

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

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ABSTRACT

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 reasoning 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. 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. Both self-confident and defensive biases were identified in the reasoning task.

1. MUSIC AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

Recent research shows that musical styles and stylistic preferences of individuals have important social implications. Listeners of music are aware of this fact and probably make conscious use of it. When questioned about purposes of listening to or performing music, adolescents and young adults in different cultures have expressed making a social impression or fulfilling social needs as one of the functions of music (North, Hargreaves, & O'Neill, 2000; Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2000; Tekman & Hortaçsu, 2002a). Adolescents and young adults also found listeners of their preferred styles more attractive (Zillman & Bhaita, 1989), attributed more positive qualities to them (Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2001; Tekman & Hortaçsu, 2002b), and thought members of their own group would be more likely to listen to their preferred musical style (Tarrant, et al., 2001, Tarrant, 2002).

One theoretical framework for examining social implications of musical styles has been the Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1981). According to SIT individuals define themselves in reference to social categories that become salient in intergroup contexts. Attributing more positive qualities to listeners of a preferred musical style is consistent with ingroup bias (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994), which indicates that individuals treat fans of a musical style they like as members of a group they belong to.

We had identified in our own research three factors for describing musical styles (Tekman & Hortaçsu, 2002a) and three factors for describing listeners of musical styles (Tekman & Hortaçsu, 2002b). We labeled the three dimensions used for describing musical styles the *evaluative*, *activity*, and *peacefulness* dimensions. We labeled the three dimensions used for describing listeners of

musical styles the *loser*, *sprightly*, and *sophisticated* dimensions. We had also found that our respondents had stereotypes for the styles and for their listeners that could be defined over these dimensions. Furthermore, for some musical styles, respondents who liked a style were more likely to attribute positive qualities to that style and its listeners compared to respondents who did not like that style. However, we were not able to make comparisons between perceptions of the ingroup and the outgroup, because the outgroup, which would have been people who did not like the style in question, could have been difficult to characterize and we had not questioned our respondents about that. This made comparison of perception of the ingroup and the outgroup by the same individuals impossible.

2. AIMS OF THE CURRENT RESEARCH

Our aim in the present research project was to extend our earlier findings in three ways. First, in order to place musical preferences better in an intergroup context, we compared perceptions of two musical styles and listeners of those styles by the members of two student organizations engaged in studying and performing music in those styles. Thus, we were able to define listeners of one style as the ingroup and listeners of the other style as the outgroup for each respondent. The musical styles we selected for this purpose were Turkish folk music and rock music, because student organizations closely related to these musical styles were available at our institution and our research (Tekman & Hortaçsu, 2002b) had shown that fans of these styles were perceived as having different profiles on the three dimensions we used. Second, we administered a social identity scale (Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999) to our respondents in order to examine the relation between social identification and attitudes towards the two musical styles and their fans. Third, we introduced a reasoning task in order to find out whether our respondents showed differential willingness to discover confirming, disconfirming, and distinctiveness information about positive and negative claims about members of the ingroup and outgroup.

The task we used for our third aim was inspired by the Wason selection task (Wason, 1966). In this task participants are given a conditional statement and asked to determine whether four kinds of information are necessary in order to evaluate the truth of the statement. In our version of the task respondents were given a claim that attributed a quality to listeners of a musical style (for example, "Listeners of rock are pessimistic") and either the musical preference or a kind of behavior observed in a specific person. Participants were required to evaluate the necessity of discovering the complementary piece of information (behavior of the person if musical preference is known and musical preference if behavior is known).

Participants were questioned about three kinds of cases: (1) A person who showed behavior consistent with the claim (“S/he despairs” for the example above). In this case, if the musical preference of the person was also consistent with the claim, it would constitute a confirming example. (2) A person who showed behavior inconsistent with the claim (“S/he does not despair”). In this case, if the musical preference of the person was consistent with the claim, it constituted a disconfirming example. (3) A person who liked a different musical style (“S/he likes Turkish folk music”). This case could not provide either confirming or disconfirming examples, but if the behavior of the person was consistent with the claim that reduced the distinctiveness of the two groups.

We defined three types of bias in seeking information on the basis of responses to the three cases described above. These biases were defined in terms of the difference in the perceived relevance of the missing piece of information when the claim was favorable (attributing a positive quality to the ingroup or attributing a negative quality to the outgroup) and when it was unfavorable (attributing a negative quality to the ingroup or attributing a positive quality to the outgroup). The difference in seeking confirming examples was called *seeking confirmation of self-serving information*; the difference in not seeking disconfirming examples was called *avoiding disconfirmation of self-serving information*; and the difference in seeking distinctiveness information was called *positive distinctiveness seeking*. In calculating these biases the loser dimensions was used as a negative quality and the sophisticated dimension was used as a positive quality. This was consistent with the desirability ratings of these dimensions (Tekman & Hortaçsu, 2002b).

3. METHOD

3.1. Participants

Twenty-nine members of the Middle East Technical University (METU) Turkish Folklore Club and 30 members of the METU Bands participated in the study. Members of the Turkish Folklore Group (henceforth the TFM group) were interested in Turkish folk music and members of the METU Bands (henceforth the Rock group) were interested in rock music.

