"TAKE A SAD SONG AND MAKE IT BETTER": EXPLORING REWARDS RELATED TO LIKING UNFAMILIAR SAD MUSIC

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Introduction

- Levinson (1997) theorized that people like music that makes them sad, because they receive hedonic rewards from the experience. Examples of his hedonic rewards are suggestions that people are rewarded through listening to sad songs by liking the emotional experiences (positive or negative), gaining an understanding of emotions through practicing emotions, resolving emotional turmoil, engaging in a catharsis, creating a need for intimacy, and allowing an emotional conversation to occur. Levinson (1997) also states rewards from absorbing oneself into the music. He believes through placing oneself in the music, one can resolve emotions, bring an emotion to full fruition as if it were generated naturally, and commune with the music (reward of intimacy).

- Moreover, Levinson (1997) argues that listeners can feel satisfaction from the sadness. In other words, we savor the negative emotions, practice different negative emotions, and gain an understanding of them, so that we feel the negative state of sadness and are then positively reinforced with feeling satisfaction. Emotional practice is stated to be more a result of negative emotions and not positive. Levinson discusses satisfaction as both a mediator and a moderator. These rewards of satisfaction are discussed in terms of mediation and moderation. He clearly states that emotional states from music can cause satisfaction, which can cause liking. Upon further reading, he suggests that if we can find satisfaction in the emotions and if the by emotion is not too intense, then listeners will be positively reinforced and like the song. Unfortunately, he leaves the reader to infer that the more satisfaction the listener has with the song, the more he or she will like it. See Figure 1 for an overview of this process.

- Based on Levinson's writing, a path diagram was interpreted. Figure 1 shows this interpreted model. It states that the music directly creates the hedonic rewards (nonmusical outcomes), emotions mediate the direct path, absorption moderates every part of the mediation and direct path. It also states that the emotion create satisfaction, which causes people to like the music, and that satisfaction moderates that emotion and liking relation.
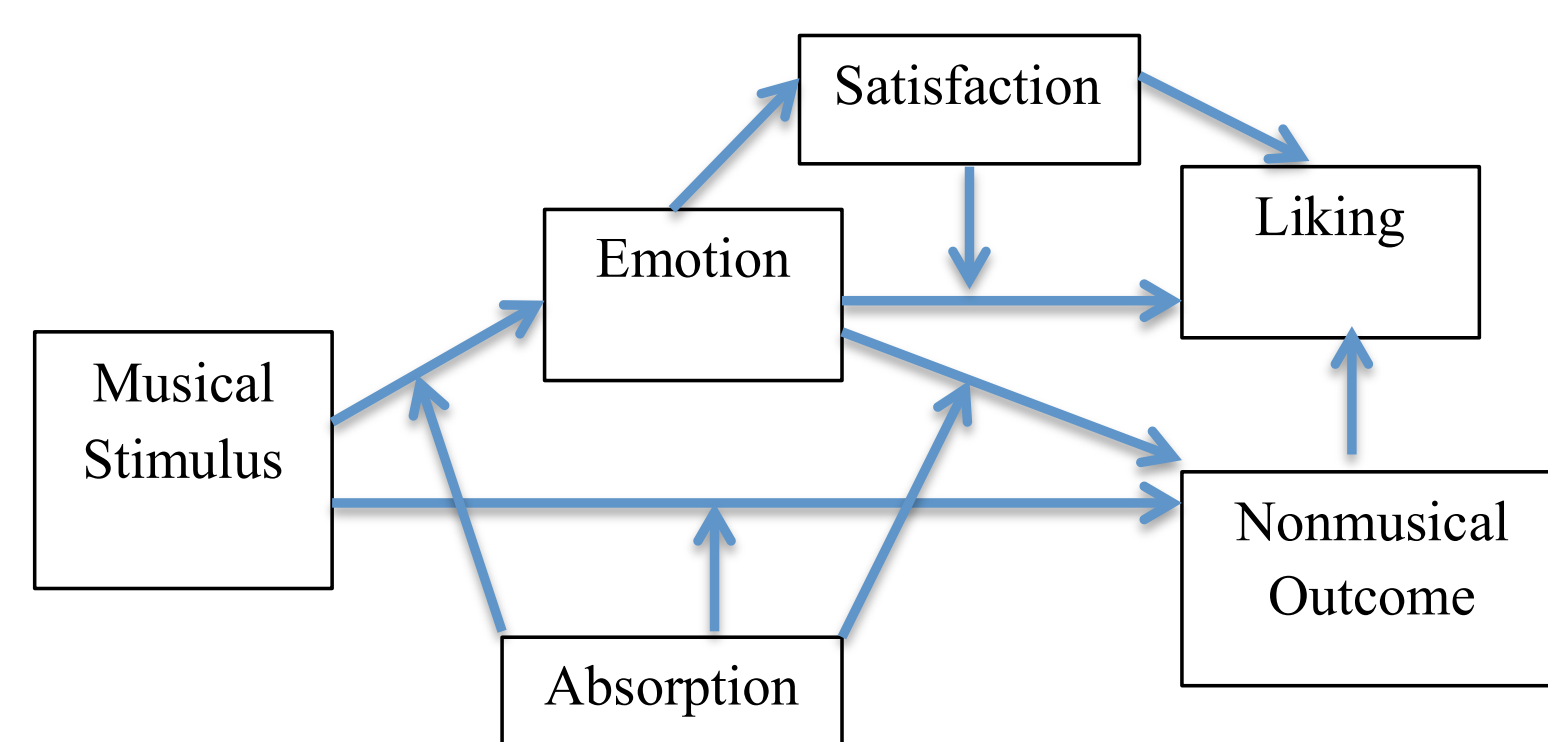
Figure 1

