
SONG OF THE DAY: IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF COURSE CONCEPTS FROM POPULAR SONG LYRICS AND VIDEOS

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INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Student motivation is a perennial challenge. When students recognize and validate each other, learning motivation increases (LaBelle & Johnson, 2018). Class activities that engage students with course material and each other will improve motivation and learning. Music is ubiquitous in American culture. The average American spends more than 32 hours a week listening to music (Mcintyre, 2017). This form of communication is an integral part of college students' lives. Connecting students' interests with communication concepts enhances student engagement. Belcher and Haridakis (2013) proposed five motives for listening to music. The data supported social utility as the primary motive. This motive included items such as "To make my opinions known" and "To be able to share information and knowledge" (p. 383). Thus, music serves to facilitate a persuasive function not just within listeners but between them. Additionally, the information motive focused on deriving meaning with a focus on lyrics. The messages in lyrics build an argument that influence attitudes. Within a classroom setting, listening to songs that challenge attitudes on a variety of issues relates to the social motive while understanding how meaning is shaped in listeners activates the information motive.

Music lyrics and videos influence college students' attitudes toward a variety of issues. Research indicates that music videos and lyrics can influence college students' attitudes about social and political issues. For example, Kistler and Lee (2010) reported that attitudes toward the objectification of women, gender, and acceptance of rape myths were influenced from hip hop music videos. Sexual attitudes are also influenced by music lyrics and videos (Vandenbosch, Vervloessem, & Eggermont, 2013). Sellnow and Sellnow (2001) explained how the combination of lyrics with music creates a unique rhetorical message where listeners' awareness and interpretations vary. Music, through a variety of rhetorical devices, shapes attitudes. The communication methods behind these influencing effects can be examined by students to understand how attitudes are influenced.

Students have benefited from efforts to connect music to the learning of communication concepts. Scholars have shared teaching activities to achieve educational goals through the analysis of music. Brigance (2002) provided a framework for educating students through an analysis of the persuasive functions of social protest music. Cohen and Wei (2010) demonstrated how music can strengthen students' understanding of speech delivery principles. Sciuillo (2014) explained that Aristotle's proofs are more easily understood when connecting the concepts to hip-hop music.

Research in the sciences substantiated the value of music as a catalyst for student learning. Crowther, McFadden, Fleming, and Davis, (2016) created three experimental conditions and reported that when music videos contained lyrics related to science material, the result was several positive learning outcomes. These included improvements in comprehension, basic knowledge, enjoyment, and students

felt the learning experience was fun. Incorporating music videos with an emphasis on the lyrics in the classroom is not for comprehension or recall of the lyrics, but, rather as a lens to understand course theories and concepts. Also, the fun aspect of a class environment engages learning. Students with positive affect in the classroom have improved learning outcomes (Schweinle, Meyer, & Turner, 2006). Exposing students in all course meetings, across the semester, with popular music videos and lyrics connected to course content, motivates student learning.

Student engagement with song lyrics and videos to connect with theories and concepts is a successful teaching strategy. Throughout the semester, students begin to recognize that music videos and lyrics are one of many influencers in society that are continually shaping attitudes. The relevance of the impact of music on individual attitudes and the subsequent social influence on culture is demonstrated. Examples that contain culturally relevant material on issues that students care about is effective at engaging student learning.

TOOLBOX: SONG OF THE DAY ACTIVITY

There are many courses where the opportunity exists to make a direct connection between music lyric and video examples and course content, concepts, and theories. Potential courses include Communication, History, Mass Media, Persuasion, Political Science, Sociology, and Social Psychology. As an illustration of this connection, music videos and lyrics are a useful learning tool in classes such as Interpersonal Communication where examples match concepts reviewed daily, including intercultural competence, ideal self vs. ought self, friendship maintenance, romantic attraction, and family stories. Concepts are directly applied in a consistent, memorable, format that is unique with regard to attitude change. For example, a common challenge with students is overcoming a third person effect, the belief that media influences others but not them (Davison, 1983). It is a form of denial about the impact that media images and content have on attitudes. Song of the day continually provides the opportunity for students to reflect on this denial and learn how their attitudes are impacted by lyrics and video. Opportunities are present in every class session to briefly discuss how the song is shaping attitudes and the extent to which students believe they are influenced by the song compared to others.

