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Musical Preference and Stress Among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Stress can be termed as a state of anxiety or mental tiredness caused by a challenging situation. That is how one reacts when they feel some type of pressure or danger. This usually occurs when a person is in a position he cannot handle or make matters right. Traditionally, techniques that were used to manage stress were the adoption of several coping strategies that fit one of three coping classifications: emotional, avoidant or problem-focused coping. There have also been numerous studies on how music can help in reducing stress, but not much about if it really does effectively serve as a coping tool. Much research has shown that listening to music allows it to be easy to reestablish emotional balance and serenity once more. However, while these do make it a very practical tool, it is still unclear to what rate it helps in relieving the toll. This paper will be used for conducting

research in relation to music preference and stress. It aims at determining whether some people prefer a certain type of music, as well as the impacts of such preferences as coping strategies on daily stress. A sample of 106 people was recruited out of which 48 females and 56 males, with regard to which the data were collected by PSQ (Perceived Stress Questionnaire) and STOMP (Short Test of Music Preferences) Questionnaire, with regard to which the sample age was between 18 years to 35 years, and the gathering technique used was a survey method including questions on demographic details, stress responses, and musical preferences

Introduction

Music is all-pervading in human existence, rubs shoulders with emotions, psychological conditions, and even physical well-being. Used not only for amusement in the centuries but also in healing, a means to teach humans how to regulate stress, tension, or emotional upset. Stress has been defined as the state of mental or emotional tension that occurs when a person becomes overwhelmed by a situation as being too great or experiences a lack of control of their life. Proper management of stress is essential to maintaining mental and physical well-being. Techniques used to manage stress include therapy, exercise, and meditation. However, listening to music is widely practiced as a real and an interesting technique that can easily fit into anyone's daily schedule. Current studies on music therapy have included using this form of therapy to treat

various types of physical and mental conditions, including anxiety, depression, and chronic pain. As music engages both the cognitive centers and the emotional centers of the brain, the primary psychological effect often is improving the mood and lowering the production of cortisol, the body's stress hormone. But while there are countless studies on music therapy, there is precious little scientific evidence about which genres of music might be better suited to doing that: that is, acting as an effective stress management tool. This investigation will question whether listening to music impacts stress and whether certain genres of music would help release more stress than other genres and, therefore, present music as a nonintrusive means of coping.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The definition of music is hard since there are very wide ranges in interpretation. For example, the ancient Greeks viewed music as an organization of tones, and modern scholarship in the form of Charles Seeger holds it as a form of structured communication. Despite such complexity, music universally carries with itself the basic elements: rhythm, harmony, and melody that make melodies into works of art that typically call for some emotional response. These answers are crucial to the effectiveness of music as a form of treatment, to better aid in self-expression, emotional discharge, and stress relief.

Scientific research in music therapy supports its practice for reducing anxiety, promoting relaxation, and even chronic health conditions. Specific styles, such as classical and jazz, are widely accepted to be very therapeutic, and sounds of nature or running water, and bird sounds, etc., are also considered to help reduce stress. These genres have helped to reduce levels of cortisol and induced relaxation and mindfulness in therapeutic settings. Self-selected music has a positive effect on mood, as individuals use it in processing their emotions, coping with the challenges they face, or distracting themselves from stressors. To illustrate, an individual might use a reflective genre such as classical or jazz for relaxation, whereas energizing music such as pop or electronic could be used to uplift and energize.

Music-based coping falls into the mainstream of coping strategies, most notably emotion-focused coping, defined as the regulation of emotional responses to stress. The theory suggests that self-chosen music may serve momentarily as a means of escape, which enables individuals to step away from their concerns. In the second place, since parts of both the neocortex and the limbic system of the brain are activated by music, such art indirectly exerts an influence on emotional processing and response to stress. In addition to its emotional function, music also improves cognitive function; listening to background music is said to improve concentration and memory, thereby indicating a dualistic role in stress.

