

## Effect of Prosocial Children's Film on Reducing Aggressiveness

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Aggressiveness may lead to various negative effects on children. Therefore, early intervention on aggressiveness is necessary. One approach of the intervention is to teach prosocial behavior by using media, especially children film. The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of children prosocial film on aggressiveness. Total subjects were 56 first grade students. Instrument used in this study was an aggressiveness observation sheet designed and based on the physical aggression theory (Tremblay & Nagin, 2005) and verbal aggression theory (Vissing, Straus, Gelles & Harrop, 1991). Result showed that children prosocial film reduces the students' aggressiveness. Moreover, students who watched the children prosocial film have lower aggressiveness compared to students who watched a neutral children film. Therefore, parents and educators could use children prosocial film as an effective way to treat aggressiveness.

*Keywords:* aggressiveness, children film, media, prosocial

Agresivitas dapat menimbulkan berbagai dampak negatif pada anak-anak sehingga penanganan agresivitas sejak dini perlu dilakukan. Salah satu cara menangani agresivitas adalah dengan mengajarkan perilaku prososial melalui media, terutama film anak. Tujuan penelitian ini ialah untuk mengetahui pengaruh film anak bertema prososial terhadap agresivitas. Total subjek berjumlah 56 orang siswa kelas I Sekolah Dasar. Instrumen penelitian yang digunakan adalah lembar observasi agresivitas yang dirancang berdasarkan teori mengenai perilaku agresif fisik (Tremblay & Nagin, 2005) dan agresif verbal (Vissing, Straus, Gelles & Harrop, 1991). Penelitian ini memperoleh hasil bahwa film anak bertema prososial mampu menurunkan agresivitas. Agresivitas siswa yang menonton film anak bertema prososial juga lebih rendah dibandingkan agresivitas siswa yang menonton film anak netral. Oleh karena itu, orang tua dan pendidik dapat menggunakan film anak bertema prososial sebagai salah satu cara yang efektif untuk menangani agresivitas anak.

*Kata kunci:* agresivitas, film anak, media, prososial

Aggressiveness has emerged since the child was two or three years old, even when the child was younger (Tim Pustaka Familia, 2006; Tremblay, 2012). Forms of aggressiveness, such as biting or hitting another person if the desire is not fulfilled, which is named tantrums, are normal in two or three year old children. However, according to Coie and Dodge (as cited in Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2007), the child's aggressiveness began intentionally directed to harm others when the child is entering the period of elementary school.

An initial survey conducted to ninety first-grade elementary students in Surabaya was held for four days during the active hours of the school. The survey obtained results that form of aggressiveness shown by

the first grade children, both when attending classes and at break time. Most of the students often hit other children with their hands and sometimes with a ruler, pencil or book. Many students often punched or pushed their friend. These behaviors increased at break time. They sometimes pulled other children's hair, said harsh words to each other, gave a nickname to other children, and often yelled or taunted if they were hit or other behaviors. Some of them sometimes complained about one's bad behavior to the teacher or another child, especially when they were studying.

Even though aggressiveness is an important instinct for survival (Lorenz, 2002) or is a significant factor to develop social skills when playing with other children (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2007), the continuous aggressiveness may carry serious impacts for both the offenders and the victims (Crick & Nelson, 2002; Hawadi, 2008; Schattler, 2000). Children who are

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aggressive tend to experience difficulties in adjustment (Crick, 1996; Hudley, 2008), often violating traffic rules or engage in crime, tend to punish their offspring or act aggressively on their partners as adults (Huesmann, Eron & Lefkowitz, 1984). As for the targeted children, they often experience psychological stress, avoid the social environment, have low self-esteem, and also vulnerable to experience adjustment difficulties (Crick & Nelson, 2002; Prinstein, Boergers & Vernberg, 2001). This is why the control or management of aggressiveness since early is critical to do.