SPECIFICS

This is a semester-long activity where, at the start of each class, a student presents a "song of the day." In the beginning of the semester, the instructor provides students with an explanation of how music is pervasive in their lives and how it influences attitudes. This explanation can be supplemented with a reading demonstrating the influence lyrics and video can have on college students' attitudes such as Kistler and Lee (2010). At the start of each class, a student presents a song related to the concept of that day's curriculum. Alternatively, the assignment works as a good way to reinforce concepts learned in previous class sessions. Students sign up during the second week of the semester and select their own song. A 400-word paper is required in addition to a presentation. The paper and presentation answer three main questions: First, what's the historical context and artist's intent with the song? What is the attitude issue related to the song? Second, what does the song have to do with course content? Specifically, find a concept and or theory from our textbook that helps frame/understand why the song and or video is persuasive. Explain how the song and video demonstrate the concept. How does this concept help us understand the persuasiveness of the song? Third, how has this song and video influenced your attitudes?

Presentations start with a brief introduction of the context and issue from the song. Examples are provided in Table 1. Next, the presenter plays a portion of the video, usually available on YouTube.com. The video is cued prior to the presentation in order to avoid commercials and to be ready with the desired section of the video. The video clip is not to exceed 90 seconds. Immediately following the video, the presenter explains how the video and lyrics demonstrate the course theory or concept. In this portion, the presenter reminds the class of the definition of the concepts and specifies the accompanying page number from the course textbook. Finally, the presenter explains the impact on personal attitudes. In total, this activity takes approximately seven minutes at the start of every class.

EXAMPLES

As an illustration of how the exercise works, one student in the author's Persuasion course chose "Love Ain't" by Eli Young Band (Eli Young Band, 2019) which addresses attitudes of what love should be and how it is sometimes misguided. The song is associated with the Wounded Warrior Project. The lyrics are contrasted with the video which demonstrates genuine love from Taylor and Danielle Morris. Taylor is a veteran quadruple amputee and the video demonstrates the couples' love for each other. The specific connection to the course material is language vividness, emotional appeal, and the contrast effect. Contrasting what love is not with the lyrics with what love is from the video draws in strong emotional appeals. Gass and Seiter (2014) explained how words can evoke emotional responses in the right context. The emotional appeal present in this video is an unusual and powerful warmth appeal. It is effective because the video itself is a documentary of Taylor's recovery with Danielle's support. Thus, this video has the key component necessary for an effective warmth appeal: believability (Gass & Seiter, 2014).

Another student example analyzes "Where is the Love?" by The Black-Eyed Peas released in 2003 and re-released in 2016 (Leiht, 2016). The song urges listeners to address problems such as racism and terrorism with love. This message is still relevant almost 20 years after its release continuing to communicate that focusing on hate will not fix social problems which are better addressed with love. The song is persuasive in two ways: visually and lyrically. First, visually, the music video begins with a poster of a red question mark contrasted on a black background. This poster is displayed throughout the video, visually reinforcing the chorus and title of the song, "where is the love?" The video contains children's faces which create a sense of unity and innocence as well as American symbols such as a model of the Statue of Liberty with a question mark placed above the torch. Second, the lyrics create vivid imagery language to illustrate hate, "But we still got terrorists here livin', In the USA, the big CIA, the Bloods and The Crips and the KKK." The song's chorus induces an emotional motivation for change in listeners through "People killin', people dyin', Children hurt and you hear them cryin'." This puts the listener in a state of sadness and sympathy, inducing a motivation to change behaviors with lyrics such as, "Can you practice what you preach or would you turn the other cheek?" The phrase, "practice what you preach" is an aphorism that serves as a heuristic cue (Gass & Seiter, 2014) for the listener.

