

Naughty or nice? A retrospective review of global child behavior

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ABSTRACT

Background

A debate in child psychology, both academic and among parents, is on the ideal ratio of punishment on reward, and whether or not child development into a fully-functional and well-adjusted adult depends more on using negative reinforcement to correct bad behavior or positive reinforcement to reward good behavior. Retrospective reviews using large datasets had not yet been done, with most data involving small sample sizes.

Methods

In the largest study of child behavior to date, the ratio of time when awake spent engaging in “nice” or “naughty” behavior is correlated to various dimensions of the life of a child.

Results

Children on the whole spend less than 10% of their day being “naughty,” regardless of whether they receive punitive or positive reinforcement, and irrespective of factors such as race, gender, religion, peer review, or nationality.

Discussion

Standard child rearing practices such as toy gifting or coal stocking may more may not have a direct influence on average behavior. It is the love and sacrifice of the caretaker that plays a more significant role in the thriving or maladjustment of a child.

Keywords: Child psychology, child behavior, review, ethics

INTRODUCTION

Modern childrearing emphasizes the importance of teaching children socially proper and polite, or “nice,” behavior from an early age, reinforcing this good behavior with positive rewards such as encouragement, positive affection, or material rewards such as toys or entertainment, motivational song, or sweets (Poppins, 1964). By contrast, inappropriate, antisocial, and socially or physically destructive, or “naughty,” behavior, is discouraged from perhaps an even earlier age. Negative stimuli such as words of discouragement, restriction of access to desired objects, and various forms of punishment are used to dissuade youngsters and, admittedly, adults from engaging in naughty behavior, in what Skellington et al. (1993) refer to as the “trick

or treat” paradigm. Opinions on the correct balance of positive and negative reinforcement, and whether the development of a child depends primarily on promoting good behavior or preventing bad behavior has been a question parents and researchers alike have been debating since the dawn of civilization (Proverbs et al., 1324).

In this short review, we reflect on a decades long observational study on the behavior of children from over 193 countries, examining the percentage of time spent in a given year engaged in “naughty” or “nice” behavior, and identified leading factors that contribute to these ratios, and how they can be corrected over time.

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METHODS

The records of the Arctic Research Station's Child Observation Data go back over a century. Observation and records keeping was historically performed through direct observation, indirect reports provided by parental and clergy figures, elven scrying orbs, and phone surveys. In the past few decades, changing technology and the exponential rise in the human population necessitated more advanced methodology. The data in this report start from 1955, following the development of the Elven Eye Satellite Network in collaboration with the North American Aerospace Defense Command as part of a deal mandating aircraft tracking technology to be activated on all sub-stratospheric sleigh flights. This was replaced in 1990 with the Elven Eye Satellite Network, which is capable of round-the-clock observation and advanced sleep/wake detection system. The system was updated in the 21st century with an artificial intelligence that uses machine learning to characterize recorded child behavior, the Behavioral Analysis and Description Self-Automated Noelian Tracking Application (Soke and Skidmore, 2003). Subjects were aged from one year up until such time as they reached adulthood or no longer believed.

As the Arctic Research Station where the study was based is considered part of international territory and legally under no nation's jurisdiction, issues of privacy are mooted and obtaining informed consent were not necessary, as stated under the Santa Clause in the 12th report of the Myra Commission.