Reduction of negative stimulus exposition, eliminating the accompanying reinforcement of aggressive behavior, and teaching social skills to children are several ways which parents or educators could use to deal with aggressiveness (Hawadi, 2008; McColloch & Gilbert, 1991; Moeller, 2001). Cultivation of prosocial behavior through film may also be used as an alternative treatment for child's aggressiveness. Film media that used to teach prosocial behavior is free from sexuality, offensive language, violence, or other negative elements; the film is categorized as children film. Information absorption on elementary school children which are more visually and begin to develop audio information absorption also support the effectiveness to learn prosocial behavior if carried by prosocial children film (Dunn & Griggs, 2000; Kumar, 2000).

Based on the study background, the authors were interested in discussing these issues and conducted a study on elementary school children in order to determine the effect of prosocial children film towards aggressiveness.

## Aggressiveness

Baron and Richardson (1994) define aggressiveness as any behavior intended to disrupt or hurt other people. These behaviors bring harm or pain to the target, so the target wants to avoid the behaviors. The behaviors may emerge as a form of self protection for the conflict that occurs between individuals. All of these behaviors are deliberate, not accidentally happen. Thereby, aggressiveness is concluded as a form of social behavior that is intended to disrupt or injure other people who does not want to be hurt and may occur to protect themselves from the threat. Aggressiveness includes the two following forms:

1. Physical aggressiveness is a form of behavior that physically disrupts or hurt others. Examples of this aggressiveness are hitting, pushing, punching,

kicking, and other behaviors that are using the help of objects, such as sticks, stones, and other objects (Tremblay & Nagin, 2005).

2. Verbal aggressiveness is a form of behavior intended to psychologically hurt the individual. Examples of this aggressiveness are name calling, saying harsh words, and other behaviors performed by expressions or body language (Vissing, Straus, Gelles & Harrop, 1991).

## Prosocial Children Film

A film is a series of images projected by an instrument so that the images move with or without sound (Tim Penyusun Ensiklopedi Nasional Indonesia, 1989). The film used in this study is a children film. Children film is a rating G (general) film and suitable to under eight years old children because the story is free from violence, offensive languages, and sexuality (Dirks, 2011; Van de Vord, 2007). Children film also often referred to family film (Dirks, 2011).

Children film used in the study is a prosocial children film. The prosocial children film is a film based on positive behaviors, such as: helping each other, cooperation, share materials, and other positive behaviors (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989; Kostelnik, Gregory, Soderman & Whiren, 2011). Some examples of children film that has prosocial behaviors are *"Barney & Friends"*, *"Sesame Street"*, *"Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood"*, *"Dragon Tales"* (Kotler, 2007a; Kotler, 2007b).

## Relationship between Aggressiveness and Prosocial Children Film

Various studies have been conducted to determine the effect of prosocial media on aggressiveness. For example, Greitemeyer and Osswald (2009) found that the prosocial video game affected aggressive cognition (e.g. perception about the normality to act aggressively) and aggressive response on university students. Based on this study, playing a prosocial video game reduced the expectation that other people respond aggressively and decreased the antisocial thoughts. In 2011, Greitemeyer conducted a research about the effect of music on aggressiveness. He found that the university students have lower aggressiveness when listening to music with prosocial lyrics (Greitemeyer, 2011). The relationship of prosocial media and aggressiveness on these two studies are based on General Learning Model (GLM) which states that media exposure could influence the person's internal states (i.e. cognition,

affection, and arousal), which then triggered the behavioral responses (Buckley & Anderson, 2006). Moreover, these two studies conducted on university students whose cognitive development was more complex than younger individual (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2007).

The present study used children in middle childhood (six-to-twelve years old). The children social environment increasingly extends and the chance to learn from the environment increases. Learning process from the environment is not limited to the living beings, but also through the media, especially film. Mechanism of child's learning from the environment could occur through modeling process, such as a child observes and then replicates the model's behavior (Bandura, 1965). In other words, the modeling process may take place through the stories or characters when the children watch the films.

Children often observe and imitate the behavior of one or more characters in the children films (Hurlock, 1993). Many studies related to prosocial shows and aggressiveness based on this premise focus on younger children. For example, around four decades ago, Friedrich and Stein (1973) have conducted research about the effect of violence, prosocial, and neutral television programs on aggressiveness and prosocial behaviors on preschool children. The children followed three weeks of baseline period, four weeks of experimental period, and two weeks of postviewing period. However, the study did not found any difference in level of aggressiveness on children who watched prosocial programs than neutral programs (Friedrich & Stein, 1973). This result might be caused by repeated exposure experienced by the children that might affect attention to the programs. The present study designs a simpler model to control the same result. Moreover, the present study involves older children who absorb information more visually and begin to develop information absorption through audio (Dunn & Griggs, 2000). Their cognitive ability enables them to be more accurate in selecting and memorizing prosocial information in the film than younger children (Hurlock, 1993; Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2007).

