"Sing Me a Sad Song and Make Me Feel Better": Exploring Rewards Related to Liking Familiar Sad Music

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Introduction

- **Testing Levinson (1997)**
- Levinson (1997) states that people like listening to sadness-inducing music because the music induces positive, hedonic rewards. Before obtaining these rewards, the listener must meet three precursors:

  1. Song must be familiar but not too familiar.
  2. Listeners must only pay attention to the song.
  3. Listeners must allow the song to move them.

- There are eight of these rewards, but this experiment tested the following:

  Emotional Communion:
  "[t]he sense of intimate contact with the mind or soul of another, the sense that one is clearly not alone in the universe" (p.236). This reward is a function of absorbing oneself into the song.

- Hogue (2013) tested Levinson's (1997) idea of emotional communion and found no difference between unfamiliar, instrumental excerpts that induce happiness compared to sadness. This finding supports Levinson's first precursor and suggest that familiar songs are necessary to test.

- **Hypothesis:**
- Compared to unfamiliar songs or songs from another participant, familiar songs would have higher communion scores. Songs that induced sadness would have similar communion scores to songs that induced happiness.

Method

- **Participants**
- Using the Psychology Research Pool, 82 people participated. Participants were mostly Caucasian (62%) and women (68%). The majority (75%) were also nonmusicians.
- Three people's data were removed completely. Data from specific songs were also removed because they did not meet the operational definition of familiarity.

- **Materials**
- **Liking:** Preference Subscale (Schafter and Sedlmeier, 2010). Cronbach's Alpha = .82 - .94
- **Absorption:** Absorption in Music Scale (AIMS; Sandstrom & Russo, 2013). Cronbach's Alpha = .89
- **Communion:** Communication Subscale (Schafter & Sedlmeier, 2010). Cronbach's Alpha = .89 - .95
- **Emotions:** Happiness, Sadness, and Satisfaction on 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Intenseley felt emotion*) Likert-type scales
- **Songs (Happiness- and Sadness-inducing):**
  1. **Unfamiliar:** *Spin Me Around* by Patent Pending and *Accidental Babies* by Damien Rice.
  2. **Prior-participant:** The self-selected songs from the participant prior each participant.
  3. **Familiar:** Self-selected songs that induced happiness and sadness.

- **Procedure**
- All participants listened to the songs and completed the scales. Half the participants completed the AIMS before listening to the songs. The other half completed it after listening to the songs.

Results

- **Emotions**
- The interaction between the songs and the type of emotion evoked was significant, Greenhouse-Geisser $\varepsilon = .71$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .72$. All songs evoked their intended emotions except for the prior-participant's song that induced sadness, $p = .07$. See Figure 1.

- **Properties of Songs**
- A Cohen Kappa analysis showed that an independent rater agreed with the participants 17% of the time on the emotionality of the song, $p = .03$.
- A chi-square test of association showed no association between the modality of the songs and the emotionality of the songs, $\chi^2(2) = 1.75$, $p = .42$.
  - **Familiar Songs That Induced Happiness:** 29% minor modality, 71% major modality
  - **Familiar Songs That Induced Sadness:** 36% minor modality, 64% major modality
- A 2 x 2 within-subjects ANOVA showed tempo was not different between the songs with a major modality and the songs with a minor modality, $p = .36$ (See Figure 2). The familiar songs that induced happiness had a faster tempo than the familiar songs that induced sadness, $p = .002$ (See Figure 3). The interaction between these variables did not significantly impact tempo, $p = .26$.

- **Testing Emotional Communion**
- Primary results showed that the familiar songs had higher communion scores than the unfamiliar and prior-participant songs, $ps < .001$. The songs that induced happiness evoked higher communion scores than the songs that induced sadness, $p = .04$. The interaction showed that communion scores were higher for the unfamiliar song that induced happiness than they were for the unfamiliar song that induced sadness ($p < .001$) but not for the familiar or the prior-participant songs, $p < .52$. See Figure 4.

Discussion

- **Testing Levinson (1997)**
- These results support Levinson's theory that songs that induced sadness can be rewarding and show that for familiar, self-selected songs, the reward is just as strong as in music that induces happiness. They did not support Hogue's (2013) findings.
- These results suggest that songs the client chooses obtain the strongest cognitive-emotional nonmusical outcomes, regardless of the emotional content. Based on these data, unfamiliar songs that were chosen specifically for their musical qualities and prior-participant songs that evoke emotions in someone else do not have the same impact as familiar, self-selected songs.