3.2. Materials

The questionnaire used in the study consisted of six parts: The first part was about demographic information. The second part included questions about attitudes towards the musical styles in question and participation in the group. The third part was the social identification scale of Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999). In the fourth part participants were asked to rate themselves, and listeners of rock and Turkish folk music in terms of 13 adjectives. These adjectives were taken from an earlier study (Tekman & Hortaçsu, 2002a) and made up three scales. These scales were called loser, sprightly, and sophisticated. In the fifth part of the questionnaire participants were asked to rate rock and Turkish folk music in terms of 19 adjective taken from an earlier study (Tekman & Hortaçsu, 2002b). These adjectives belonged to three scales, which were called evaluative, activity, and peacefulness.

The sixth part of the questionnaire contained questions of the reasoning task. There were 18 questions of this type. Six different claims attributed three qualities belonging to each one of the three scales about listeners of musical styles (Tekman & Hortaçsu, 2002b) to listeners of rock and Turkish folk music. These claims were combined with three cases described above to obtain 18 questions in total. The behaviors associated with the three qualities were pessimistic-despairs, dynamic-cannot sit still, calm-does not get excited.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Ratings of the two musical styles

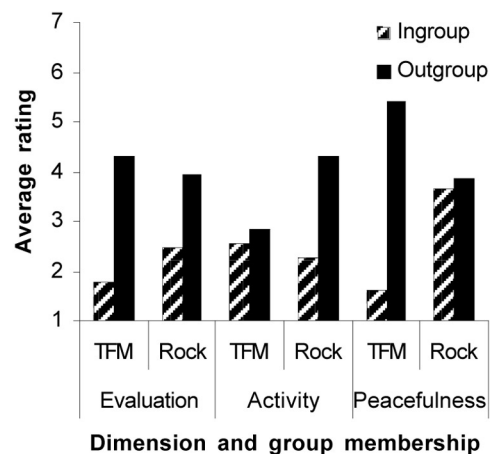


Figure 1: Average ratings of the preferred style of the ingroup and the outgroup on three dimensions by the TFM and Rock groups. Lower numbers mean more appropriate to describe the style.

Average ratings of rock and Turkish folk music and rock music on the dimensions of evaluative, activity, and peacefulness by members of the two student organizations are given in Figure 1. Because an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant interaction of target musical style, rating dimension, and group membership [$F(2, 100) = 46.48, MSe = 0.992, p < .001, \eta^2 = .48$], ratings on each dimension were analyzed in separate two-way ANOVAs. According to the results of these analyses (1) both groups rated the style associated with their own group more positively on the evaluative dimension, but the difference was larger for TFM group [$F(1, 50) = 4.96, MSe = 1.559, p < .05, \eta^2 = .09$ for the interaction]. (2) Only the Rock group rated the music of their own group as higher on the activity dimension [$F(1, 50) = 10.66, MSe = 1.875, p < .005, \eta^2 = .17$ for the interaction]. (3) Only the TFM group rated the music of their own group as higher on the peacefulness dimension [$F(1, 50) = 52.37, MSe = 1.581, p < .001, \eta^2 = .51$ for the interaction].

4.2. Ratings of the listeners of the two musical styles

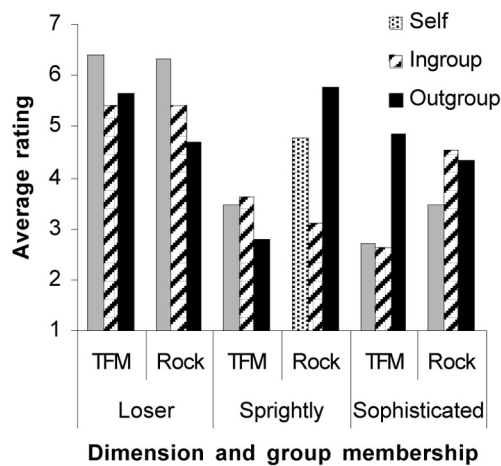


Figure 2: Average ratings of self, ingroup, and outgroup on three dimensions by the TFM and Rock groups. Lower numbers mean more appropriate to describe the target.

Average ratings of self and listeners of Turkish folk music and rock music on the dimensions of loser, sprightly, and sophisticated by members of the two student organizations are given in Figure 2. Because a three-way ANOVA revealed a significant interaction of rating dimension, rating target, and group membership [$F(4, 172) = 16.71, MSe = 1.601, p < .001, \eta^2 = .28$], ratings on the three dimensions were analyzed in separate two-way ANOVAs. The analysis of the loser dimension showed that members of both groups found this dimension to describe themselves less well than both the ingroup and the outgroup [$F(2,86) = 16.24, MSe = 1.079, p < .001, \eta^2 = .27$]. On the sprightly dimension, although the TFM group did not rate themselves, the ingroup, and the outgroup differently, the Rock group significantly differentiated the outgroup from the self and the ingroup [$F(2, 86) = 21.55, MSe = 1.58, p < .001, \eta^2 = .33$ for the interaction]. On the sophisticated dimension, the TFM group perceived themselves similar to the ingroup and significantly more sophisticated than the outgroup, whereas members of the Rock group did not differentiate the three targets of rating. [$F(2, 86) = 11.83, MSe = 1.393, p < .001, \eta^2 = .22$ for the interaction].

