

17) Emotional role and place of lullabies and childhood songs in Republic of Benin.

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Research Paper

Emotional role and place of lullabies and childhood songs in Republic of Benin

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Abstract

An important channel of communication and induction of emotions and feelings remains music, in its various characteristics and type of melody. Childhood songs or lullabies are a specific musical type. They immerse the subject in particular effects. This study was carried out to analyze in adolescents the effects associated with lullabies and childhood songs kept in memory. The study was cross-sectional with descriptive focus and covered 269 adolescents in formal or informal training in southern Benin. The sampling mode was convenient. The survey lasted 2 months in 2011 and was based on observation and a self-questionnaire. The processing and analysis of the data was carried out in IBM SPSS Statistics, with a significance threshold of 5%. The recall, listening, or interpretation of the lullabies used to soothe the baby he/she had been plunges the adolescent into the evocation of childhood memories and the remembrance of the parental affection received in the childhood (62.9%). These teenagers hum lullabies in moments of family joy or in situations of solitude, despair, feelings of emotional lack or inattention, sadness, anger or anguish. The personal experience related to listening, humming or performing the lullabies used to soothe the baby was influenced by gender, with *p* comprised between 0.034 and 0.048. Lullabies can prove to be a calming tool to better explore for better use in child psychiatry.

Keywords: Lullabies, childhood effect, adolescent, child psychiatry.

Fioffi-Kpadonou E^{1,2}, Sessou DV¹,
Kpadonou TG^{1,3} and Agossou T⁴

¹Faculty of Health Sciences (FSS),
University of Abomey-Calavi, Benin.

²Mother-Child-Adolescent mental
healthcare service (SMEA) of the Mother
and Child University Hospital Center,
Lagune (CHU- MEL) Cotonou.

³Physical and Rehabilitation medicine
Service, CNHU-HKM, Cotonou, Benin.

⁴Pedopsychiatrist, Teacher Emeritus,
Cotonou, Benin.

*Corresponding author. E-mail:
kpadonou_emilie@yahoo.fr. Tél : 00 229
97588927.

INTRODUCTION

Music is the art of combining sounds in a way that is nice to hear. It is an "organized sound" (Levitin, 2010). Bloom said that "we are in the era of the music and States of mind that come with it. Adolescents and youth of 10 to 20 years live for music, that is, for them a passion, an essential object of enthusiasm and their reason for being in this moment (Bloom, 1987). Each era and each age group have their types and models of music. At the mention of panegyrics by mothers in psychiatric consultation, an effect of peace and tranquility was noted among inconsolable or restless children (Fioffi-Kpadonou et al., 2014). The same effect was observed in children with the hum of the lullabies and/or ditties by mothers in psychiatric clinic. Similarly to the eulogies which result in an effect of peace and tranquility in inconsolable or restless children during a psychiatric consultation (Blackwell, 2006), the lullabies

and/or ditties hummed by mothers cause the same effect in children.

This study aims to analyze the effects related to lullabies and childhood songs kept in memory, for a better use as support in mental health.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was a prospective cross-sectional descriptive and analytical study. The survey lasted 2 months (May to June, 2011), on sites that were randomly chosen, considering however the size of the attached workforce. Sampling focused on two secondary schools (one public and the other private), two schools, two Universities and ten formal or informal training centers, all located in

Cotonou and Abomey-Calavi, two large contiguous cities of South Benin. Based on the definition of the age of adolescence by the WHO as comprised between 10 and 19 years old (WHO, 2017), the study population was composed of any teenager aged from 10 to 18 years old, registered for the current year and present in its school or training center on the day of the survey. The method of sampling was convenient and consisted of 290 adolescents and young people who agreed to freely respond to the questionnaire. Twenty-one (21) questionnaires with incomplete answers were eliminated. Therefore, the 269 completely filled questionnaires have been kept for the study. IBM SPSS Statistics version 20 was used for processing and analyzing the data. The significance threshold adopted is $\alpha = 5\%$. On the ethical side, respect for the human person and personal privacy were strictly observed throughout the study, as well as strict anonymity. All the respondents gave their consent.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

The study population comprises of two hundred and sixty-nine (269) adolescents, consisting of a hundred and forty-nine (149) males (55.4%) and one hundred and twenty (120) female subjects (44.6%) and a sex ratio H/F of 1.2. They were aged 10-18 years old and in formal or informal training.

