

PERCEIVING AND REASONING ABOUT MUSICAL STYLES AND THEIR LISTENERS: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL IDENTITY

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Background

Musical preferences play a role in constructing and presenting identity. Group membership information is used in inferring musical preference. Musical preference, in turn, reflects on expectations and evaluations about others.

Aims

One aim was to show that members of two student organizations related to two musical styles (Turkish folk music and rock) perceived their own musical style and listeners of that style more positively than the other style and its listeners. A second aim was to show that group members used information in a way that would maintain their perception of the two groups.

Method

Members of two student organizations, one promoting Turkish folklore and the other organizing student bands that play rock music, were given questionnaires. Participants were asked to describe Turkish folk music and rock music, listeners of these styles, and themselves on scales that had been developed in an earlier study. In addition, in a task modeled after Wason's selection task, participants were asked to rate how relevant different pieces of information were for judging the truth of statements that attributed positive or negative qualities to listeners of Turkish folk music and rock.

Results

Although there was some consensus about which qualities described the two styles of music and their listeners better, members of the two groups tended to exaggerate differences that were in favor of their group and minimize differences that were in favor of the opposite group. In the Wason task, participants showed greater willingness to look for confirmatory information when examining statements that attributed positive qualities to their own group and negative qualities to the other group compared to the opposite cases.

Conclusions

Interest in musical styles is one way of defining social identity. Musical preferences affect how people perceive musical styles and their listeners, and also how people use information in reasoning about listeners of different musical styles.