PERCEPTION AND RESPONSES TO SCHEMATA IN DIFFERENT CULTURES: WESTERN AND ARAB MUSIC

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Background

Many studies have examined aspects of perception and response, but mainly with Western material and Western subjects. Here we want to contribute to filling this gap.

Assumptions

- Much of musical talent and listening to music, like mathematical aptitude, is expressed in the form of skill at uncovering schemata that are formulated unconsciously in our minds.
- The specific (unconscious) "selection" of natural and learned schemata (manifested in various principles of musical organization) reflects the "aesthetic ideal" of a period or culture.
- The basic variables of cognitive activity are difference/similarity and salience/non-salience, which are influenced by the listener's background and types of schemata.

Aims

- Immediate: to examine the analytical aspect of music perception experimentally, addressing the characteristics of the schemata, musical culture, musical knowledge, and mathematical aptitude
- More general: to increase our understanding of the meaning of the schemata in terms of types of experiences

Method

We carried out an experiment on the responses of 75 Arabs and Westerners, with various amounts of music education, to Arab and Western music, which have very different ideals and schemata (represented here by patterns in various categories), and to series of numbers.

Tasks: Repeat each numerical pattern (20 altogether) in writing; compare musical patterns in pairs (33 Western and 16 Arab) and mark whether they are very different, similar, or identical; explain how the musical patterns are similar or different; to sing 20 patterns; specify the strategy used in both music and mathematics

Results

The results indicate that the subjects' responses are influenced by all of the factors investigated. They pointed to the importance of the analytical aspect, confirmed the significance of the groups of subjects, and produced an interesting hierarchy among the schemata in terms of the responses of the subjects as a whole and of the various groups.

Conclusion

Further research is required, but already the experimental findings support the hypothesis regarding the sources of influences on musical perception and memory and strengthen the hypothesis that the selection of schemata is not the result of conventions.

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