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Abstract: Exposure to media violence has been associated with decreased empathy and increased aggressive behavior. One possible mediator for this relationship may be emotional face processing; however, little is known about how media violence may influence the neural correlates of emotional face processing. Twenty-six participants were shown violent and nonviolent movie clips during separate testing sessions and then had their brain waves recorded while completing a stop-signal gender discrimination task using happy and fearful faces. Results showed that media violence exposure influences the processing of emotional faces as reflected in the P200 and P250 event-related potentials (ERPs). Inhibitory control was also influenced by media violence exposure as reflected in the P300 ERP. These results indicate that even relatively short-term passive exposure to media violence can modulate the processing of emotional faces offering a possible mechanism by which media violence could modulate empathy and possibly aggression.