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Music listening and emotional well-being in adolescence: A person- and variable-oriented study

Écoute de la musique et bien-être émotionnel à l'adolescence : une étude centrée sur les personnes et sur les variables

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ABSTRACT

The principal aim of this study was to determine if different profiles (types) of emotional reactions following music listening (happiness and sadness) characterized different levels of emotional well-being (i.e., positive and negative affects) in adolescence. The secondary aim was to examine relationships between social congruence in music tastes with friends or parents (i.e., sharing similar music tastes and having fewer conflicts about music) and emotional well-being in adolescence. This study's sample was composed of 316 adolescents ($M = 15.32$ and $S.D. = 0.90$ years of age; 172 girls and 144 boys). Cluster analysis identified three profiles: (1) 'emotionally-negative listeners' (medium happiness and higher sadness); (2) 'emotionally-limited listeners' (lower happiness and lower sadness); (3) 'emotionally-positive listeners' (higher happiness and lower sadness). Results indicated that 'emotionally-negative listeners' had less emotional well-being, that 'emotionally-positive listeners' had more emotional well-being, and that social congruence in music tastes with both friends and parents were related to more emotional well-being.

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RÉSUMÉ

L'objectif primaire de cette étude était de déterminer si différents profils (types) de réactions émotionnelles suite à l'écoute de la musique (bonheur et tristesse) caractérisent différents niveaux de bien-être émotionnel (i.e., affects positifs et négatifs) à l'adolescence. L'objectif secondaire était d'examiner les relations entre la congruence sociale des goûts musicaux avec les amis ou les parents (i.e., partager des goûts musicaux similaires et avoir moins de conflits à propos de la musique) et le bien-être émotionnel à l'adolescence. L'échantillon de cette étude était composé de 316 adolescents ($M = 15.32$ et $ET = 0,90$ ans ; 172 filles et 144 garçons). Une analyse par regroupements (*cluster analysis*) a identifié trois profils : (1) « auditeurs émotionnellement négatifs » (bonheur moyen et tristesse élevée) ; (2) « auditeurs émotionnellement limités » (bonheur faible et tristesse faible) ; (3) « auditeurs émotionnellement positifs » (bonheur élevé et tristesse faible). Les résultats ont indiqué que les « auditeurs émotionnellement négatifs » avaient moins de bien-être émotionnel, que les « auditeurs émotionnellement positifs » avaient plus de bien-être émotionnel et que la congruence sociale des goûts musicaux avec les amis et les parents était associée à plus de bien-être émotionnel.

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1. Introduction

As a scientific endeavour, studying the interface between developmental and music psychology is an integrative effort to understand how musically-related behaviours, emotions, and cognitions evolve across the life course and how they interact positively and/or negatively with psychosocial adaptation. The developmental study of music is thus an interdisciplinary research

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theme that cuts across several research fields, such as psychology, education, and cognitive neuroscience (e.g., Hargreaves, 1986; McPherson, 2006; Peretz and Zatorre, 2003).

In regard to the developmental implications of music listening, adolescence has been thought of being particularly meaningful, notably because motivation for music listening can reach its climax during the second decade of life (Larson, 1995; North et al., 2000; Zillmann and Gan, 1997). Improving our knowledge about the developmental implications of music listening in adolescence provides novel opportunities to better understand distinctive psychosocial needs and realities of adolescents. For instance, it has provided an original outlook to further understand developmental constructs established by mainstream psychology, such as personality, coping, or friendship (e.g., Delsing et al., 2008; Miranda and Claes, 2008, 2009; Rentfrow and Gosling, 2003; Selfhout et al., 2009). Ultimately, knowledge about the developmental roles of music can be used to optimize evidence-based prevention and intervention programs insofar as making them more developmentally attuned to the lifestyle of contemporary adolescents (see Lemieux et al., 2008). Moreover, developmentally attuned music therapies for adolescents can intervene on and inform about key aspects of individual and social youth development, such as identity formation, resilience, connectedness, and competence (McFerran, 2010).

Music listening is usually a pleasurable, gratifying, and valuable daily experience throughout the life course. Nonetheless, in terms of psychosocial adaptation, music listening in adolescence can also relate (either as a protective or risk factor) to various indicators of psychopathology. Therefore, it is also possible to talk about a 'developmental psychopathology of music listening' as a research topic implicitly shared by several studies in adolescence. For instance, recent studies have shown complex longitudinal links between different music listening behaviours and externalizing problem behaviours in adolescence, such as aggression (Selfhout et al., 2008). Recent studies have also identified complex longitudinal relationships between different music listening behaviours and internalizing symptoms in adolescence, such as depression (Miranda and Claes, 2008). Recent literature reviews have also scrutinized developmental issues surrounding music in adolescence (see North and Hargreaves, 2008). Overall, such developmental studies and reviews (whether on externalizing or internalizing symptoms) deepen our understanding of adaptive (or maladaptive) music listening as it relates to the negative end of the continuum of mental health: psychopathology.

