

Research on Listeners' Music Liking and Felt Emotions While Listening to Different Types of Emotional Music

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Summary

This study investigated people's music liking and felt emotions while listening to four types of emotional music: happy, tender, sad, and scary music. A survey was conducted for this study. The independent variables were the four types of emotional music and each participant's gender; the dependent variables were music liking and felt emotions. The term "felt emotions" refers to the real emotional responses that the music evoked in the participants. An instrument called the Scale of Music Liking and Felt Emotions was designed on the basis of the "Geneva emotional music scale" (Zentner et al., 2008) and "Hevner's adjective circle" (Hevner, 1936). Subsequently, 10 distinct felt emotions were analyzed: happy, sacred, tender, nostalgic, peaceful, vigorous, energetic, nervous, sad, and moved.

Based on "Communicating emotion in music performance" by Juslin (2005), 8 musical excerpts were selected to represent the four types of emotional music, with each type being represented by two excerpts. All musical excerpts were instrumental pieces without lyrics and with low familiarity. A total of 217 college students with nonmusic majors were recruited, of whom 152 were women and 65 were men. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 24 years, with an average age of approximately 19 years. These students were chosen from multiple universities across multiple regions. The participants were divided into six groups, namely Groups A to F. To minimize any potential order effects and carry-over effects, each group had a different listening order. This study was conducted in professionally soundproofed classrooms with high-quality audiovisual equipment. After the experiment, a repeated-measures two-way analysis of variance was performed for statistical analysis.

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This study's results showed that first, the participants strongly liked both happy music and tender music. However, they did not like scary music, with the women liking this type less than the men. Second, an examination of the interaction effects of gender and felt emotions revealed that listening to tender music caused the women to have more peaceful and fewer sad emotions than did the men. Furthermore, compared with the men, the women felt fewer happy and energetic emotions, and more sad emotions while listening to sad music. Finally, different types of emotional music evoked different emotions in the listeners. Happy music tended to induce positive emotions such as vigorous, energetic, and happy emotion. Tender music produced positive emotions such as tender, peaceful, moved, and nostalgic emotions. By contrast, scary music aroused only nervousness. Finally, sad music induced five emotions—not only the negative emotion of sadness but also positive tender, moved, nostalgic, and peaceful emotions.

On the basis of the study results, this study developed a model called the Music felt emotion model (Figure 1). The horizontal axis represents the degree of music liking, ranging from low liking on the left to high liking on the right. The vertical axis represents felt emotions, with negative emotions toward the bottom and positive emotions toward the top. In this model, happy music and tender music are located in the quadrant of high liking and positive felt emotions. By contrast, scary music is located in the quadrant representing low liking and negative emotion. Finally, sad music is unique in that it simultaneously occupies two quadrants: one associated with high liking and positive emotions and one associated with high liking and negative emotions.

In a related study, Vuoskoski et al. (2012) explored why people enjoyed listening to sad music. They found that such music tended to evoke positive but complex emotions, such as nostalgia, peacefulness, and wonder. Additionally, Kawakami et al. (2013) observed that sad music tended to induce feelings of romance and blitheness. Building on these findings, Vuoskoski and Eerola (2017) discovered that pleasure evoked by sad music was mediated by the feeling of being moved. These findings are consistent with the results of the present study, suggesting that music considered to be sad can evoke not only the emotion of sadness but also positive emotions. This phenomenon appears to be unique to music listening and may help explain why many people like listening to sad music.

For teaching, teachers must recognize that males and females experience emotions differently. In our study, the female participants felt less happy, less energetic, and more sad than did the male participants while listening to sad music. Conversely, the female participants also felt more peaceful and less sad than did the male participants while listening to tender music. Accordingly,

teachers could seek to understand gender-based differences and tailor methods to arouse students' listening emotions on the basis of these differences. In summary, music—be it happy, tender, or sad music—can evoke positive emotions. Therefore, music can serve as a key medium for teaching students how to effectively regulate their emotions.

Figure 1

Music felt emotion model