## Method

### Subjects

This study was conducted to two classes of first-grade students of the public school in Surabaya. Each class was considered as one group and was assigned to

experimental group and control group. This determination was done by random assignment technique, such as by pulling one of a number of papers containing the names of the class. The class I-A (control group) had thirty students, which consisted of sixteen boys and fifteen girls. The class I-C (experimental group) had twenty-nine students, which consisted of sixteen boys and thirteen girls. However, the data analysis was performed only on twenty-eight students in each class because not all of the students attended the whole process of the study. All participants were aged from six-to-nine years old.

### Prosocial and Neutral Children Film

Prosocial children film used by experimental group entitled "Auto B. Good". This film is a serial film that tells about animated nine cars with each personality and the story focused on character development, including prosocial behavior. Meanwhile, film entitled "*Belajar tentang Tubuh Manusia bersama Adiboo*" is the neutral children's film used by the control group. Film "*Belajar tentang Tubuh Manusia bersama Adiboo*" tells about Adiboo and friends' adventure inside the human body to find the organ and how it works.

This study used content validity. Content validity consisted of: (1) The compatibility of the story and participant's age and (2) the compatibility of the story and prosocial and neutral themes. After confirmation by a developmental psychologist and a social psychologist, the two children film were declared valid by content.

### Aggressiveness Observation Sheet

Aggressiveness observation sheet consisted of fifteen behavior indicators, both physical and verbal aggressiveness. The fifteen behavior indicators were generated from exploratory observation of the entire first grade students in the school several weeks before. The observation sheet was tested to twenty-seven students from class I-B. The test produced eight reliable behavior indicators ( $p$ -value of Kendall's concordance  $< .05$ ). Four of eight indicators were physical aggressiveness, which consisted of: kicking, pulling hair, pushing, and throwing objects. The other four are verbal aggressiveness, which consisted of: saying rude things, name calling, complaining about one's bad behavior, and threatening.

### Questionnaire

The authors distributed a simple questionnaire that

aims to determine participants' memory and response about the children films. The questionnaire designed based on four stages of modeling processes (Mkhize, 2008; Musser & Leone, 1992; Tuckman & Monetti, 2011). The questionnaire consisted of twenty-five multiple choice questions, which include: (1) memory of the story, (2) favorite character, (3) preference of the film, (4) familiarity of the film, (5) familiarity of the target behavior, and (6) motivation to perform the target behavior.

## Procedure

This study used pretest-posttest independent group design. Thus, the study procedure began with pretest data collection by doing one-day observation, for both experimental and control group. Pretest observation was carried by two observers, for 60 minutes, in each group's classroom. Two days later, the prosocial children film was showed for experimental group and continued by distributing the questionnaire to all participants of the experimental group. After that, posttest observation took place with the same procedure as in the pretest observation. On the next day, the neutral children film exposure, questionnaire distribution, and posttest observation of the control group was conducted by the same procedure in the experimental group.

On the first day (on 9 April 2012), pretest data collection was held by doing observation for both experimental and control groups. Pretest observation conducted to 29 participants (16 boys, 13 girls) for both group (Note: one student of the control group was absent). Each of the two observers observed each group for 60 minutes during the lesson in each group's classroom, which included 30 minutes before the break and 30 minutes after the break. The observers entered the classroom after been allowed by the teacher then took the position of observation that is one observer was in the back and another observer was in the front seat. Both observers watched and filled the observation data sheet (such as name of class, name of lesson, number of students attending class) for 10 minutes. This activity was intended to help the observers to adjust with class situation and help the students got used to the observers' attendance.

