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# Emotional aspects in the psychology of pop music

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***Abstract:*** *The topic addressed in this article deals with the role of emotion in pop music, viewed from a psychological perspective. A questionnaire was used as a method of communication, involving young people between ages of 15 and 18 years. They expressed their emotions while listening to pop music works. The whole study is viewed from a psychological perspective. Dissociation theory is a way to understand listeners' attraction to states of sadness. The psychology of pop music helps to better understand emotions as synchronized responses to changes in the environment. The usefulness of the study is evidenced by the possibility of achieving a bridge to the psychological, cultural and social needs of the modern individual, by the emotions in pop music.*

Key-words: *psychology, emotions, pop music.*

## 1. Introduction

Music can have various psychological impacts and nuances, depending on the periods of the individual's progress.

It could be the statement of an artist, the image or the career of a musician or a listener's passion. Music is a resource of noticeable intellectual depth, the side of pop music being a multi-billion dollar industry, providing music across multiple domains (Huron, 2006).

Young people, in particular, spend huge amounts of time listening to music (Fitch, 2006). There are created large numbers of music applications in order to meet the individual's wishes and demands. Therefore, listening to music is meaningful and ubiquitous in contemporary human life as in Grewe et al. (2007, 776). Thus, through the proposed experiment, this article argues that pop music has become a real resource for psychological, social and cultural development. Emotion generated by music listening is a necessity and a considerable part of the life of all participants in this experiment.

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In terms of listening to music, the experiment confirms that it has a special contribution in shaping the emotion and successfully adapting to the cultural and educational aspects, as well as coping with the daily stress.

## 2. The context of psychological research

Musical psychology presents more and more studies dealing with emotion in music. A theoretical scheme is presented for this expanding area of research. The experiment is based on the individual's daily program, in which music plays a key role. Also, this framework extends the theories of development, by intensifying an everyday phenomenon that is ubiquitous, namely music. The specialized experiments use sophisticated data analysis, an example being the role of structural equations.

A very important and suggestive basis is the volume Emotion and Music: Theory and Research (Gabrielsson, 2010), being edited by two very important music psychology researchers: Patrik Juslin and John Sloboda.

Regarding the psychological perspective in pop music, it was firstly expressed in 1955 (Davies, 2003). His study followed an experiment conducted two years before, which included several pop songs and the emotions felt by the participants during the listening sessions. The most common emotions were sadness and love.

There are mentioned the articles published in the 1970s as in Nyklicek et al. (2003, 310). It is assumed that pop music does not show emotions, but they are revealed in the listener’s brain.

Other recent studies dealing with pop music and emotion are aimed at the free choice of the musical repertoire used in the experiment as in Peretz et al. (1998, 119). Empirical evidence shows that some works of pop music evoke, without exception, an emotional stimulus, such as Keston’s experiment (Juslin, 2008, 568), which has proven that the greatest hits of pop music stir emotions, even if they are listened to for the first time.

Patrik Juslin (2001) argues that a large number of works of pop music convey strong emotions, either through the vocal qualities of the singer, the sound of the band or through a message that people can relate to (such as love themes). The pop music singer will expose his own emotions or those evoked in the lyrics, being transmitted to the listener, an experience of internalizing the emotion (the singer's perspective being used to metamorphose the listener’s feelings into a personal, emotional situation). John Sloboda (2010) presents this type of experience as transmissible, a perceived mood being spread and felt by the listener, the emotion exceeding the purpose of the musical score.

The experiment presented in this article aims to enrich the specialized literature, by highlighting the psychological perspectives of the emotional side of pop music.

Correlation studies use experience sampling methods to shed light on how music can create complex patterns of positive and negative emotions during the course of our daily lives as in Khalfa et al. (2002, 147). In this sense, a promising research direction is that music can guide and adapt the psychic in order to coordinate emotions.