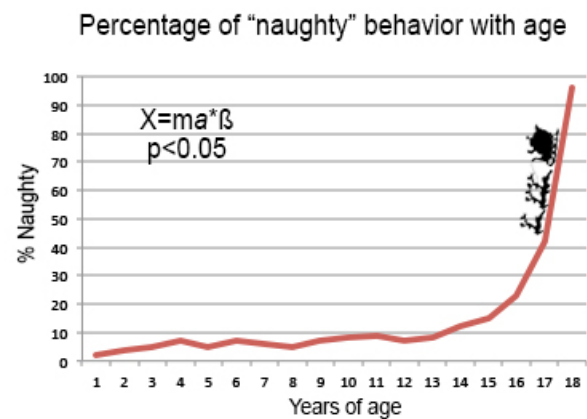
Total time spent was characterized into the binary category of "nice" or "naughty," with ambiguous behaviors and time asleep discarded from analysis (Tchaikovsky, 1892). Examples of "nice" behavior included learning from teachers, respecting one's elders, bonding with one's family, showing good sportsmanship when playing with others, observing sound scientific principles when evaluating evidence, caring for one's pets, sharing wholesome memes on social media, working in the toy factory for long hours without complaining or demanding pay, meditating, and recycling. Examples of "naughty" behavior included engaging in acts of violence, being insubordinate towards one's teachers or caregivers, using rude or insulting language, posting conspiracy theories online, being cruel towards animals, participating in a stand-up comedy or rap-based roast battle, sending unsolicited nudes, intentionally breaking the law, being an anti-vaxxer, shouting in public, and running a predatory journal that publishes all submissions automatically without peer review but passes itself off as a legitimate scientific journal. Time spent in each category was compared to standard descriptive characteristics such as age, nationality, average daily cookie intake, etc., and correlations calculated using the NAVIDAD statistical package and the Scrooge & Marlowe (1843) steam-powered counting apparatus.

RESULTS

Data from a total of over 2.2 billion children were collected and sorted. On average, children engaged in "naughty" behavior for less than 10% of their waking lives (Figure 1), which is considered below the mean naughtiness of adults (McLane, 1988). Naughtiness shows a drastic peak in the period leading

up to age of 18, but prior to this all pre-pubescent children appear to be around the same baseline level of good. We found no differences in boys or girls, nor did we find any differences across characteristics such as race, nationality, religion, or ability of the child or their parents. In any given year, we saw maximum nice behavior in December and prior to certain says such as a parents' birthday or the week leading up to a new game console release date, while peak naughtiness occurred at the start of summer vacation and the first of April.

Figure 1: Percentage of time spent in "naughty" behavior as a function of child age.



Importantly, we did not see any sudden shifts in the naughty:nice ratio that occurred when children lost their faith in Santa, nor did we notice any correlation between the ratio of toy to coal in childrens' stockings. [Disclosure: the first author owns the majority share of stock in the North Pole Toy Workshop, Happy Holidays Doll and Sneaker Factory, Arctic Foxconn Technology Group, Snowy Smiles Sweatshops Ltd., and China Coal Energy Co.]

DISCUSSION

This experiment set out to test three hypotheses: H1) That niceness and naughtiness have peaks during childhood associated with particular moments in infant to adolescent development. H2) That cardiac atrophy and abnormal megalocardia were associated with predominantly naughty or nice behavior respectively, also known as Grinch Syndrome (Seuss, 1957). H3) That years of unseasonal naughtiness correlate with increased compensatory milk and cookie donations. We did not find any such correlations, but rather nice:naughty ratios were constant throughout much of childhood all across the world. This suggests that the null hypothesis is true for all three questions, and thus our results are summarized as H0, H0, H0.

Regarding child rearing, we found no evidence that increased presents lead to increased niceness, or that punishment reduced naughtiness, but rather that a balanced parenting focusing more on providing opportunities for the child to grow and mature into a confident adult were most important. Parents who took time to be with their kids, to eat meals with them, who sacrificed for them, could consistently count on children who,

on the whole, were appreciative and polite, and statistically less likely to grow up to as criminals such as dog fighting ring managers, chiropractors, radio pundits, or predatory journal editors.

As a result of this data, and in light of the undeniable evidence that anthropogenic climate change is having a negative effect on global ecosystems and the work ethics of polar elves, the Arctic Research Station has decided to no longer be using coal as a punitive measure to reduce naughtiness. Instead the station will be adopting the more effective and carbon-friendly option of giving naughty children a defective powerbank and loosely fitting phone charger.

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