Each observer observed the first to 10<sup>th</sup> participants (counted from left to right) for five minutes in the observation sheet. The observers recorded each participant's behavior by noting a pillar line (|) in the column of certain behavior that had been valid and reliable in this study. The observers continued to 11<sup>th</sup>

to 20<sup>th</sup> participants for five minutes then observed the remaining participants for another five minutes. The observers repeated the observation in the second observation sheet. After the break, each observer started the same procedure for the 29 participants of each group. Therefore, each participant was observed for 20 minutes in the pretest.

The experimental group treatment followed by posttest observation was held two days later on 11 April 2012. At first, the authors entered the classroom and gave a briefing about the watching movie activity without conveyed the real purpose of the treatment. The two stories of "Auto B. Good" film were played on a LCD which was placed in front of the class and supported by a loudspeaker. The authors and class teacher remained in the classroom. When there are participants who did not pay attention to the film (e.g. talked with another participant), the teacher instructed the participant to watch the film. After the film ended, the participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire about the film. The authors distributed the questionnaire, explained how to answer, invited the participants to fill the questionnaire, and ensured the participants to complete their data. The posttest observation was conducted a few minutes after all participants completed the questionnaire. The procedure was same as the pretest observation procedure. However, the observation was only carried out on 28 participants because one participant asked for permission to go home when the posttest had not been performed.

On 12 April 2012, 31 participants of the control group watched two stories of "*Belajar tentang Tubuh Manusia bersama Adiboo*" film in the classroom. Just like the day before, the authors and class teacher remained in the classroom. When the participant did not pay attention to the film (e.g. talked with another participant), the teacher instructed the participant to watch the film. The participants then filled out the questionnaire about the film. After that, the posttest observation was held with the same procedure as before, that is the observation carried out alternately for every 10 participants (11 participants at last five minutes) and then repeated the observation once again with the second observation sheet. The observers asked for permission to the teacher and got out of the classroom.

## Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using SPSS version 17. First, the data were analyzed using homogeneity test and normality test (Kolmogorov-

Smirnov). After that, comparison between pretest data, posttest data, and gain score among the two groups were examined using T-test.

## Results & Discussion

Based on the category of ideal mean and standard deviation, 71.4% of the experimental group students have low level of aggressiveness during the pretest and the percentage of students with high level of aggressiveness was 14.3%. While percentage of students with low level of aggressiveness increased from 71.4% to 96.4% at the posttest. Thus, there was a decrease in the percentage of students after watching the prosocial children film (25%).

On the other hand, there is an increase in the percentage of students after watching the neutral children film. Before watching the film, 14.3% of the control group students have high level of aggressiveness and the rest (85.7%) have low level of aggressiveness. Percentage of students with high level of aggressiveness increases to 17.9% after watching the film.

Based on results of Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test, there was a significant difference between pretest mean score and posttest mean score on experimental group ( $p < .05$ ), where the pretest mean score ( $\bar{X}_{\text{pretest}} = .679$ ) which is higher than posttest mean score ( $\bar{X}_{\text{posttest}} = .018$ ). This indicates that the students were less aggressive after watching the prosocial children film. Furthermore, the Mann-Whitney U test shows a significant difference between gain score of the experimental group and gain score of the control group ( $p < .05$ ). The gain score was derived from the subtraction of pretest score and posttest score. With the experimental group's gain score ( $\bar{X}_{\text{gain1}} = -.061$ ) is lower than the control group's gain score ( $\bar{X}_{\text{gain2}} = .054$ ), it could be said that aggressiveness was more decreased when the students watch the prosocial children film than when the students watch the neutral children film.

The students in this study have been able to control their emotions and develop verbal communication ability so they should be more verbal aggressive in their actions (Tremblay, 2012; Tremblay & Nagin, 2005). However, these middle childhood students were demanded to be able to do things that require skill in adapting to their environment (Erikson, as cited in Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2007). The students also want to be accepted by friends or group (Suprajitno, 2004). If the students are not able to meet both of these, it is possible that the students will show

physical and verbal aggressiveness as the compensation of inability.

The students' aggressiveness is very likely to decrease after watching the prosocial children film. Besides the tendency to learn the prosocial behavior from observation of the film, the students' cognitive ability enable them to be more accurate in selecting and memorizing prosocial information in the film (Hurlock, 1993; Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2007). Moreover, the questionnaire result indicates that the average students remember the film well enough ( $\bar{X} = 5.821$ ). The memory of 75% of the students was ranging from quite good to very good. This level of memory is a proof that modeling process takes place when the students watch the prosocial children film, particularly the attention and retention phases in the modeling process.

