

'Love is in the air': Effects of songs with romantic lyrics on compliance with a courtship request

Psychology of Music

Psychology of Music

Copyright © 2010

Society for Education, Music
and Psychology Research

303-307

10.1177/0305735609360428

<http://pom.sagepub.com>

NICOLAS GUÉGUEN

UNIVERSITÉ DE BRETAGNE-SUD, FRANCE

CÉLINE JACOB

UNIVERSITÉ DE BRETAGNE-SUD, FRANCE

LUBOMIR LAMY

UNIVERSITÉ DE PARIS-SUD, FRANCE

ABSTRACT Previous research has shown that exposure to various media is correlated to variations in human behaviour. Exposure to aggressive song lyrics increases aggressive action whereas exposure to songs with prosocial lyrics is associated with prosocial behaviour. An experiment was carried out where 18–20-year-old single female participants were exposed to romantic lyrics or to neutral ones while waiting for the experiment to start. Five minutes later, the participant interacted with a young male confederate in a marketing survey. During a break, the male confederate asked the participant for her phone number. It was found that women previously exposed to romantic lyrics complied with the request more readily than women exposed to the neutral ones. The theoretical implication of our results for the General Learning Model is discussed.

KEYWORDS: *courtship behaviour, lyrics, music*

Music and song lyrics have the ability to influence people's behaviour (North & Hargreaves, 2008). In a recent experiment conducted by Jacob, Guéguen, Boulbry and Selmi (2009) it was found that male customers, but not female, exposed to romantic songs played in a flower shop spent more money than when no music was played or when non-romantic pop music was played. The objective of this new experiment was to test if romantic songs also have the ability to influence dating behaviour.

It is well established that exposure to violent media increases aggressive behaviour, thoughts and feelings and decreases the probability of expressing prosocial behaviour (see Bushman & Huesmann, 2006 for a review). The same effects were found with violent video games (Anderson, Gentile & Buckley, 2007), and experimental studies found that listening to aggressive song lyrics, compared with neutral ones, increased aggressive behaviour, thoughts and feelings (Fischer & Greitemeyer, 2006). These effects of violent or aggressive media on aggression-related variables were explained

sempré :

by the General Aggression Model (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). According to this model, exposure to violent or aggressive media (including song lyrics) could lead to the activation of various internal states such as affect, cognition, physiological or cognitive arousal in an individual that led him/her, in return, to misinterpret a social situation and to respond in an aggressive way. However, with this model, only violent or aggressive media could explain the effects. Recently, Greitemeyer (2009) extended the cognitive, affective and behavioural responses of exposure to song lyrics by showing that exposure to prosocial song lyrics (relative to neutral ones) increased prosocial thoughts, feelings and behaviour. These results confirm the General Learning Model (GLM) proposed by Buckley and Anderson (2006) that states that media exposure in general, and not only aggressive or violent media, affects the internal states of individuals, which explains why prosocial media fosters prosocial outcomes. The purpose of our study was to expand the validity of the GLM model by showing that further media content that is not associated with aggression, violence or prosociality can affect behaviours other than aggressive or prosocial behaviours.

Method

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were 183 undergraduate female students in social and managerial science, 18 to 20 years old ($M = 18.7$, $SD = 0.6$). When solicited about participating in research on a product evaluation that would be carried out the following week, a survey was administered to the volunteers. Demographic data were measured including a question that asked whether the participant had 'someone in her life at the moment'. Based on the response to this question, participants who declared that they had nobody in their life ($N = 87$) were included in our experiment.

MATERIALS

In order to determine the songs that could be used in the experimental conditions, a pilot study was performed in two successive stages. First, 48 participants who were from the same participant pool as our experiment were invited to answer two single questions: 'For you, what is the first French song you like, that is associated with love thoughts and feelings?' and 'For you, what is the first French song you like, that is associated with neutral thoughts and feelings?' The interviewer noted the participant's suggestions and six songs (three with romantic lyrics and three with neutral lyrics) were selected according to their citation frequency. Second, 22 other participants listened to each song and rated to what extent the lyrics were romantic. The evaluation was performed with a scale of 0 = neutral to 9 = extremely romantic. The participants were also invited to rate how much they liked the song with a scale of 0 = I don't like this song to 9 = I like this song very much. The two songs with the highest ($M = 8.28$, $SD = 1.03$) and the lowest ($M = 1.15$, $SD = 0.81$) romantic/neutral mean and without any difference with regard to liking ($M = 7.03$, $SD = 2.02$ for the romantic song and $M = 6.58$, $SD = 1.97$ for the neutral song: $t(21) = 1.17$, $p > .20$) were retained for the study. The romantic song was 'Je l'aime à mourir', a French song by the songwriter Francis Cabrel and the neutral song was 'L'heure du thé', a French song by the songwriter Vincent Delerm.

