

## Social Surrogacy: How Music Provides a Sense of Belonging

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### ABSTRACT

#### Background

As social animals, we have a need to form and maintain strong interpersonal relationships. If direct social interaction is not possible, we resort to social surrogates which provide temporary substitutes for direct interaction (Gardner, Pickett, & Knowles, 2005). Those surrogates can have different forms: Some people like to immerse themselves into narratives (Gabriel & Young, 2011) while others prefer the virtual company of TV characters (Derrick, Gabriel, & Hugenberg, 2009). Previous research suggests that also music could be used as social surrogate (e.g. Lee, Andrade, & Palmer, 2013), but there is no consensus about the ways through which music listening might provide company.

#### Aims

The aim of this study was twofold. First, we wanted to know, if music is used as temporary substitute for social interaction at all. Second, it was tested, if music listening conveys company in similar ways like literary fiction (Gabriel et al., 2011) or TV programs (Derrick et al., 2009).

#### Method

In order to explore the ways through which media provide company, 30 statements about possible ways music, TV, and fiction could provide social surrogacy were compiled. The statements were inspired by a comprehensive analysis about the psychological functions of music listening (Schäfer, Sedlmeier, Städtler & Huron, 2013). The dominant part of the statements was derived from typical manifestations of social surrogates suggested by previous investigations in the domains of literature (Gabriel et al., 2011) and TV (Derrick et al., 2009). Additionally, statements about media as reminders of real relationship partners were added (Gardner et al., 2005). The statements were adjusted to fit the domains of music, TV, and, literature. Over 300 participants, mostly from Skandinavia, rated their agreement to the statements across the three domains in an online survey. To identify separate facets of social surrogacy, a factor analysis was conducted for each domain separately.

#### Results

The results suggest that music is used as temporary substitute for social interaction. Regarding the ways through which music listening might provide company, music's ability to remind us of meaningful life events and significant others plays a key role in this process. The aspect of reminiscence

did not seem as important in the other two domains. In all three domains, identification with and feeling understood by the performer (music) or character(s) (TV, movies, and literary fiction) were identified as relevant ways, how media may provide company and comfort.

#### Conclusions

Music is used as temporary substitute for social interaction, but it acts differently from TV, films, or literary fiction.

#### Keywords

social surrogacy; music; TV; literature; interpersonal relationships

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