The students pay attention to the characters which perform prosocial behavior (attention phase), then they store the behavior and information related to the behavior, especially the consequences of the behavior, in their mind (retention phase). The behavior's consequences may be acquired directly when the students watch the film (e.g. Johnny felt good about himself after lent the tires to his friends in one of the "Auto B. Good" stories) and from the experiences when performing the same prosocial behavior (e.g. the student lent pencil to her friend and got praised by the teacher). The consequences tend to motivate the students to perform the prosocial behavior later (motivation phase). Supported by the motivation, all students are also able to reproduce the prosocial behavior because of good motor ability; the students do not have physical disability (reproduction phase). All phases then lead to the modeling of prosocial behavior which guides the students to be more adaptive when facing the environment. This would make the aggressive response that was initially demonstrated by the student decreased after watching the prosocial children film.

## Limitations

Although the results of the statistical tests show that there was an influence of the prosocial children film on the students' aggressiveness in this study, the authors acknowledges the limitations of this study. First, the modeling process in the study was only as an intervening variable that is not valid and reliably measured. This causes the lack of profound explanation of the modeling process which mediates the prosocial children film and aggressiveness. Moreover, this study used a multiple

choice questionnaire as manipulation check that can only measure the extent of students' knowledge, not their understanding of the film. Therefore, the future researches need to involve the measurement of the modeling process, such as to develop an open-ended questionnaire based on the theory of modeling process.

Second, this study did not control for individual variables, such as level of intelligence and level of frustration, and environmental variables, such as level of stimulus exposition, which could affect the results. Students who have low intelligence are more likely to be aggressive than student with higher level of intelligence (Lasmono, 1991). Students with high level of frustration are easier to perform aggressiveness-related behavior than students with lower level of frustration (Taylor, Peplau, & Sears, 2009). At home, students may often watch violent programs or may be moral education programs. In addition, students are taught moral education, including prosocial behavior, through the religion and civic lessons while in school. All of these may affect the students' aggressiveness which subsequently affected the results. Future researches should control these variables, such as conducting intelligence test, measure the participants' level of frustration, or choose the participants who have not watch violent programs over the past few months.

Although the observations and treatments were conducted in the classroom for each group, the classrooms' physical variable were different, especially the lighting factor. The control group's classroom was surrounded by windows so that the intensity of light from outside the room is high; while the experimental group's classroom was supported by two lamps, but the room lights were more dim than the control group's classroom. This lighting factor is not controlled so that the research can be influenced by this physical variable (Myers & Hansen, 2006). Thus, it is better for further researches to conduct the observations and treatments in the same location for all groups in the study.

The last but not least, the control of the film is limited. The prosocial and neutral children film in this study has different elements. The characters of the prosocial children film were car-shaped cartoon characters, while the characters of the neutral children film were human or robot-shaped cartoon characters. The difference of characters may affect the students' attention. Students tend to attend models that has similar characteristics so the students will give more attention to human or robot-shaped characters than car-shaped characters (Mkhize, 2008). Therefore, the future researchers should be more careful in the selection of films, especially the selection of the character elements.

Other implications provided by the results of this study were that parents should select the television programs, choose the rating G films, and assist their children while watching. It is intended that the children could understand what is conveyed by the programs or films. On the other side, educators or psychologists could utilize prosocial media, such as film, music, or video games in dealing with aggressiveness. Appropriate selection of the media should consider the individual characteristics of the children, such as age, level of intelligence, or preferences of media.

## Conclusions

The results of statistical tests indicate that the prosocial children film affect the decreased aggressiveness of the students. The decreased aggressiveness was assumed due to the prosocial children film modeling. Future researchers need to involve the measurement of the modeling process; controlling of the individual variables, such as level of intelligence, level of frustration, and other variables which could influence the outcome of the study; controlling of the environmental variables, such as level of negative or positive stimulus exposure, observation and treatment location; and control the film characters used in the study.

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