

Emotion regulation motives in music listening

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Disciplinary background A. Emotion regulation research

Emotion regulation describes measures taken to influence one's emotional state (Gross, 2002). Recent research not only investigates how people want to regulate their emotions, but also why they wish to do so (Tamir, 2016). Negative emotions, like sadness and anger, can be useful in specific situations, and may be the goal of mood regulation (Tamir, 2016). Certain social situations, rituals for example, may ask for the experience or expression of certain emotions to facilitate participation, or feeling connected with others. Tamir (2016) distinguishes between hedonic and instrumental motives. The former describes motives which directly focus on enhancing positive (prohedonic motives) or negative (contrahedonic motives). Instrumental motives aim at achieving emotional states to facilitate performance on tasks (performance motives), social interactions and participation in mutual activities (social motives), to gain insight in oneself (epistemic motives), or to find meaning and grow as a person (eudaimonic motives).

Disciplinary background B. Music listening behaviour

Research on emotion regulation through music listening largely focused on different strategies applied by listeners (e.g. Saarikallio, 2008). The questions as to why listeners use music to regulate their emotions remains, however, mostly unaddressed. Investigating motives may prove fruitful in understand how, when, and where mood regulation through music is most useful. This interdisciplinary approach may, for instance, contribute to the question why people already in a negative mood deliberately choose to listen to music of equally negative valence (Van den Tol, A. J. M. & Edwards, 2013). Furthermore, little is known so far about the participatory aspects of emotion regulation through music listening, i.e., which role present or imagined others play in this process.

Abstract

The present research aims to integrate recent theoretical and empirical progress from the field of emotion regulation into research on music listening behaviour. The main research questions are: Do emotion regulation motives also play a role in music listening and do motives differ between regulated emotions? Which role do participatory aspects play for these motives?

As this study is the first attempt to apply this perspective, we chose an open-ended format for our questionnaire (N = 97, Age: M = 37.7, SD = 16.0; Sex: 59% female, 40% male, 1% diverse). Four blocks of questions were presented to participants, asking about situations in which participants listened to music to regulate happiness, sadness, anger, or other emotions, respectively. Participants were asked why they wanted to regulate the respective emotion through music listening. To investigate in how far emotion regulation through music listening is a participatory activity we asked about the number of others present in the situation and we investigated the answers on motives for their importance for social situations beyond specific social motives.

Participants stated 135 episodes in which they regulated their emotions through music listening. Participant's answers on regulation motives were coded according to Tamir's taxonomy by three coders. It was possible to code up to three motives per episode, which resulted in 177 coded motives. Inter-rater reliability was high (happiness $\alpha = .76$, sadness $\alpha = .87$, anger $\alpha = .87$, other emotions $\alpha = .88$). Prohedonic motives accounted for 40% of all emotion regulation episodes, contrahedonic motives accounted for 18%, performance motives for 17%, social motives for 6%, epistemic motives for 7%, and eudaimonic motives for 14%. Especially other emotions were regulated for social motives (23%) e.g., participating in political activities or being intimate with others. Participants aimed at regulating their emotions to participate in social situations in 20% of the reported episodes. While participants regulated sadness almost exclusively in private (95%), happiness and anger are regulated with at least one other person present in 20-30% of the episodes.

Interdisciplinary implications. Interdisciplinary implications. Approaching emotion regulation through music listening from an interdisciplinary perspective that looks at both the how and why question, increases our understanding of this important function of music listening. Motives for emotion regulation in a situation are crucial for understanding the complexity of emotion regulation through music listening. The results also indicate that albeit emotion regulation appears to be done mainly in private, it has also important functions for social situations and participating in social activities. The present research is the first attempt to integrate emotion regulation motives into music listening behaviour. Future work needs to further pursue this interdisciplinary perspective and investigate its potential for overall wellbeing.

References

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