Figure 1. This is a path diagram showing Levinson's (1997) ideas of liking sad music.

Hypotheses

- Levinson's (1997) ideas have not been tested, so the current study tested them To keep things simple, the current study tested the emotion and satisfaction moderation on liking the song and the emotion mediation between the musical stimulus and the nonmusical outcome.

- **Moderation**
  - It was hypothesized that the effect of the emotion on liking would depend on satisfaction. This effect is expected for both happiness and sadness.

- **Mediation**
  - It was predicted that the fast, major and slow, minor songs would create happiness and sadness, respectively. It was also predicted that happiness would either positively or negtively predict a nonmusical outcome. For sadness, it was hypothesized that it would positively predict a nonmusical outcome.

Method

- **Participants**
  - This study obtained 85 participants. The average age of the participants was 20.07 (SD = 2.34) and ranged from 18 to 33. There were 72 females and 13 males, and the vast majority of participants (79%) were Caucasian.

- **Materials**
  - To measure liking of a song, the current study used the Preference subscale from Schäfer and Sedlmeier (2010). Cronbach's alpha = .94 - .96
    - Example Items:
      - "I like this music"
      - "I could not live without this music."
  - To measure the nonmusical outcome, the Communication subscale from Schäfer and Sedlmeier (2010) was used. Cronbach's alpha = .94
    - Example Items:
      - "This music helps me connect with others"
      - "This music provides me with interesting or important information."
  - Happiness, sadness, and satisfaction were measured individually on 1 (*Not Felt at All*) to 5 (*Extremely Intense Emotion*) Likert-type scales.
  - The stimuli in this study involved 3 instrumental 50 s clips of music:
    - **Fast, Major**: Vivaldi's *Concerto (Sinfonia) in D Major*
    - **Repetitive**: Moby's *Hymn*
    - **Slow, Minor**: Debussy's *Prelude: Des Pas sur la Neige*

- **Procedure**
  - All participants were assigned to a condition using a Latin-square design. All participants listened to all 3 pieces and rated their emotional experience, their satisfaction and liking, and their communicative connection with the pieces.

Results

- **Evoked Emotions**
  - There was not a significant difference in emotion between the songs (Wilk's Λ = .97, p = .28, η^2 = .03), but the participants felt happiness during the songs much more strongly than they felt sadness, Wilk's Λ = .62, p < .001, η^2 = .86. The interaction between the felt emotions and the songs was also significant, p < .001, η^2 = .76. Post-hoc analyses revealed that Vivaldi had higher happiness scores than Moby and Debussy. Debussy had higher sadness scores than Moby and Vivaldi. Moby was in between both songs for each emotion (ps < .001). See Figure 2.

- **Moderation**
  - Happiness did not significantly predict liking (β = .16, p = .15), but satisfaction did, β = .25, p = .03. These explained a significant portion of the variance, R^2 = .12, p = .006. The interaction between happiness and satisfaction was entered in step 2 but did not significantly predict liking, β = .16, p = .25. It did not explain a significant portion of the change in variance, ΔR^2 = .02, p = .25.
  - Once 4 outliers were removed, sadness did not predict liking (β = -.12, p = .16), but satisfaction did, β = .65, p < .001. They significantly explained about half of the variance, R^2 = .50, p < .001. In step 2, the interaction between sadness and satisfaction was significant β = -.22, p = .006. It also significantly explained the change in variance, ΔR^2 = .05, p = .006. Low satisfaction (β = .08, p = .52) and average satisfaction (β = -.12, p = .19) did not influence sadness's effect of liking. High satisfaction did have a significant effect, β = -.32, p = .006. See Figure 3.