4.3. Associations of the ratings of the listeners and social identity

The social identity scale was divided into two subscales according to the results of a factor analysis. One of these factors brought together the group self-esteem and commitment to the group subscales of Ellemers and others (1999). This factor explained 49% of the variance. The second factor, which explained 18% of the variance, corresponded to the self-categorization subscale.

Both subscales of social identity correlated positively with the sophisticated dimension for describing the ingroup ($r = .329, p <$

$.05, n = 52$ for group self-esteem and commitment and $r = .387, p < .005, n = 52$ for self classification). Group self-esteem and commitment also correlated with how the group was perceived in relation to self on the sophisticated and sprightly dimensions. This correlation was negative for the sophisticated dimension ($r = -.357, p < .01, n = 52$), that is, respondents who had higher group self-esteem and commitment to the group tended to think more positively of the ingroup relative to themselves. A positive correlation was observed for the sprightly dimension ($r = .349, p < .05, n = 52$), that is, higher group self-esteem and commitment was associated with finding the self more sprightly compared to the ingroup. Correlations of the group self-esteem and commitment factor with the absolute difference between ratings of self and the ingroup showed positive relations with both of these dimensions ($r = .341, p < .05, n = 52$ for sophisticated and $r = .425, p < .005, n = 52$ for sprightly). This indicated that higher group self-esteem and commitment to the group was associated with higher perceived similarity to the group on these dimensions. The self-classification scale was also positively correlated with the absolute difference between self and ingroup on the sophisticated dimension ($r = .385, p < .005, n = 52$).

4.4. The reasoning task

Average ratings of the necessity to find out the three pieces of information participants were questioned about in the reasoning task were analyzed in a three-way ANOVA, in which target group, dimension, and type of case were the independent variables. The only significant effect in this analysis was the effect of type case [$F(2, 116) = 6.51, MSe = 6.456, p < .005, \eta^2 = .10$]. Target group, dimension, or their interaction did not have significant effects. One possible reason for this is that, although the task was made complicated for them, participants did realize the formal parallels between questions with different content and gave similar responses. Nevertheless, the significant effect of type of question was interesting, because unlike what would be expected on the basis of the findings with the standard Wason selection task (Wason, 1966), the type of case that was seen most relevant was the correct case. This was when the person was known to behave in a way that is inconsistent with the claim. Discovering that this person had the musical preference consistent with the claim would have falsified the claim. In the standard version of the task participants are more likely to select the incorrect case that corresponds to behavior consistent with the claim in our version.

A factor analysis was performed with the double aims of making better sense of the variables related to social identity and examining the biases in reasoning that may be revealed by the responses in the reasoning task. The variables we entered in this analysis were the three types of bias in the reasoning task (seeking confirmation of self-serving information, avoiding disconfirmation of self-serving information, and positive distinctiveness seeking), the two subscales of social identity, ingroup favoritism (difference between the ratings of the ingroup and the outgroup) on the loser and sophisticated dimensions, and individualization (difference between the ratings of self and the ingroup) on the loser and sophisticated dimensions. The measure of individualization used the absolute rather than the directional difference between self and ingroup.

Three factors explained 54.4 percent of the variance. One factor that explained 23.6 percent of the variance in this analysis brought together the two measures of social identity, individualization of the sophisticated dimension, and seeking confirmation of self-serving information. Respondents who were high in identification with the group (greater social identity with the group and lower individualization on the sophisticated dimension) had lower bias to seek confirming examples more for favorable compared to unfavorable claims. The second factor, which explained 15.7 percent of the variance brought together ingroup favoritism and individualization for the loser dimension. Respondents who thought that the dimension loser was less applicable to the ingroup compared to the outgroup perceived themselves closer to the ingroup in this respect. The third factor, which explained 15.1 percent of the variance, brought together in group favoritism on the sophisticated dimension and the remaining two measures of bias. This factor showed that respondents who were high in ingroup favoritism on the sophisticated dimension tended to avoid seeking disconfirmation of favorable information and seeking positive distinctiveness information.

5. DISCUSSION

The results revealed that stereotypes for Turkish folk music and rock music and also for the listeners of these styles exist but individuals with public commitments to these musical styles tend to pull these stereotypes in a direction favorable to them. This finding is consistent with individuals showing ingroup favoritism for fans of their preferred musical styles.

A second important observation was that measures of social identity showed relationships with ratings of the fans of a preferred style. This relationship appeared for the more evaluative sophisticated dimension. In addition, perceived similarity to the group on the dimensions used for describing fans of musical styles correlated with social identification.

A third finding was that there may be various reasoning styles related to groups. A self-confident style associated with lower bias to seek confirmation of self-serving information factored together with measures of social identity. A more defensive style of avoiding disconfirmation of self-serving information and not seeking positive distinctiveness factored together with ingroup favoritism.

6. REFERENCES

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