PROCEDURE

Participants were welcomed by one female experimenter and were informed that the purpose of the study was to discuss organic products with another participant. Of course, none of the participants in this main study participated in the pilot study. The participant was invited to wait in a room because the second participant had not arrived yet. The participant was alone in the waiting-room for three minutes. During this time, the romantic song or the neutral one was played according to random assignment. After three minutes, the female experimenter entered the waiting-room and said: 'The second participant is here, so we can go to the experiment room.' The participant entered the experiment room where a 20-year-old confederate presented as a participant was seated. The selection of the confederate was based on an earlier test in which the physical attractiveness of the confederate was rated by 18 young women (none of them participated in the pilot study or the main study) who were instructed to evaluate the attractiveness of a group of 12 young men who volunteered to act as confederates. The evaluation was done by using a full-face photo of each target. The women were instructed to evaluate each target on a scale of 0 = low physical attractiveness to 9 = high physical attractiveness. The confederate with the most average score (near the value 5) for attractiveness and the lowest standard-deviation was chosen by the experimenter ($M = 5.08$, $SD = 1.21$). The confederate was unaware of the aim of the study.

The participant and the confederate were instructed to taste one organic cookie and the same cookie without organic ingredients and to discuss the difference between the two products for five minutes. The confederate, who was unaware of the experimental condition, was instructed to voice the same arguments in each interaction. After five minutes, the female-experimenter re-entered the room and stopped the interaction. She said that now she needed two to three minutes to finish a task and instructed the participant and the confederate to wait until she came back. During this phase, the confederate was instructed to smile and to say to the participant: 'My name is Antoine, as you know, I think you are very nice and I was wondering if you would give me your phone number. I'll phone you later and we can have a drink together somewhere next week.' After making his request, the confederate was instructed to wait 10 seconds, and to gaze and smile at the participant. If the participant accepted the confederate's solicitation, the confederate wrote her phone number down. If the participant refused, the confederate was instructed to say, 'Too bad. Anyway, it's not a problem', and smile again. A few seconds later the female-experimenter re-entered the room. The participant was questioned to see if she suspected anything (none indicated a link between the courtship request and previously listening to the song), fully debriefed and thanked.

Results

The number of participants who complied with the confederate's solicitation was the dependant variable. In the romantic song lyrics condition 52.2 percent (23/44) complied with the confederate's request compared to 27.9 percent (12/43) in the neutral song lyrics condition. The difference was significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 83) = 5.37$, $p = .02$, $r = .24$).

Discussion

Our hypothesis is supported by the results. Listening to romantic song lyrics, relative to neutral ones, increased the probability of accepting a request for a date some minutes later. This effect confirms the behavioural effect of exposure to media content. However, it confirms this effect on a new behavioural registry that has not been tested previously, given the fact that previous research has mainly focused on the effect of violent media on aggressive or violent behaviour, thoughts and feelings. For the first time, it was found that the effect of media exposure affects another individual's behavioural response with no relation to aggressive or prosocial thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Such results give empirical validity to the GLM proposed by Buckley and Anderson (2006) to explain the effect of media exposure. Our results confirm that the effect of exposure to media content is not limited to violence and could have the potential to influence a high spectrum of behaviour. The results are interesting for scientists who work on the effect of background music on individuals' behaviour. Research has found that music played in people's environment is associated with an increase in prosocial behaviour (North, Tarrant, & Hargreaves, 2004), interaction behaviour (Le Guellec, Guéguen, Jacob, & Pascual, 2007) and consumer behaviour (Areni & Kim, 1993). Our results seem to show that people's behaviours related to more intimate affects are also influenced by background music.