Genre-specific effects further underscore that how certain types of music affect mood or mental conditions uniquely differ between genres; classical, which portrays complex harmonies and low tempos, always starts by decreasing stress levels while improving one's concentration. Similarly, the improvisatory and rhythmic nature of jazz calms the listener and opens up for relaxation and mental activity. Folk is characterized with easy melodies, which bring emotional grounding, being thus related to tradition and community. The current paper expands on these findings by looking into the stress-coping potential of different genres, and how those relationships are played out in real-life listening to music.

METHODOLOGY

The data was collected through an online survey, which recorded the demographic information, stress level, and preference of music from the participants. The age group 18–35 years were targeted and informed through social media regarding the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw from the survey at any time. All ethical considerations, including the guarantee of confidentiality and voluntary participation, were satisfied. By means of the **Perceived Stress Questionnaire** (PSQ), self-rated questions on stress level were taken; that is, how often the participants had felt stressed during the last month. The scale used was a 5-point Likert-scale with response options varying from "Never" to "Very Often," scored in numerical forms for a calculated assessment on their stress level. Further information was obtained by using the **Short Test of Music Preferences** (STOMP), which contains items assessing preference for all kinds of genres, such as rock, classical, pop, jazz, and electronic. Items were rated on the basis of enjoyment on a 7-point scale across different dimensions of music preferences. These were then considered in the context of stress levels, for the purpose of establishing some connections between preference for a given genre and stress-coping potential.

RESULTS

The sample size was 106: 48 female participants with an average age of 23 years, 56 male participants with an average age 25, and one who did not report their gender. Furthermore, most of the participants were middle-class according to their socioeconomic status, and nearly half of them were unemployed. Their music preferences were evaluated in the study. It was found that 29.4% preferred quiet genres like classical, jazz, and blues whereas 26.2% preferred bright and conventional genres like pop. As many as 57% of the respondents explained that listening to music reduced their stress; in particular, the reflective genres led people into relaxation. The PSQ results indicated how majorly the sample experienced moderate levels of stress but with males having reported a little more perceived stress than females. Higher perceived levels of stress tended to be associated with preferences for the reflective genres, which have generally been associated with qualities such as introspective and soothing properties. A positive correlation between music preference and response to stress suggests that at conscious or subconscious levels, people may use certain types of music as a means of managing stress.

DISCUSSION

The research focused on understanding the relationship of music preferences to stress coping or management. The results indicated that 51% of the participants considered music as a means of relieving their stress while 41% of them stated that it is helpful in that aspect sometimes and 8% of them believed that music was helpful in mitigating their stress all times. Moreover, more than half 61% of the population indicated that music also affected some of their feelings, especially different genres which made them happy, sad or angry. With respect to stress scores, the average perceived stress score for females was lower 9.3 than males 11.58 implying that generally females tend to have less stress when compared to their male counterparts. The results further showed that a majority of the participants preferred listening to music labeled as "Reflective and Complex" namely Classical, Blues, Jazz and Folk, during stressful phases. Such types of music may enhance the focus and self-regulation of a person thus acting as a diversion from the stressors. Such types of music which may be classified as Classical, are mostly the relatively quiet and peaceful music that encourages the listener to boost mental alertness. The results do put an indication that stress

probably can be alleviated with the help of reflective and complex music genres, however additional studies with greater scope and length is needed to prove this as an effective way of coping with stress. It has also been shown in earlier studies, specific (eg classical music) and soft soothing genres provided relaxation whereas genres that tended to be cheap music (e.g. heavy music, electronic music) were associated with heightened anxiety levels (Burns et al. 1999, Labbe et al. 2004).

In summation, self-selected music may be useful in stress management, but because of the small sample size and low statistical power, no firm conclusions can be drawn from the present study. There is a need for such studies in the future where bigger samples will be used to properly evaluate the music preferences in correlation to the stress reduction levels.

CONCLUSION

The article, thus, contributes to a series of researches that point to the potential of music in coping with stress management. This study found that it is through reflective and complex genres of music that this reduction in stress levels of the young adults is highly associated. Music is an available and enjoyable means of handling stress, supplementing conventional stress-reduction techniques. However, because there is variability in preference changing with age, personality, and situational conditions, the effectiveness of music for coping with stress may not be the same for all people.

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