- **Mediation**
  - The mediation was tested using Judd, Kenny, and McClelland's (2001) guidelines for mediation with a within-subjects design. The difference scores represent the total effect the music's evoked emotions have on the nonmusical outcome. The summed scores test if the the scores increase at the same rate for each song.
  - In the first analysis, happiness in Vivaldi was subtracted by the happiness in Moby. The difference in happiness significantly predicted the difference in communication, β = .38, p < .001. The sum of the scores did not significantly predict the communication scores, β = .14, p = .17. They explained a significant portion of the variance, R^2 = .15, p < .001.
  - For the second analysis, sadness in Debussy was subtracted by sadness in Moby. The difference in sadness did not significantly predict communication, β = -.09, p = .41. They also did not predict communication, β = .07, p = .54. They did not explain a significant portion of the variance, either, R^2 = .01, p = .59.
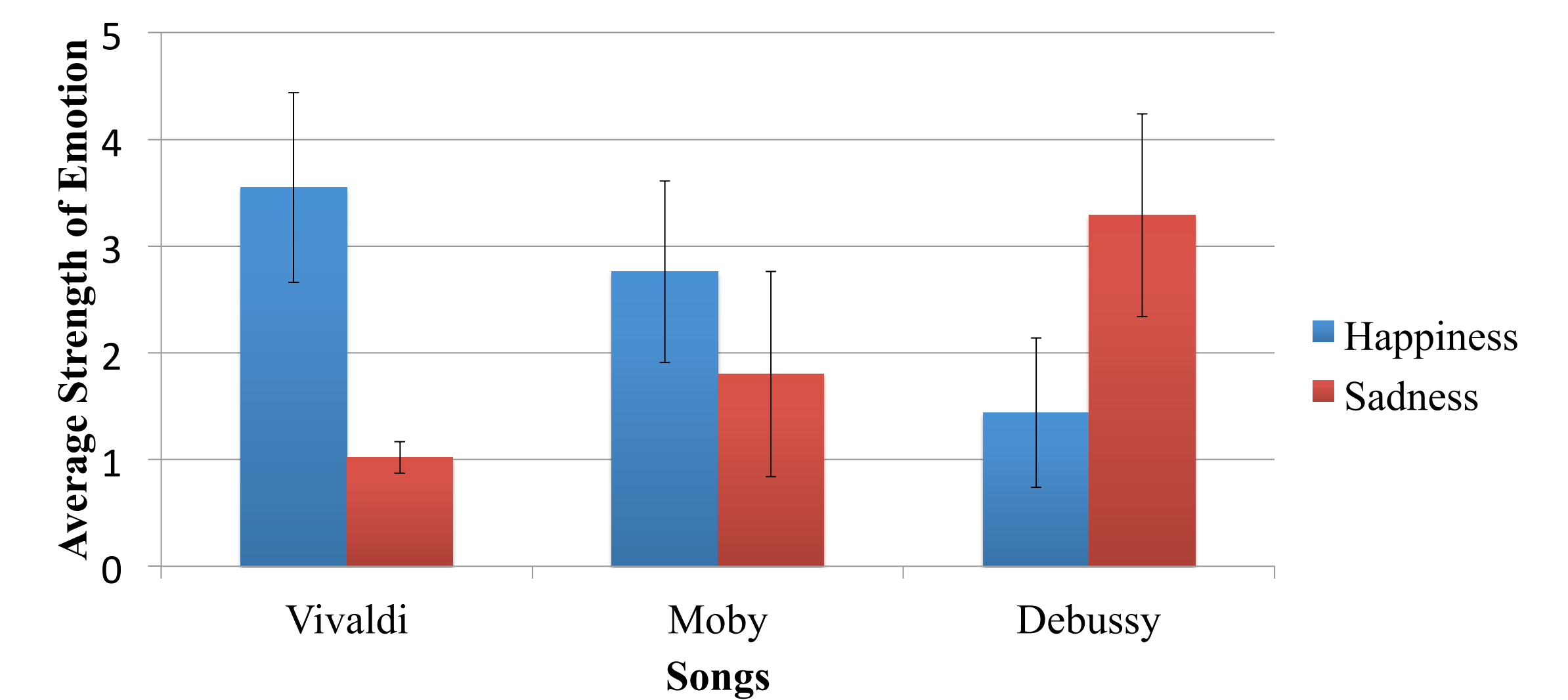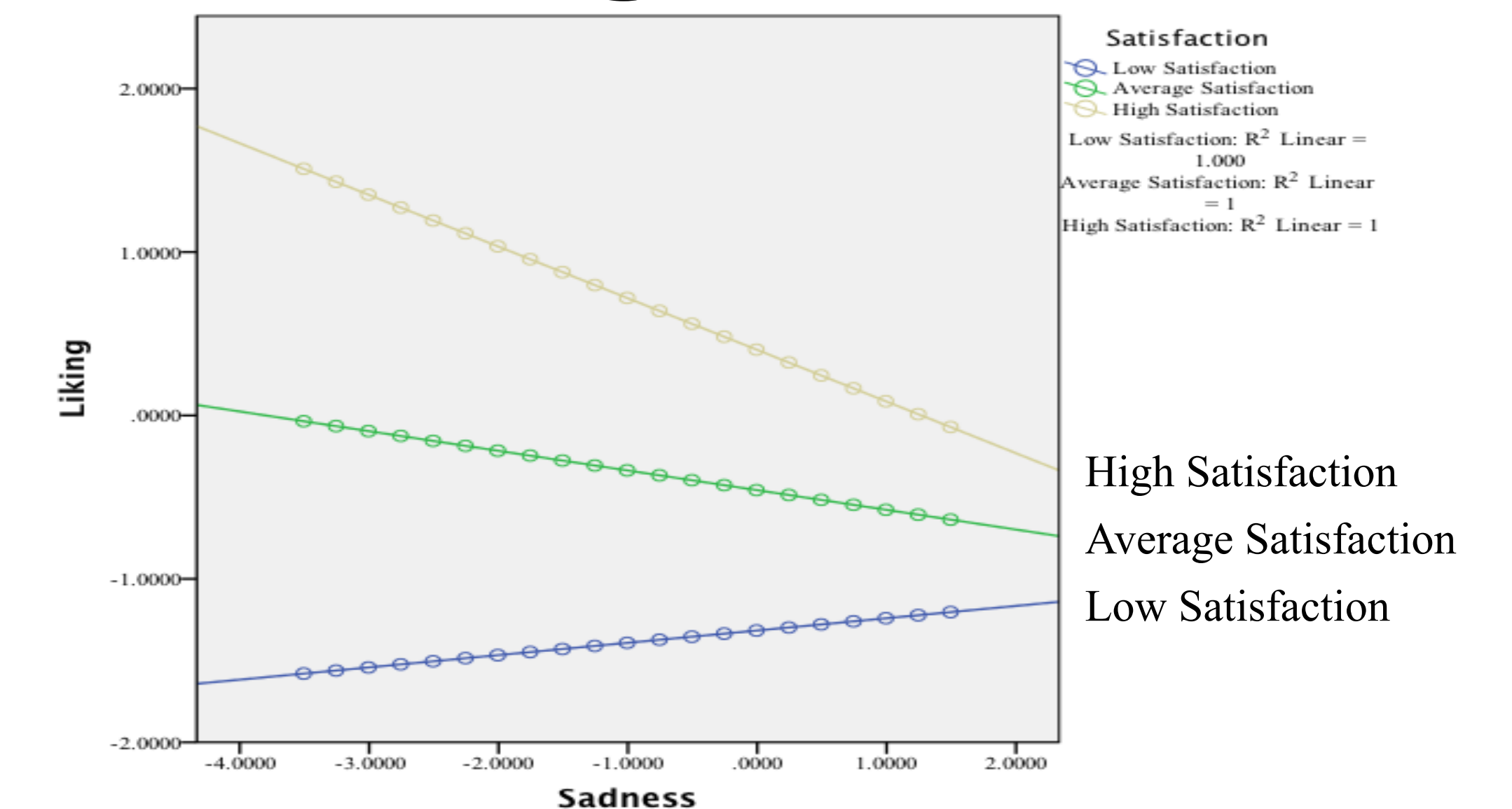
Figure 2