Why did this effect occur in this experiment? Previous research found that music had the ability to induce positive affect (Lenton & Martin, 1991) and that positive affect is related with receptivity in a courtship request (Guéguen, 2008). Thus, in our experiment, it is possible that the romantic song lyrics activated positive affect which, in turn, made the participant more receptive to a request for a date. It's also possible that the romantic song lyrics acted as a prime that, in turn, led to the display of behaviour associated with this prime (Bargh, Chen & Burrows, 1996). In a recent experiment, Lamy, Fischer-Lokou and Guéguen (2009) found that men who were interviewed and asked to recall a romantic episode interacted more favourably with a female confederate some seconds later.

Thus, it would be interesting for further studies to evaluate more precisely behaviours that are influenced by background music and the type of music and lyric content associated with behavioural variation and the cognitive and/or affective variable that influences the behavioural response of the listeners. It would also be interesting to evaluate mediating factors associated with romantic song lyrics such as positive mood or priming effect. Of course, this experiment had some limitations given that only one romantic song was played in this experiment and compared with another song. Thus, the generalization of our findings to all romantic songs lyrics still remains in question and needs further investigation.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, C. A., & Bushman, B. J. (2002). Human aggression. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53, 27–51.
- Anderson, C. A., Gentile, D. A., & Buckley, K. E. (2007). *Violent video game effects on children and adolescents: Theory, research, and public policy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Areni, C. S., & Kim, D. (1993). The influence of background music on shopping behavior: Classical versus top-forty music in a winestore. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 20, 336–346.
- Bargh, J. A., Chen, M., & Burrows, L. (1996). Automaticity of social behavior: Direct effect of trait construct and stereotype activation on action. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71(2), 230–244.
- Buckley, K. E., & Anderson, C. A. (2006). A theoretical model of the effects and consequences of playing video games. In P. Vorderer and J. Bryant (Eds.), *Playing video games: Motives, responses, and consequences* (pp. 363–378). Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Bushman, B. J., & Huesmann, L. R., (2006). Short-term and long-term effects of violent media on aggression in children and adults. *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, 160, 348–352.
- Fischer, P., & Greitemeyer, T., (2006). Music and aggression. The impact of sexual-aggressive song lyrics on aggression-related thoughts, emotions and behavior toward the same and the opposite sex. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32, 1165–1176.
- Greitemeyer, T. (2009). Effects of songs with prosocial lyrics on prosocial thoughts, affect, and behavior. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 45, 186–190.
- Guéguen, N. (2008). The effect of a woman's smile on men's courtship behavior. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 36(9), 1233–1236.
- Jacob, C., Guéguen, N., Boulbry, G., & Selmi, S. (2009). 'Love is in the air': Congruency between background music and goods in a flower shop. *International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 19, 75–79.
- Lamy, L., Fischer-Lokou, J., & Guéguen, N. (2009). Induced reminiscence of love and chivalrous helping. *Current Psychology*, 28(3), 202–209.
- Le Guellec, H., Guéguen, N. Jacob, C., & Pascual, A. (2007). Cartoon music in a candy store: A field experiment. *Psychological Reports*, 100, 1255–1258.
- Lenton, S. R. & Martin, P. R. (1991). The contribution of music vs. instructions in the musical mood induction procedure. *Behavioral Research Therapy*, 29, 623–625.
- North, A. C. & Hargreaves, D. J. (2008). *The social and applied psychology of music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- North, A. C., Tarrant, M. & Hargreaves, D. J. (2004). The effects of music on helping behaviour: a field study. *Environment and Behaviour*, 36, 266–275.

NICOLAS GUÉGUEN is Professor of Social Behaviour at the University of Bretagne-Sud in France. His research interests focus on atmospherics and consumer behaviour and compliance-gaining procedures.

Address: 4 rue Jean Zay, Lorient 56100, France. [email: nicolas.gueguen@univ-ubs.fr]

CÉLINE JACOB is Associate-Professor of Marketing at the University of Bretagne-Sud in France. Her research interests focus on atmospherics and consumer behaviour.

Address: 8 rue Montaigne, Vannes 56000, France. [email: celine.jacob@univ-ubs.fr]

LUBOMIR LAMY is Associate-Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Paris 12. His research interests focus on priming and behavioural response.

Address: 9, route de Croissy, 78110 Le Vezinet, France. [email: lubomir.lamy@iut-sceaux.fr]