Memories of lullabies and people performing them to respondents

Of the surveyed two hundred and sixty-nine (269) adolescents, the study found 116, or 43.1% of the study population who said they remembered the songs or lullabies as their parents and other relatives sang them in their early childhood. Sixty (60) girls (51.7%) and 56 boys (48.3%) giving a sex ratio of 0.9 remembered these lullabies. The prevalence of girls who kept a memory of their childhood lullabies was 50% while it amounted to 37.6% among the boys. These lullabies were sometimes performed by multiple persons for a same child; the respondents cited the mothers (88.8%), fathers (15.5%), brothers, but especially sisters (15.5%) and grandmothers (12%).

Experience related to lullabies

The respondents were all moved at the evocation of the research topic. Listening, humming or the interpretation of lullabies and songs of childhood immersed them in the evocation of childhood memories and of parental affection

received in childhood (62.9%). Some mentioned the desire to return to childhood (0.9%) and that it helped them to understand they have grown.

In real life, these lullabies are hummed or sung during birthdays and family gatherings (56.6% of those who recalled them), but also to welcome a new-born or soothe a child (7.7%). Sometimes, this leads to a personal healing in moments of despair, emotional lack, suffered inattention of sadness, anger, anxiety, or provides the stimulus to move forward (15.5%). 2.6% confessed that it happens that they feel nothing, whereas 4.3% find it tricky to clarify the experience linked to the memory of childhood lullabies. Responses on the experience of the lullabies proved positive in 75%; the remaining 25% were related to negative or unspecified, resulting in a positive ratio of 75:25 = 3. The study found that 93% of the adolescents with positive sounding experience linked to lullabies, had also a positive sounding experience with listening to music in general, with $p=0,007$.

Memories of lullabies lived and gender

The experiences of respondents who kept a memory of their childhood lullabies was classified based on genre. 58.3% (35/120) of girls versus 39.3% (22/149) of boys said it was fun to recall childhood memories, whereas 1.7% of girls and 1.8% of boys reported a sense of irritation listening to lullabies of their childhood. The boys that declared a feeling of nostalgia for these lullabies were 8.9% but no girl spoke of nostalgia (Table 1). The correlation of the dependent variables "personal experience with listening to childhood lullabies" and "personal experience with singing or humming childhood lullabies" with the criterion of 'gender' by a one-way ANOVA gives respectively $p=0.039$ and $p=0.034$ (Table 2).

Memories of lullabies, experience and age

Younger respondents (13 to 15 years old) had a better memory of their lullabies than elders (18 years old) with $p=0.167$ (Table 3).

DISCUSSION

Interest for listening or singing the lullabies

This study noted that birthdays and family gatherings are times when lullabies and songs of childhood are most present. These moments become the perfect opportunity to remind that family is an emotional key place, where the subject has its place and roots. Listen to a nice music has positive effects on cognition. The use of music to improve

Table 1: Summary of the circumstances of execution of lullabies by investigation according to sex.

	Female (%)	Male (%)
Experience not specified	3.3	10.6
Feeling of excitement	1.7	1.8
Feeling of receiving love	1.7	0.0
Wanting to give back care	1.7	0.0
Feeling of having evolved	0.0	1.8
Energy boost	0.0	3.6
Relaxation	3.3	3.6
Pleasure to recall previous parental love	5.0	0.0
Nostalgia	0.0	8.9
Feeling of joy while listening	10.0	12.5
Non more listening to childhood lullabies	15.0	17.9
Pleasure to recall childhood memories	58.3	39.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Table 2: Data from the one-way test ANOVA (test = sex).

Variable	Df	F	p
Persons performing the song or melody of the childhood lullabies	1	4.225	0.041
Personal experiences listening to childhood lullabies	1	4.296	0.039
Circumstances leading to listening childhood lullabies	1	4.285	0.039
Personal experience with singing or humming childhood lullabies	1	4.553	0.034
Circumstances in which the childhood lullabies are performed by the respondent	1	4.555	0.034
Reminding of childhood lullabies	1	4.212	0.041

Table 3: Data from the Test one-way ANOVA (= age criterion).