- **Implications for Music Therapy**
- Thaut and Davis (1993) stated that clients should choose their own music based on their personal preferences to decrease anxiety and increase relaxation. The results support this line of reasoning.
- These results suggest people emotionally react differently to another person's songs, especially the songs that induce sadness. This finding poses a problem for group music therapy, where a song might be familiar for one client but unfamiliar to another person.

Figure 1

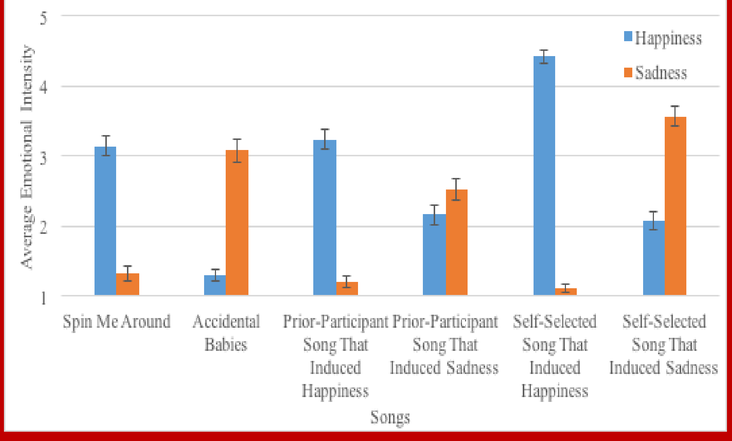


Figure 2

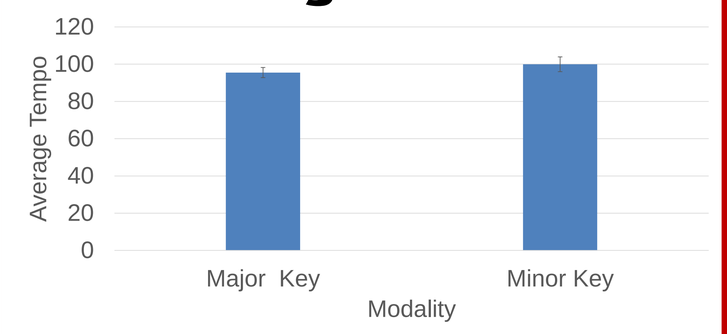


Figure 3

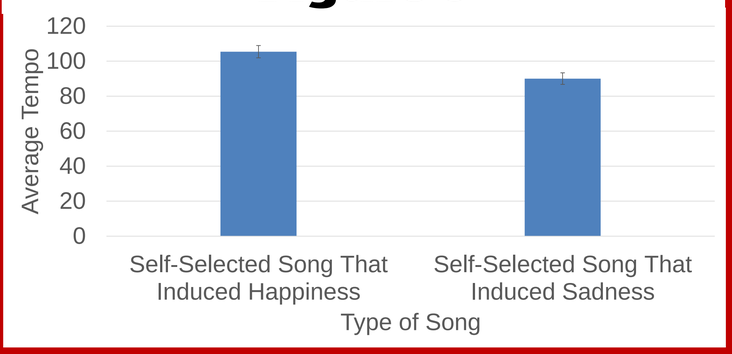
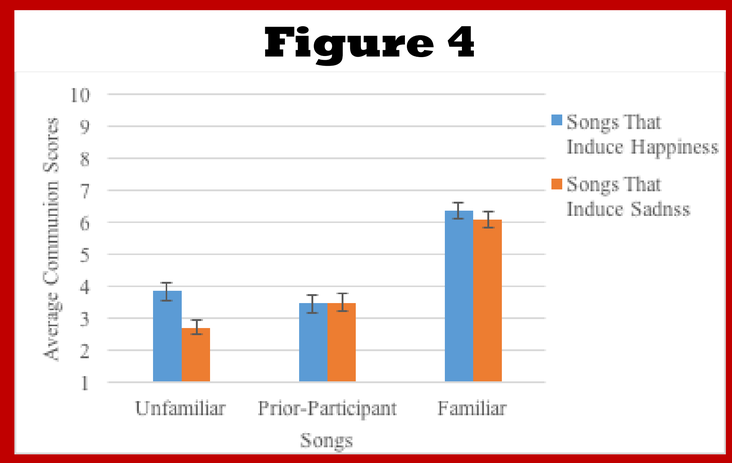


Figure 4



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