

Listening to music can change the way you judge facial emotions

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A research project led by Dr Joydeep Bhattacharya at Goldsmiths, University of London has shown that it is possible to influence emotional evaluation of visual stimuli by listening to musical excerpts before the evaluation.

It is often said that music is the language of emotions. Simply, we are moved by music. But can these musically induced emotions arising through the auditory sense influence our interpretation of emotions arising through other senses (eg visual)?

A research project led by Dr Joydeep Bhattacharya at Goldsmiths, University of London has shown that it is possible to influence emotional evaluation of [visual stimuli](#) by listening to musical excerpts before the evaluation. Volunteers listened to a short musical excerpt (15 seconds) and then judged the emotional content of a face. The research found that the prior listening to happy music significantly enhanced the perceived happiness of a face and likewise listening to sad music significantly enhanced the perceived sadness of a face, and this music-induced effect was maximal when the face was emotionally neutral. Further, by recording [brain waves](#), the study showed that prior listening to music could induce changes in the brain activation patterns which are usually not directly under our conscious control.

“What surprises us,” Bhattacharya said, “is that even as short as 15 sec of music can cause this effect. However more research is needed to find how long the effect lasts or if, and how, other factors such as musical

preference, personality, control this effect.”

So next time you meet your boss, listen to a happy tune beforehand. At least they will appear pleasant even though they might reject your holiday application!

“Although music is primarily related to auditory modality,” Dr. Bhattacharya commented, “it has functionally significant cross-modal components: some of which we can consciously control, and some others, possibly not!”

Now it’s time to turn on the music!

More information: N. Logeswaran and J. Bhattacharya (2009) Crossmodal transfer of emotion by [music](#). *Neuroscience Letters* 455: 129-133.

Source: Goldsmiths, University of London

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