Variable	Df	F	p
Persons performing the song or melody of the childhood lullabies	10	1.432	0.166
Personal experiences listening to childhood lullabies	10	1.357	0.201
Circumstances leading to listening childhood lullabies	10	1.354	0.202
Personal experience with singing or humming childhood lullabies	10	1.462	0.154
Circumstances in which the childhood lullabies are performed by the respondent	10	1.461	0.154
Reminding of childhood lullabies	10	1.430	0.167

memory was explored. Musical recitation improves the encoding of information by activating neural networks in the most unanimous and optimal way. It therefore has therapeutic purposes (Blackwell, 2006).

Frequency of recalling lullabies today by previous children

Slightly more than 50% of respondents do not remember their childhood lullabies. This can be explained by a sharp decline in the impregnation of the habits and customs in urban areas (Fioffi-Kpadonou et al., 2014). Broad schooling, the mode of work and professional activities practiced by Beninese adults have forced to adopt new styles of child care that slow down the outreach of

traditional lullabies. Moreover, the use of mobile phones consumes a lot of time, offers various entertainment and communication means, besides downloading songs from other areas and eras.

Development, childhood and lullabies

The emotional perception in music appears early, or even likely innate (Vaillancourt, 2010). Consonance is perceived as early as 4 months old (Zentner and Kagan, 1996). At 3 years old, a child is capable of sensing joy in a musical piece from its culture and at 6, they can identify sadness, fear and anger (Pedneault, 2005). At 5 years old, fast or slow tempo help their emotional judgement make a distinction between happy or sad pieces of music.

At 6 years old, a child uses a combination of tempo and mode (major=happy and minor=sad) like adults, to assign an emotional value to a piece of music (Dalla et al., 2001).

Individuals have an emotional system allowing variations of intensity according to the origin of the music. Music, like language, involves an early and close association between its perception and its ability to communicate emotion (Molnar-Szakács and Overy, 2006; Krumhansl, 2010; Juslin and Sloboda, 2001).

The source of emotion can be associated with an event recorded in human memory at the same time as music. Subsequently, the identification of this music induces the recall of the event or of effect initially associated with it (Waterman, 1996). These associations are related to history, experiences, personality traits and the environment of the subject.

They are therefore a remarkable consistence and precocity concerning emotional recognition of music in humans. The sensitivity for lullabies seems to derive from a global sensitivity of humans for music. Music performs social functions in the life of an individual; the context (geopolitical, historical, socio-cultural, economic and spiritual) greatly affects the emotional reaction.

We can understand that the humans can be imbued with the first songs they get emotionally from their immediate surroundings, sang or hummed lullabies impregnated with their culture (Ambady and Bharucha, 2009).

Humans react innately to objects with emotions of varied intensity and inherent feelings according to Damasio (2005). Therefore, several behavioural characteristics in listening to music can be closely related to the attachment.

The particular case of lullabies or parental songs is quite edifying. The lullaby sung to a child by his mother is like a ritual of attachment. The complex rendering consisted of sentences, rhythmic sounds and movement of the various parts of the body of the mother (or the mother substitute) comforts for the child. Deep or simple words and the pitch of the lullabies carry a reassuring message to the child. They are fully aware this complicity that binds them to their mother and makes them confident (Hanley, 2010). Maternal voice, with all the inherent gesture, sets itself as master organizer of this sound universe whose initial function is to be a reassuring and soothing bubble. Both the mother and her child find some pleasure in it.

The baby's speech is expressed by his voice, cries and lallations. This speech production is accompanied by the voice of the Other; the other being his mother or its substitute and more broadly, his father, brothers and sisters and the other members of the family. The human brain presents highly selective and specific cortical regions for the perception and treatment of the human voice (Belin et al., 2000). Zentner and Kagan (1996) reported that biological provisions could explain the special sensitivity of children to the harmony of melodies, specifically lullabies.

The voice of the Other perceived by the baby makes the mother present, who, she who was the first to use her

voice as a musical instrument to rock her baby, make him sleep and calm him down. The baby seems to be able to decode the vocal expression before the facial expression. The characteristics of each melody generates a type of emotion (Mithen, 2005; Izdebski, 2007) especially when the production from someone entitled like the mother. The mother-child communication will help the child in its own communication with others and in his awakening.

Lullabies, also called parental songs, help to maintain the parent-child bonding and also optimize the stimulation and development of the baby. According to Trehub (2001), parental singing would serve as sleep induction (lullabies), child development stimulation, survival and reduction of crying. It promotes bonding between the baby and the parent.

Lullaby is a love and comfort song and a song of security since it is offered by someone entitled to do so and accompanied by a physical and emotional bonding that counts just as much as the sweetness of the melody. It is a response to a discomfort, sorrow and pain and comes to supersede tears and cries of the child, therefore creating an inseparable bond.