Conversely, the present study strived to improve our knowledge about the relationships between music listening in adolescence and the positive end of the continuum of mental health: subjective well-being. Subjective well-being is colloquially referred to as "happiness", and it can be scientifically defined as the optimal presence of higher levels of positive affect (pleasant emotions), lower levels of negative affect (unpleasant emotions), and higher levels of life satisfaction (see Diener, 2000). As such, this study was inspired by the gradual shift of psychology from its traditional emphasis on psychopathology to placing a stronger consideration on the study of positive human development. The recent movements of *positive psychology* and of *psychology of positive youth development* are representative examples of this scientific trend (Larson, 2000; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Therefore, it is within a 'positively-oriented' developmental research that the present study undertook to investigate links between music listening and adolescents' *emotional well-being*, a construct consisting of higher positive affect and lower negative affect. In fact, it seemed especially pertinent to focus on the emotional component of subjective well-being (i.e., positive and negative affects) as music listening is profoundly tied to both positive and negative emotional experiences (Juslin and Sloboda, 2010).

Lastly, the developmental roles of music listening in adolescence can also be organized by two overarching motivation systems. The first motivation system is responsible for the satisfaction of individual needs (e.g., emotion regulation, aesthetic appreciation, coping) whereas the second is responsible for the satisfaction of social needs (e.g., social identity, relationships with peers, membership to musical subcultures) (Bakagiannis and Tarrant, 2006; Miranda and Claes, 2009). In this study, this framework was used to account for individual experiences (emotional reactions from music listening) and social experiences (social congruence in music tastes with friends or parents) involved in the music listening of adolescents.

1.1. Individual experiences: emotions from music listening and emotional well-being

Research suggests that positive and negative affects are two fundamental and distinct dimensions structuring emotions (Watson and Tellegen, 1985). For instance, it is possible to have simultaneously negative emotions and positive emotions towards (or as a result) of any given experience – what is colloquially referred to as having "mixed feelings". In other words, there is mounting empirical evidence that different levels of negative emotions and positive emotions can be experienced simultaneously in each and every person (Watson and Clark, 1997). In parallel, two of the basic emotions that are activated by music listening are happiness (positive) and sadness (negative) (Kallinen, 2005). In this regard, the field of cognitive neuroscience provides compelling biological evidence for the direct influence of music on human emotions (see Juslin and Sloboda, 2010; Peretz and Zatorre, 2003). Additionally, recent experimental studies indicated that both positive and negative emotional responses can coexist within the same music listening experience (Hunter et al., 2008). Lastly, follow-up studies in natural settings – using an *experience sampling method* that provided a random sample of everyday emotional states – corroborated that, on average and to various degrees, both happiness and sadness are experienced from everyday life music listening (Juslin et al., 2008). In other words, different levels of negative emotions and positive emotions can be experienced simultaneously when one person listens to music.

Can different patterns of this simultaneous experience of happiness and sadness from music listening be associated with adolescents' emotional well-being? Firstly, this seems likely if one considers the importance that many adolescents give to music and the great amount of music listening they can experience on a daily basis (Roberts et al., 2004). Secondly, one should also add to this consideration that daily music listening conveys mild and cumulative emotional experiences that can become significant over time (Sloboda, 2010). However, to the best of our knowledge, research has rarely studied relationships between basic emotional reactions from music listening and emotional well-being in adolescence, as the most related research on music in adolescence has prioritized the study of health risks, social issues, and psychopathology. For instance, in terms of externalizing problem behaviours, Roberts et al. (1998b) found that negative emotions experienced from music listening was a robust predictor of health risk behaviours (e.g., drug use, violence) in a sample of adolescents. In terms of internalizing problem behaviours, Martin et al. (1993) have reported that experiencing more sadness as a result of music listening can also be associated with higher levels of depression.

In sum, a generally positive emotional experience from music listening could be part of, or play a role in, the normative psychosocial development of adolescents. The current literature provides some converging evidences supporting this assumption. Firstly, among main reasons, adolescents report listening to music because it provides positive and enjoyable experiences (North et al., 2000;

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