



# The influence of personality traits and depressive symptoms on music enjoyment and preference



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## Introduction

Music enjoyment and preference can be influenced by a number of factors. For example, tempo, gender of the listener, and emotionality of music can alter enjoyment of a piece (e.g. Chamorro-Premuzic, Fagan, & Furnham, 2010; Finnäs, 1989). The current investigation sought to explore additional factors known to influence music enjoyment/preference. Specifically, this study examined the relationship between three different personality characteristics (openness, empathy, & depressive symptomatology) and music enjoyment/preference. In the present study, these three characteristics were measured to determine their influence on music enjoyment & preference of positive, neutral, and negative valence music selections.

## Hypotheses

### Openness to experience

- An appreciation of art, emotion, imagination, adventure, curiosity, & a variety of experiences
- Those high in openness...
  - Experience music cognitively
  - Enjoy complex music
  - Appreciate music as art
- **Hypothesis I** - Those high in openness will enjoy positive and negative music, and will prefer these selections over neutral music.

### Empathy

- Ability to understand & share the emotions of another
- Those high in empathy relate strongly to emotional stimuli. In general, *most* listeners enjoy...
  - Emotional music
  - Music which triggers emotional memories
  - Music which is seen as relating to one's identity/emotions
- **Hypothesis II** - Those high in empathy will enjoy positive and negative music, and will prefer these selections over neutral music.

### Depression

- Not as stable of a predictor as openness/empathy
- Those with depression are drawn to negativity
  - Negative feedback seeking
  - Have friends with depression
- **Hypothesis III** - Those with high depression scores will enjoy negative music only, and will prefer negative music over positive or neutral selections.



## Methods

### Part I: Questionnaires

- Big Five Inventory
- Interpersonal Reactivity Index
- Major Depression Inventory

### Part II: Music portion

- Listened to a 30 second clip of each song
  - Positive (Eyes as Candles – Passion Pit)
  - Neutral (Slow Motion – Panda Bear)
  - Negative (Like Spinning Plates – Radiohead)
- Filled out surveys
  1. How much did you like or dislike the music you just listened to?
  2. **How would you evaluate this song as a piece of art?**
  3. **How much did you relate to this song?**

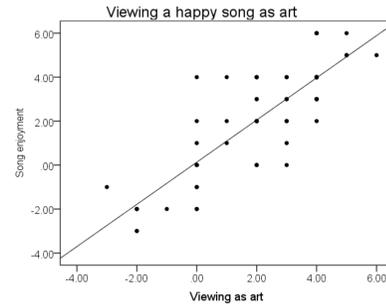
### Part III: Fake journaling activity

- Assessing music preference

## Results

### Original hypotheses

- Those high in empathy showed increased enjoyment of sad music



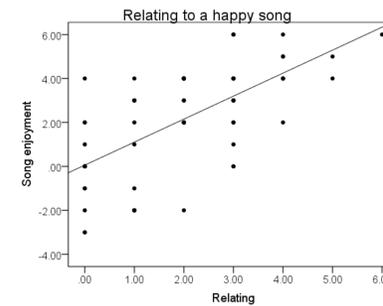
**\*\*Post-hoc analyses examined whether specific responses in Part II (bold items) predicted music enjoyment/preference.\*\***

### I. Post-hoc analyses – enjoyment

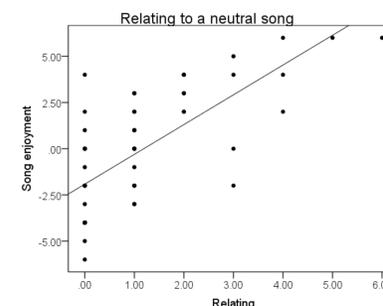
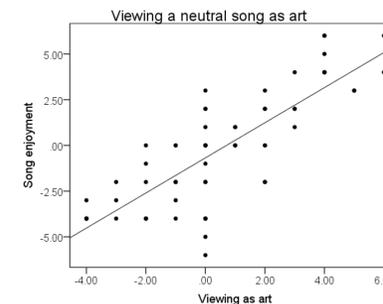
- Happy song
  - Higher ratings of viewing the song as **art** were associated with increased enjoyment
  - Higher ratings of **relating** to the song were associated with increased enjoyment



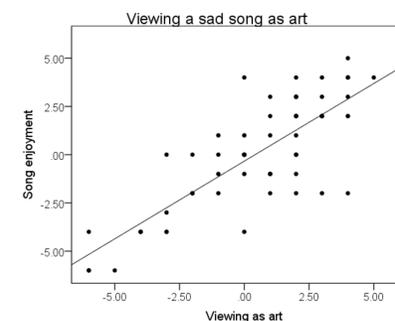
## Results (continued)



- Neutral song
  - Higher ratings of viewing the song as **art** were associated with increased enjoyment
  - Higher ratings of **relating** to the song were associated with increased enjoyment



- Sad song
  - Higher ratings of viewing the song as **art** were associated with increased enjoyment



## Results (continued)

### II. Post-hoc analyses – preference

- Happy song
  - Higher ratings of **relating** to the happy song → more likely to choose happy song over the neutral song
- Neutral song
  - Higher ratings of viewing the neutral song as **art** → more likely to choose neutral song over the happy song
  - Higher ratings of **relating** to the neutral song → more likely to choose neutral song over the happy song
- Sad song
  - Higher ratings of viewing the sad song as **art** → more likely to choose the sad song over the neutral song

## Conclusion

Initial analyses of the three primary personality characteristics revealed only one statistically significant predictor of music enjoyment (empathy). Further analysis of responses regarding individual song selections indicated a potential connection between situational personality traits and music enjoyment/preference. Specifically, it was found that considering a song to be artistic, a perspective shared by those high in openness, was associated with an increase in enjoyment for that song. Furthermore, relating strongly to a song, a defining characteristic of empathetic individuals, is associated with a higher enjoyment rating as well.

Results from the current study suggest that using specific music related assessments may be more effective than global trait assessments at establishing connections between personality traits and music preference.

## References

1. Chamorro-Premuzic, T., Fagan, P., & Furnham, A. (2010). Personality and uses of music as predictors of preferences for music consensually classified as happy, sad, complex, and social. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts, 4*(4), 205-213. doi:1.1037/a0019210
2. Finnäs, L. (1989). How can musical preferences be modified? A research review. *Council for Research in Music Education, 102*, 1–59.

## Acknowledgments

Thanks to Dr. Quin Chrobak and Mary Seaman for all their support. This research is made possible by the UW Oshkosh McNair Scholars Program, which is 100% funded through a TRIO grant from the United States Department of Education PR/Award Number P217A070188. For 2011/2012, the UW Oshkosh McNair Scholars Program received \$213,000 in federal funds.