## 3. Methods

The experiment consists in a listening session of three works from the pop music repertoire, chosen by the participants and a subsequent questionnaire, in which the following aspects are evaluated: the power of music, of emotion and the cognitive, biological and social effects of pop music on the individual's brain.

### 3.1. Participants and Materials

Twenty participants were chosen, males and females between ages of 15 and 18 years, ten subjects being students of a specialized music institution, the other ten having no musical background, only being passionate about music.

The subjects were asked to choose three music pieces of any style they wanted. This self-selection criterion is a very important aspect, because, by requiring the selection of an artist or a predetermined style, the participants could be influenced, as in Oatley et al. (1996, 256). This type of characteristic demand is thus removed.

They were divided into two groups, according to the previous musical education. In the first room there were the subjects without musical studies and in the second one, there were located the students of the specialized musical institution, this characteristic of the previous musical formation being a very important aspect in the evaluation of the answers as in Zentner et al. (2008, 513). Each one received a pair of headphones, in order to be able to hear the selected songs.

The subjects received a questionnaire, in which they were asked questions about the chosen pop music repertoire, the characteristics of their favourite music and how they can relate to the chosen themes in the lyrics, the way music influences their daily life and the amount of time they spend listening to music (Sandstrom 2013, 221).

There were collected details of each self-selected pop music works, including background information about the tracks and predilection on certain themes, depending on the gender of the subjects as in Peretz et al. (1998, 382). The questions related to the music pieces, strictly, required three answers, for each selected work. The three-piece selection was intended to evoke a wide range of responses, in order to understand the way music influences the personality and preferences of an individual with or without musical training as in Koelsch et al. (2006, 243).

For some questions, scores from 1 to 10 were used to evaluate the intensity of music, the positive emotions felt but also the negative ones, observing a predilection for sad themes, oriented towards anxiety, this being a characteristic of the favourite music at this age category. Thus, the music has sadness accents, which, paradoxically, positively influences the listener's psyche.

### 3.2. Procedure

The experiment aimed to highlight the stage of emotion in pop music and the role it plays in relation to the psychic of the chosen subjects. Several parameters were taken into account.

Depending on the musical preparation and genre of the subjects, the experiment was centered on a series of questions which, through the number of participants, can lead to relevant conclusions (Gabrielsson 2010, 43).

The questionnaires contained 20 questions, half of which required three answers, one for each selected musical work.

The questions were designed to report the impact on the psychic. It can provide some information regarding the intensity of the emotion.

The duality of the positive - negative character in music is very often considered as having a basic function for the emotional side as in Johnsen et al. (2009, 27).

In the experiment, the subjects had the opportunity to evaluate a musical work as having both positive traits and negative impact on emotional functions, model taken from previous studies as in Tillmann et al. (2001, 1187).

The grades from 1 to 10 are used, given the intensity and the way in which the musical work influences the mood but also the impact that the music has on the body, on the social elements and on the psychological well-being. These typical assessments may lead to signalling asymmetries, a process that could not be possible on an evaluation with only two response variants (Koelsch et al. 2006, 247).

This research aimed to focus research on the expression and expression of emotion felt in music, using experimental ones. Very important is the aspect of self-selection of musical works, here defending the major differences between the two groups of students (Rickard 2004, 374). Moreover, there are no barriers in the expression of the experiences, this model being taken from musical studies already carried out decades ago (Fitch 2006, 178).

Each subject had a predetermined period of time, this being ten minutes, to carefully choose three works from pop music, which he considered representative and with emotional impact on the psychic. During the next twenty minutes, the works could be heard up to twice, during which time the questions focused strictly on the musical work were passed. Twenty more minutes were offered for the free-answer questions, in which the rating from 1 to 10 was not used, in order to establish the intensity of the emotional experiences.

The carefully selected questions were inspired by music psychology studies, from a series of relatively recent publications, dealing with how emotion is positively or negatively affected by pop music, which has become so popular today (Rickard 2004, 220).