Figure 3

Discussion

- Levinson's (1997) theory that the satisfaction from the emotion is a reason why people like a slow, minor song was not supported. Satisfaction did not moderate happiness, but it did moderate sadness. Even though it moderated sadness, the people with high satisfaction liked the song less as sadness increased. The participants did like the song more as their satisfaction increased, but the moderation showed an opposite effect that Levinson hypothesized. His emotional reward of savoring feelings was not supported.

- Levinson's (1997) reward of emotional experience, where the emotions mediate the song's ability to create the communion was not wholly supported, either. Levinson discusses this reward in terms of sadness creating our connection with the song. This mediation was not the case. Instead, happiness predicted the communion, which Levinson stated was also plausible.

- It was found that people like music, whether it evokes sadness or happiness, more as their satisfaction increases, but this is only true if too much sadness is not evoked in people who feel high satisfaction with the song. Supporting the mood-arousal theory (Husain et al., 2008), feeling happiness with the song positively predicted having a communication with the song. Because none of Levinson's rewards were unearthed in these data, it is impossible to say that people like music that makes them sad because of some benefit they receive from it. It is possible, however, to say that the more satisfaction you have with the song, the more you will like it, as long as it does not make you too sad.

- Despite the lack of support for Levinson's (1997) rewards, these results have clinical applications in a music therapy setting. According to these results, the music should be music that makes the person happy. This happiness can come from the music that is intended to make the listener sad but should induce high satisfaction and little sadness.