



Apr 27th, 12:00 PM - 4:30 PM

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Walters, Amy and Clavadetscher, Faculty Advisor, Dr. John, "The Combined Influence of Music and Visual Scenes on Fear and Humor Perception" (1991). *John Wesley Powell Student Research Conference*. 4.

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# THE COMBINED INFLUENCE OF MUSIC AND VISUAL SCENES ON FEAR AND HUMOR PERCEPTION

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This study investigates the process by which perception of a visual stimulus is influenced by the perception of an accompanying musical selection. The subjects were chosen from among IWU students based on their self-report of either high or low levels of musical training. Subjects watched four video-taped scenes involving animals interacting, listened to four musical excerpts, and experienced the audio and visual portions paired in all combinations. After the presentation of each stimulus condition, subjects were asked to use a 1-10 scale to rate fear and humor evoked by the stimuli. The subjects also rated music-video compatibility. The results are shown in figures 1 and 2 below in which each data curve represents one visual scene. The music and visual stimuli appeared to combine their influences differently for fear and humor. The fear ratings of audio-visual pairings (figure 1) were strongly influenced by the subjects' impressions of the mood of the music, as indicated by the steep slope of each visual stimulus curve. Despite the widely disparate ratings of the visual stimuli in the video alone condition, the visual scenes had little influence over the fear rating, as indicated by the minimal separation between the curves.

A quite different pattern of results occurred for the humor ratings. The almost horizontal data points in figure 2 show that the differences in music had little effect on the ratings of pairings. However, the differences in the visual scenes had a large impact on humor ratings as shown by the substantial differences in the heights of the curves for visual conditions. The results are consistent with the idea that music evokes strong emotional responses while humor is more cognitively based.

There did not appear to be a significant difference between the responses of subjects who had considerable musical training and those who had little or no musical training except in the area of compatibility. Those with little musical training appeared to be more likely to see the pairings as compatible than those with more musical training.

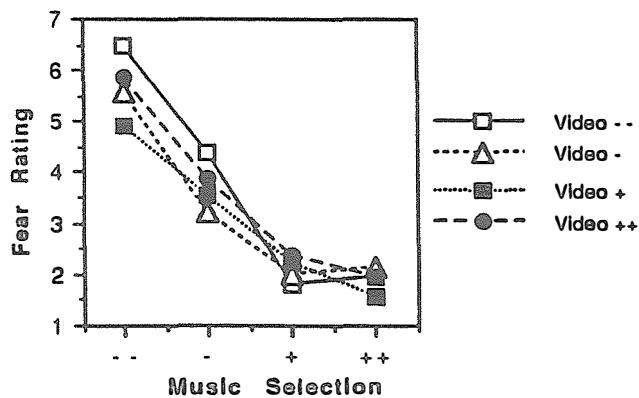


Figure 1. Fear ratings of video-music combinations.

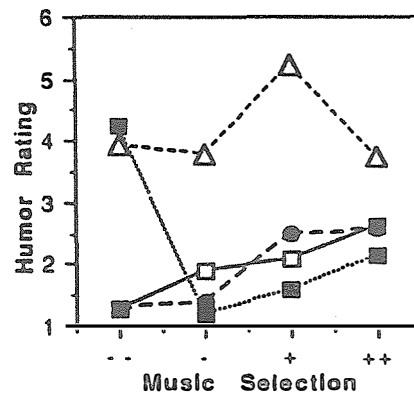


Figure 2. Humor ratings of video-music combinations.