

Abstract

Helsing, M. (2012). *Everyday music listening: The importance of individual and situational factors for musical emotions and stress reduction*. Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Music listening primarily evokes positive emotions in listeners. Research has shown that positive emotions may be fundamental for improving both psychological and physical aspects of well-being. Besides from the music itself it is essential to consider individual and situational factors when studying emotional experiences to music. Everyone does not respond in the same way to a piece of music and one individual may respond differently to a piece of music at different times. The main aim with the four papers in this thesis was to explore the effects of everyday music listening on emotions, stress and health. By using the Day Reconstruction Method (DRM), a new approach was taken to study the prevalence of musical emotions in everyday life. In the DRM the previous day is divided into episodes, in terms of activity, experienced emotions, and time of day. The results from study I showed that music occurred in 30 % of the episodes and that positive emotions were more often and more intensively experienced in musical episodes than in non-musical episodes. Music was also related to lower stress levels and higher health scores. The results from study II showed that if music occurred in the episode after a particularly stressful episode, the stress level was lower in both that episode and in the next one compared to if music did not occur. A mediation analysis suggested that the positive emotions induced by the music were mediating the effect of music on stress. The results did also show that liking of the music affected the level of stress. In study III, an experiment group who listened to their self-chosen music on mp3-players when arriving home from work every day for 30 minutes for two weeks' time was compared to a control group who relaxed without music and with a baseline week when the experiment group relaxed without music. The results showed that although no significant differences were found between the groups, the experiment group showed an increase in intensity of positive emotions and decrease in perceived stress level and cortisol levels over time. No such changes were found within the control group. In study IV, data from study I and III was reanalysed with the purpose of exploring the associations between personality and emotional responses to music. The results showed that the associations between personality and intensity of positive emotions, perceived stress, and use of emotion regulation strategies differed in the two datasets and these inconsistencies indicate that personality is not the main contributor to emotional responses to music. Overall, the results from this thesis indicate that everyday music listening is an easy and effective way of improving well-being and health by its ability to evoke positive emotions and thereby reduce stress. But not just any music will do since the responses to music are influenced by individual and situational factors.

Keywords: emotion, everyday life, health, music listening, personality, stress.

Everyday music listening: The importance of individual and situational factors for musical emotions and stress reduction.

Marie Helsing

Department of Psychology

Avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i psykologi som med vederbörligt tillstånd av samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Göteborgs Universitet kommer att offentligens försvaras fredagen den 17 februari 2012, kl. 10.00, sal F1, Psykologiska institutionen, Haraldsgatan 1, Göteborg.

Fakultetsopponent Suzanne Hanser

Department of Music Therapy, Berklee College of Music, Boston, USA

The thesis consists of the following four studies referred to by their roman numerals:

- I. Helsing, M., Västfäll, D., Juslin, P. N., & Hartig, T. (2011). A day reconstruction method study of musical emotion in everyday life. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- II. Helsing, M., Västfäll, D., Juslin, P. N., & Hartig, T. (2011). Associations between everyday music listening and self-reported stress. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- III. Helsing, M., Västfäll, D., Juslin, P. N., Hartig, T., & Bjälkebring, P. (2011). A quasi-experimental study of the effects of listening to self-chosen music on emotions, stress and cortisol levels compared to relaxation without music. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- IV. Helsing, M., Västfäll, D., Juslin, P. N., & Hartig, T. (2011). Associations between personality and emotional responses to music. Manuscript submitted for publication.



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