The voice of the Other opens the emotional communication and socialization and subsequently facilitates the acquisition of language. The results of a series of experiments on children showed that the baby responds more to the affective qualities of parental language than to its linguistic features (Nakataa and Trehub, 2004; Ready, 2010).

One can understand that this voice, especially through lullabies or songs/melodies of the childhood (positive-sounding melody) can be invoked or referred to by the child or adolescent in moments of anguish, sadness, nostalgia or need of soothing and invigorating energy.

Teens and lullabies

Adolescence is an "integrative and maturing process, aiming at evolution and reorganization and culminating in an emotional and structural redesign". It should not be considered a crisis, but as an "odyssey through emotional storms, turmoils of passion, a rampage of search for identity and a surging narcissism" (Nevjinsky, 1996). A way of appeasement in this odyssey and storms lies in music, be it played, performed or produced. Thus, adolescence is viewed as a convenient time for sharing of many things, including music. This explains the choice of the study population.

While listening to or performing lullabies and childhood songs, a teenager renews a childhood experience; it is like a reminiscence of the secure, understanding and affective bond built between mother and child. Listening to or singing a lullaby or childhood ditty of is therefore a source of pleasure, a rather structuring regression. The mention of these lullabies or ditties by

parents also helps the adolescent in his quest for emotional reference. "Emotion is not induced by songs themselves, but rather connotations attached to them by the listeners" (Pedneault, 2005). The adolescent who is afraid to face the outside world alone could use music as a protective bubble. Music is a means of unification (Peretz, 2001); thanks to its communicative function, it has the power to create an emotional connection between those who listen and improvise it together (Martiny, 2006).

Lullabies, gender and age

In this study, 43.1% of adolescents could remember these childhood songs and lullabies. For those who remembered, many referred to their mother as the person singing them. All emotions, feelings and states of mind caused by childhood songs bring them back to emotional links established in childhood. These songs can even recreate the image of the securing emotional framework of childhood. All these internal representations developed the pleasure, appeasement, the desire to return to childhood, resourcing and the desire to recreate this emotional framework for others (such as a need for transmission).

However, according to this study, the experience of adolescents while listening or performing the lullabies and childhood songs varies between the female and male populations. Girls were more prone to a "give and receive" attitude. In the best cases, they remembered, with great pleasure, parental affection they received in childhood, and behaved as if, in turn, they had to do the same thing.

In Benin, the daughter is quite early involved in the custody of the baby. The mother (without use of custody for her baby) ask the eldest daughter to sing for the baby and play with him, so she, the mother can go take a shower or prepare the family meal. Thus, we can better understand why girls were, in this study, the first people after the mother and the father, to sing lullabies or ditties to their younger brothers and sisters. All this might suggest the fact that mentioning these childhood songs could stimulate the maternal instinct in girls. One can think that girls, more than the boy, have a more complex and developed level of consciousness (Damasio, 1999). Concerning boys, these songs are a way to restore or boost energy. When they sing these lullabies and songs themselves, they have a desire to return to their childhood, as if that period of their lives gave them a satisfaction that they are willing to find again. Between 10 and 18 years, the age group was not found as an influential factor for the experience and feelings related to the lullabies ($0.154 < p < 0.202$).

Thus, the emotional recognition of music has a remarkable consistence and precocity in humans. Experience and listening or humming circumstances somewhat match. We can therefore develop a customized strategy of fading sadness and calming anger based on lullabies (Terwogt and Van Grinsven, 1988). A study on a

larger sample, analyzing the various elements and types of lullabies, matched to the traits of personality in various age groups would find other aspects substantially more usable in therapy.

Conclusion

This study has showed, as announced for several centuries, that music softens the difficult moments of life. Emotions were intermingled with generated feelings, particularly while children and adolescents listen to or perform of a piece of music. Many emotions, ranging from primary ones to background ones, have been noticed: sadness, anger, tranquility, nostalgia, pleasure/joy, etc. It is therefore understandable that there are musical notes corresponding to each situation, each level and each subject in what he has and its sense of self. A reorganization of the use of the lullabies with as much early memories as they can carry, could allow us a better therapeutic strategy in child psychiatry.

A better understanding of the positive effects of lullabies will lead to an adequate use for a nice, gentle and effective therapy.

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