The importance of music versus musical experience in music choice

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Abstract

This study examined how student’s ratings of the importance of music and musical experience related to personality as well as preference for certain types of music. Participants completed questionnaires that measured music preference, music importance, music experience, and various personality factors (Big 5 factors, self-esteem, and need for cognition). The statistics revealed that music importance was positively correlated with agreeableness and extraversion for energetic/rhythmic music. Music experience was positively correlated with emotional stability and a preference for reflective/complex music. For participants with high music experience, complex music preference was positively correlated with openness to experiences and need for cognition. For participants with lower musical experience, complex music preference was negatively correlated with extraversion and agreeableness.

Introduction

• Music is one of the most ubiquitous forms of culture that exists. Some form of music has been documented in every known culture and often plays a central role in those cultures (Jordan, 1997).
• Catell said it best when he remarked “no powerful is the effect of music... that one is surprised to find in the history of psychology and psychotherapy so little experimental, or even speculative, reference to the use of music” (Catell & Janardan, 1954: 3).
• Recently, however, Rentfrow and Gosling (2003) have made efforts to correct this shortcoming by looking at how personality characteristics relate to music preferences. They created the STOMP or Short Test of Music Preference. They looked at how preference for these genres correlated with personality.
• Rentfrow and Gosling (2003) correlated these general music preference categories with various personality factors.
• While Rentfrow and Gosling (2003) found a link between music and personality, others have found a relationship between music and arousal. For example, Greenoehl and Bloem (1997) found that individual’s arousal level was related to music preference.
• Likewise, McNamara and Budd (1999) found that musical arousal, as well as sensation seeking, was related to a preference for highly arousing music.
• The relationship between an individual’s internal state of arousal and music preference was also established by Judd and Zuckerman (1980), who found a positive correlation between sensation seeking and a preference for rock, punk, and heavy metal. Also, they found a negative correlation between sensation seeking and a preference for sound tracks and religious music.
• This research suggests that particular individual differences (i.e., personality and resting arousal) may draw different people to different types of music.
• When one considers why we listen to music, we often focus on cultural explanations that look at the Ballard and Zuckerman (1975) study, who found that music enjoyment was correlated with rap/hip hop (r = .21, p < .033). Music experience, however, correlated with several variables (see Table 2). Music experience was strongly correlated with both complex music preference (r = .52, p < .001) and for the reflective/complex STOMP category (r = .52, p < .001). When breaking down the global STOMP categories to specific genres, music experience was found to be positively correlated with classical music (r = .312, p < .001), blues (r = .371, p < .001), and jazz (r = .364, p < .001), while it was negatively correlated with country music (r = -.273, p < .011), rap/hip-hop (r = -.276, p < .010), and pop music (r = -.273, p < .011). We decided to look further into the interaction between musical experience and a preference for more complex music. So, we conducted a median split on the data to separate it into two groups, those with high music experience and those with low music experience. Then we ran the correlations between complex music preference and personality to see if these relationships were different for the different levels of experience. For the sample with low music experience complex music preference was negatively correlated with extraversion (r = -.442, p < .015) as well as with agreeableness (r = -.404, p < .027) for the sample with high music experience we found positive correlations with both with the agreeableness (r = .637, p < .001) and need for cognition (r = .440, p < .012).

Results

As depicted in Table 1, music importance was found to correlate with agreeableness (r = .318, p < .003) and with the energetic/rhythmic STOMP category (r = .282, p < .009). The only specific genre that music importance correlated with was rap/hip-hop (r = .231, p < .011). Music experience, however, correlated with several variables (see Table 2). Music experience was strongly correlated with both complex music preference (r = .521, p < .001) and for the reflective/complex STOMP category (r = .558, p < .011). Music experience was also correlated with need for cognition (r = .521, p < .001). When breaking down the STOMP categories to specific genres, music experience was found to be positively correlated with classical music (r = .312, p < .001), blues (r = .371, p < .001), and jazz (r = .364, p < .001), while it was negatively correlated with country music (r = -.273, p < .011), rap/hip-hop (r = -.276, p < .010), and pop music (r = -.273, p < .011).

Discussion

• While music importance was found to correlate with agreeableness, energetic/rhythmic, and rap/hip-hop, it did not correlate with anything else. This suggests that people who find music important tend to like different kinds of music and that there are no particular personalities that find music more important than others (with the possible exception of agreeableness).
• The measures for music importance was not the norm to have musical experiences (M = 3.15) and that there is some variability in musical experience in the sample (SD = 1.90). Music experience was found to correlate with multiple factors. In general, music experience was strongly correlated with both complex music preference and for the reflective/complex STOMP category. This suggests that those with higher musical experience prefer more complex music and those with lower musical experience prefer music that is simpler in nature. This preference for complex music seems to go hand-in-hand with the need for cognition which was also positively correlated with music experience. So, those with more musical experience like more complex music and like to think. Reflecting this preference for complex music, music experience was found to be positively correlated with classical music, blues, and jazz, and negatively correlated with country, rap/hip-hop, and pop music.
• The results suggest that individuals with less musical experience who like complex music are more extraverted and agreeable. The results also indicate that for individuals with more music experience, liking complex music is associated with higher openness to experience and need for cognition. While these results are interesting and informative, they are still preliminary. Further studies will need to be conducted to establish a valid and reliable pattern of results.

Table 1. The correlation between music importance, personality, and music preference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Agreeableness</th>
<th>Energetic/Rhythmic</th>
<th>Rap/Hip-Hop</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>.318</td>
<td>.282</td>
<td>.231</td>
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<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>&lt; .003</td>
<td>&lt; .009</td>
<td>&lt; .011</td>
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</table>

Table 2. The correlation between music experience, personality, and music preference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Complex Music Preference</th>
<th>Med for Coping</th>
<th>Reflective/Complex</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>r</td>
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<td>.367</td>
<td>.376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classical</td>
<td>Blues</td>
<td>Jazz</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>r = .512</td>
<td>r = .387</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>R&amp;B/Hip-Hop</td>
<td>Pop</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>r = .276</td>
<td>r = .278</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p = .010</td>
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Figure 1. Means of music experience and music importance.

Figure 2. Means of music experience and music importance.

References