## 4. Results and Discussions

The differences between the male and female genres influence the musical preferences and the way the emotion is transmitted by the music. The consequences of these differences involve social, cognitive and biological factors.

By analyzing the questions that deal with the reason for listening to certain musical works, gender differences may be of greater importance. Female gender attaches more importance to meeting emotional needs through music, while young males attach greater importance to managing their social identity with music (Davies, 2003, 47). This may explain why the links between music and mood disorders are also more significant in females, because they could use music as a way of healing and stimulation.

However, regarding the emotional reactions of young people to music, no gender differences were reported. Significant bridges between the emotional signals related to the musical works and the emotional well-being were signalled, being similar links between the male and female genres.

After analyzing the questionnaires, the female subjects did not show great differences in the amount of time allotted to listening to the music, but this chapter

certainly prevails, compared to the male one. The two groups showed differences in the importance given to the lyrics, with a higher affinity, in the case of the group with specialized studies.

Young females can spend more time listening to music. This gender contrast is not always suggestive. It is also unclear whether females attach greater importance to song themes, as studies rarely consider or control lyrics.

Regarding the musical preferences among the subjects, a parallel is made with a study carried out (Fitch, 2006, 179) in which there are find certain variations within the branches of music, an example being the predilection of the female genre for pop music in which the vocal soloists are women. There are also similarities: the works of pop music performed by a male vocal soloist are equally appreciated by both categories.

It has been found that the longitudinal stability of musical options does not reveal gender contrasts. Musical tastes are diversified, the group of subjects with specialized music studies, preferring musical works with greater harmonic unfolding. In these cases, there is observed the predilection for modulations, for amplitude in orchestration, for works with tradition, listening intensely to works from Michael Jackson's repertoire.

Certain aspects of listening to works from the pop music repertoire are analyzed in the results of the study, because by choosing the musical works by the subjects, it results an unconventional feature on the educated or uneducated musical tastes.

There is observed a common feature for the group of students with a previous specialized education, by carefully selecting musical works. They do not fit into the traditional western pattern of this kind of music. If the listener's perception without prior music education is taken into account, the desire to listen to certain musical works is most likely related to psychological factors, such as the frequency with which they are exposed in the various media as in Tillmann et al. (2001, 1192), rather than musical factors, harmonic progressions and orchestral traits, which define the different forms of pop music. This psychological side refers to the importance of being able to make the difference between the offered pop music, which can be considered popular, from the point of view of specialty studies and a psychologically preferred one. The two sides are not mutually exclusive. The first one is focused on the interviewed subject, in contrast with the second one, with authoritative traits, based on what the music industry offers and promotes.

## 5. Conclusions

Music is important for quick visibility depending on social and cognitive aspects. Music has various functions in human life, most of them being social and psychological. Regarding young people, music promotes a fundamental social connection. The power of musical care stimulates and shapes interpersonal relationships in social events (auditions, concerts, meetings, ceremonies, meetings).

When individuals are in a certain context, musical options are used in managing social impressions. They can evaluate each other's similarity and acquire subtle or social perception about the personality and values of people they meet as in Peretz et al. (1998, 115).

Therefore, musical tastes may be significant when it comes to cognitive aspects and social status, psychically influencing each subject.

Specifically, people develop frameworks and stereotypes about lovers of different genres of music and this can influence the dynamics of intergroup by forming other small groups.

The conclusions of this experiment can be drawn based on two aspects of pop music - a musicological vision and a psychological perspective. The former has strong traditional features and requires knowledge of musical parameters. The psychological perspective presents a series of characteristics and processes, such as learning examples and musical styles (Rickard, 2004, 387).

An intermediate vision could be defined, which would include quasi-objective aspects, such as the study of the main music rankings and the favourite promoted themes. For a complex point of view, studies require a harmonic analysis and an overview of the instrumental. They translate the emotion felt by the listener and play an important role, regarded from the psychological perspective of music.

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