SENSATION SEEKING, MUSIC PREFERENCE, AND PSYCHOPHYSIOLOGICAL REACTIVITY

Urs M. Nater, Monika Krebs, Ulrike Ehlert

University of Zurich, Dept. Clinical Psychology II, Switzerland

Background

The personality construct ‚sensation seeking' (SS) as defined by Zuckerman can be used as an explanation for behavioral phenomena that are wide spread but little understood, such as the preference of arousing music styles. Embedded in a psychobiological theory of personality, SS is closely related to a number of biological variables.

Aims

We hypothesized that subjects with high levels of SS would prefer aggressive and arousing music to peaceful and comforting music and show attenuated psychophysiological reactivity to aggressive and arousing music.

Method

A total of 53 healthy subjects (mean age: 26.13, SD: 3.97; 26 males, 27 females) was examined. For evaluation of SS the german version of the Sensation Seeking Scale V (SSS V) was applied. Heart rate, electrodermal activity, skin temperature, salivary cortisol, and salivary alpha-amylase were assessed during the course of the whole study. After a baseline period, two musical stimuli that were carefully selected and rated in a pre-study as peaceful and comforting (renaissance music) and aggressive and arousing (heavy metal), respectively, were presented on two different days via headphones during 10 minutes in a randomized order.

Results

Preliminary results suggest that subjects with high levels of SS are more likely to rate their psychological state after the aggressive stimulus as less aroused ($r = -.31$; $p < .05$) and more comforted ($r = .32$; $p < .05$) than subjects with low levels of SS.

Psychophysiological and endocrinological parameters have not been analyzed yet and will be presented at the conference.

Conclusions

SS seems to be associated with the psychological experience of aggressive and arousing music. Whether this relationship holds true on a physiological dimension remains to be seen. Implications for research in music preference and music therapy will be discussed.