

Anne Cabildo & Karl Szpunar
Department of Psychology

Background

- *Personal events* refer to occurrences in one's own life whereas *public events* refer to occurrences in the world that are often reported in the news and the media
- In this study, we set out to further investigate the mnemonic organization of personal and public events (Klein et al., 2002; Brown, 1990)
- Prior research has shown that musical cues can remind people of different periods of their lives (e.g., elementary school, high school, etc.) (Cady et al., 2008), and that these lifetime periods can guide the retrieval of more specific personal events from memory (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000)
- *If personal and public events are governed by distinct retrieval mechanisms, then evoking lifetime periods should bring to mind relevant personal events but not relevant public events*
- *If, on the other hand, personal and public events are governed by similar retrieval mechanisms, then evoking lifetime periods should bring to mind both relevant personal and public events*

Methods

Participants

42 Ryerson undergraduates; recruited via SONA

Stimuli

24, 10s clips; top 8 songs from the *Billboard Hot 100* chart for 2019, 2015, and 1989

Within-participant variables

Lifetime period:

- 2019 - last year of high school
- 2015 - last year of elementary school
- 1989 - one decade before the students' birth

Domains of memory: personal and public (in Canada)

Dependent measures

Participants indicated the first personal or public event, if any, that came to mind for each cue, dated each memory, and rated each memory for level of detail, valence, and ease of retrieval

***We expected personal memories to be more closely tied to musically-evoked lifetime periods (2019 and 2015) than public memories.*

Results

- Music was more effective in cueing personal than public events

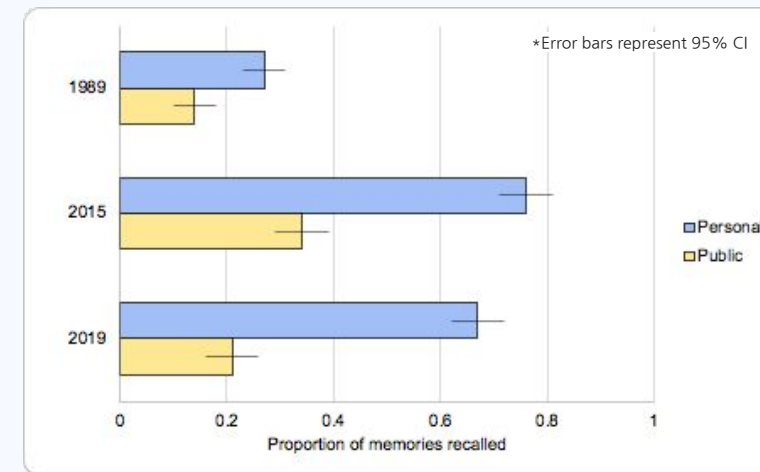


Figure 1: Proportion of Personal vs Public Memories recalled for 1989, 2015, and 2019

- Some evidence indicating that musically-evoked lifetime periods (2019 and 2015) were more successful in bringing to mind personal events from those periods than public events from those periods
- Caution in interpreting these findings given the small number of public events that came to mind during the study

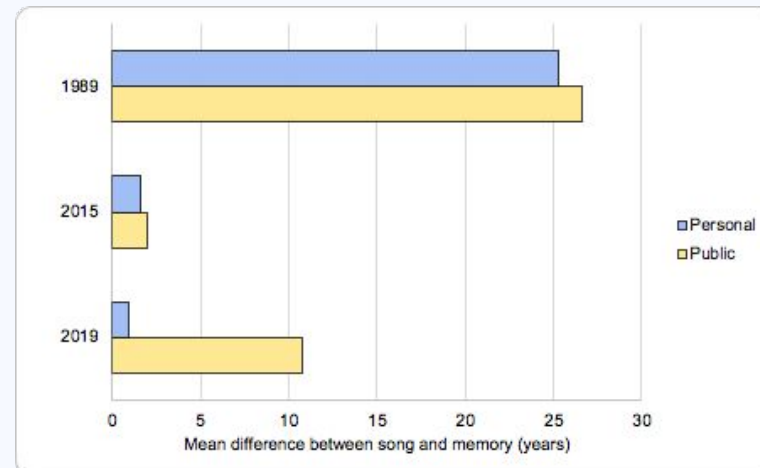


Figure 2: Mean difference between song and memory reported for 1989, 2015, 2019 (years)

- Phenomenological ratings reflected the following:
 - Personal memories were more detailed
 - Personal memories were more positive
 - Public events were rated as less difficult to retrieve overall (likely due to an item selection effect)

Discussion

- In line with previous research, music proved to be an exceptionally effective cue for personal memories
- There is some evidence that musically-evoked lifetime periods (2019 and 2015) were more successful in cueing personal versus public events, although the low number of public events generated during the study warrants caution in interpretation
- Notably, many public event memories were related to pop culture and contained an element of personal experience, suggesting that interactions between personal and public event memory are common (Brown, 1990)
- The lack of public events reported in response to musical cues in the context of this study may be explained by:
 - **Mnemonic organization:** Musically-evoked lifetime periods do not bring to mind public events
 - **Age:** Undergraduate students do not remember many public events (e.g., Tekcan et al., 2017)
 - **Mood congruency:** more than half of the musical cues were positive in valence, which may have biased memory performance in favour of personal events (Shrikanth & Szpunar, 2021)
- Currently following up on these findings by further examining the extent to which undergraduates are able to recall public events from memory



References

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