TABLE 1: SONG OF THE DAY EXAMPLES: PERSUASION CLASS

Concept(s)	Song	Artist	Year	Issue
Central and peripheral processing	Down to Earth	Peter Gabriel	2008	Environmentalism
Cognitive dissonance	Man in the	Michael	1988	Giving to people in need

	Mirror	Jackson		
Communication accommodation: language.	Most People are Good	Luke Bryan	2017	Rethinking political divides, positivity
Deception	Online	Brad Paisley	2007	Catfishing online
Explicit messages and repetition	1-800-273-8255	Logic	2017	Suicide prevention
Fear-then-relief	Don't Take the Money	Bleachers	2017	Taking a chance on love
Language: labeling	Masters of War	Bob Dylan	1963	Civil rights
One vs. more than one dissenter: conformity resistance	Beautiful	Christina Aguilera	2002	Self-esteem and conformity pressure
Pathos and labeling	There is Power in a Union	Joe Hill	1913	Pro labor ideology
Pity and guilt	Kenji	Fort Minor	2005	Japanese internment camps during WW2
Social comparison theory	Movin' Out	Billy Joel	1977	Society pressures and materialism
Visual persuasion, explicit messages	Where is the Love	Black Eyed Peas	2003	Terrorism and hate
Vivid Language and aphorisms	Don't Blink	Kenny Chesney	2007	Appreciation of life

This activity could be modified in a number of ways to accommodate various class sizes. For example, in classes of 25-30 students, the activity requires one speaker per class. In smaller class sizes students could do the activity twice. In larger class sizes presentations could be from small groups of 2-4 students. Also, a reflection assignment could be added to courses utilizing journal type projects. For example, students could pick one of their classmate's presentations and identify additional strategies and provide an explanation of how their attitude towards the issue was impacted by the lyrics and video.

DEBRIEFING

Every presentation offers an opportunity for all students to connect several concepts from the course. After the presenter is finished, the instructor asks students to provide examples of additional course elements present in the lyrics and video. Often, several additional concepts from the course are mentioned by classmates while referencing the textbook. This additional analysis from classmates elevates the overall understanding of the strategies at work in lyrics and video as well as providing an opportunity to understand concepts as multifaceted. Through this additional analysis, the song of the day assignment moves beyond a passive experience from classmates. The enthusiasm for class interaction, additional class connections, and analysis from classmates is an excellent learning opportunity. Also, the instructor asks students if they are familiar with the song and if their attitudes

have been influenced by it. In total, the activity, from the start of class to the end of a brief discussion following, takes less than 10 minutes per class.

In the classes following each presentation, students and the instructor can refer back to certain songs when discussing a theory or concept in the course. This builds community with students by helping to provide a common class culture through points of reference with the class (LaBelle, & Johnson, 2018). This also helps demonstrate that the same concepts can be employed in a variety of formats and contexts. Separate from this activity, a common error made by students is to remember the example as exclusive to one concept or to provide the example on the exam rather than the explanation of the concept itself. Song of the day helps students see concepts in action through a variety of examples. Students see and discuss the same concept applied in a different framework.

APPRAISAL

Student feedback is very positive. Often during the activity classmates take notes and write the name of the song being presented in order to reference the course concept reviewed. Students frequently cite song of the day as one of their favorite aspects of the course. The activity has been implemented by the author in over a dozen classes over the past six years. The following are some student comments taken from course evaluation data:

1. "The project of "song of the day" is a great way to get students engaged, to apply concepts to real life and to get to know fellow classmates"
2. "The song of the day was a great way to engage students intellectually and creatively."
3. "I enjoyed the song of the day project and now when I am listening to songs, I often think about how they are persuasive."
4. "The song of the day presentations were a lot of fun and were a more modern way of getting us to think critically about things we encounter in our everyday lives."
5. "Starting class with the "song of the day" also helped people get in gear to pay attention in class and it was a nice way to see what unique ideas of music of videos clips each person brought to the table."

Also, students made several positive verbal comments about the activity including, "I run to class because I do not want to miss the song of the day." Engaging in an activity, every class, that builds community, connects relatable examples to class concepts, and is relatively brief, starts each class as a positive learning experience. The title of the activity is catchy and classes start with a strong sense of anticipation.

An added benefit to the activity is the opportunity for students to practice presentational speaking skills. A clear format is established for the presentation including introducing the issue of the song, managing the clip from the video, explaining the analysis of the concepts present, and the impact the son has had on personal attitudes. Presenters learn to follow this format which affords both explanation of analysis and personal connection. Instructors can evaluate the merits of the presentation with assessments such as: structure, completeness of assigned analysis, articulation, and timeliness. Students are passionate about music videos and accompanying lyrics and enjoy explaining how elements of the example influence attitudes. Most students are highly motivated to put significant effort into this assignment. For the few that have not been motivated, at least they show a video clip. Then, as a class community, following the presentation the instructor and classmates can elaborate on observed concepts in the video and lyrics.

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