

The Social Psychology of Music ¹

I read this book edited by Hargreaves and North after I had written my original chapter on music in 'Sex 'n' Drugs 'n' Rock 'n' Health' ². As a result I felt impressed enough to want to add some notes based on it to my website of the same name. The book covers a range of topics, most of which aren't relevant to public health. However below I've summarized the most useful chapters with comments on how to apply them to health education.

Music and decision-making

Research has shown that listeners have problems correctly identifying the intended subject of pop music lyrics ³. However, other research has shown that music and lyrics can influence people's view. 70% of 16 year olds in one study said that lyrics had influenced the way they think about an important topic ⁴. In another study singing with a guitar was found to be more effective than a dramatic presentation in influencing students' attitudes about poverty, pollution and the abolition of boxing ⁵. Interestingly, singing without the guitar was no more effective than the spoken presentation.

Decision-making can of course either be based on rational processes or other factors such as how someone feels about who is giving the information. One set of researchers argue that negative moods encourage rational thinking, where as positive moods tend to lend themselves to other ways of thinking ⁶.

On top of all this other research has shown that students do not deliberately use music videos to be educated. They tend to use them to pass the time ⁷. So what is the implication for health educators of using music?

- Make use of the fact that music is considered non-educational to reach groups where a more formal approach wouldn't be welcome
- Be very clear on how lyrics are delivered. Singing needs to be clear and loud enough. In live events perhaps a suitable introduction to the song could be given. If using music on CD or as downloads, perhaps printed lyrics are also useful
- Make use of the musical aspect of a song to influence mood and views
- Consider the implication of sadder songs encouraging rational thinking
- Consider the implication of more upbeat songs influencing people in other ways
- Carry out your own research as many of the studies have been with very specific audiences e.g. college students. Their findings may not apply to other target groups
- For example, what impact does performer behaviour have on people's views?

Music can attract people to an event

One piece of research showed that playing music can make people more likely to feel generally positive towards where it is played and return there (in this case to a cafeteria). It also encouraged interaction with others there. In addition music increased the number of people going to the source of the music, a stall giving out leaflets ⁸. I imagine in this example, not only is the choice of music is relevant i.e. that diners like it but also how loud it is. As people have not explicitly come to a performance, can the lyrics be intrusive enough to make people think? It may just be a device to attract people over, so that health workers can talk to them

Music and BME groups

In South-west Asia such as Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and Turkey there is still a tradition of a wandering bard singing ancient songs and stories. In West Africa, griots are musicians who sing the praises of anyone who pays enough and slanders anyone else who doesn't. Equatorial Africa also has still has a role for the traditional singer/story teller ⁹. Perhaps these performers could be harnessed for health purposes with immigrant groups within the UK.

References

- 1 HARGREAVES, D. J AND NORTH, A.C., eds., 1997. *The Social Psychology Of Music*. Oxford University Press
- 2 BURNS, M., 2008. Sex 'n' Drugs 'n' Rock 'n' Health. Available from www.sexanddrugsandrockandhealth.com (Accessed 4th August 2008.)
- 3 KONECNI, V.J. *Elusive Affects Of Artists 'Messages'* in CROZIER, W.R. AND CHAPMAN, A.J., eds., 1984. *Cogitative Processes In The Perception Of Art*. Amsterdam: Elsevier Science Publishers quoted in HARGREAVES, D. J AND NORTH, A.C., eds., 1997. *The Social Psychology Of Music*. Page 92. Oxford University Press
- 4 LEMING, J.S., 1987. Rock Music And The Socialization of Moral Values In Early Adolescence. *Youth And Society*. 18(4), Pages 363-383 quoted in ZILLMANN, D. AND GAN, S., Musical Tastes In Adolescence from HARGREAVES, D. J AND NORTH, A.C., eds., 1997. *The Social Psychology Of Music*. Page 168. Oxford University Press
- 5 GALAZIO, M. AND HENDRICK., C. 1972. Effect Of Musical Accompaniment On Attitude: The Guitar As A Prop For Persuasion. *Journal Of Applied Social Psychology*. 2. Pages 350-359 quoted in CROZIER, W.R., Music And Social Influence from HARGREAVES, D. J AND NORTH, A.C., eds., 1997. *The Social Psychology Of Music*. Pages 76-77. Oxford University Press
- 6 PETTY, R.E. AND CACIOPPO, J.T., 1968. The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion. *Advances In Experimental Psychology*. 19, Pages 123-205. quoted in CROZIER, W.R., Music And Social Influence from HARGREAVES, D. J AND NORTH, A.C., eds., 1997. *The Social Psychology Of Music*. Page 77. Oxford University Press
- 7 SUN, S-W. AND LULL, J., 1986. The Adolescent Audience For Music Videos And Why They Watch. *Journal Of Communication*, 36 (1). Pages 115-125 quoted in ZILLMANN, D. AND GAN, S., Musical Tastes In Adolescence from

HARGREAVES, D. J AND NORTH, A.C., eds., 1997. *The Social Psychology Of Music*. Page 167. Oxford University Press

8 NORTH, A.C AND HARGREAVES, D. J., 1996. The Effect Of Music On Responses To A Dining Area. *Journal Of Environmental Psychology*, 16. Pages 55-64 quoted in HARGREAVES, D. J AND NORTH, A.C., eds., 1997. *The Social Psychology Of Music*. Page 276. Oxford University Press

9 GREGORY, A.H., The Roles Of Music In Society: The Ethnomusicological Perspective from HARGREAVES, D. J AND NORTH, A.C., eds., 1997. *The Social Psychology Of Music*. Page 128. Oxford University Press

Mark Burns, 2008