

STRONG EXPERIENCES RELATED TO MUSIC: COMPARISON OF REACTIONS IN DIFFERENT SUBJECTS AND IN DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

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Background

Descriptions of Strong Experiences related to Music (SEM) have been gathered from about 900 respondents aged 13 to 91 years with musical preferences spread across many different genres.

Aims

The overall purpose of the SEM project is to obtain a comprehensive and detailed account of components in SEM and to study their relative occurrence and importance in different groups of participants and under different conditions.

Method

Content analysis of free descriptions of SEM and factor analysis of ratings on questionnaires have resulted in a comprehensive three-level descriptive system including at least 150 different aspects. Using this system as reference allows comparison of SEM between different groups of participants (e.g., men and women, old and young, musicians and non musicians) and under different conditions (e.g. SEM during listening or performance).

Results

Each individual SEM report is more or less unique but certain components of SEM tend to recur, with varying emphasis, in different groups of participants and under different conditions. The general picture of SEM thus displays both similarities and differences. The number of influencing factors seems almost infinite and as they also interact in complex ways, modelling of music experience seems very difficult. It is obvious, however, that SEM is not restricted to any specific musical genre.

Conclusions

Systematic analysis of free descriptions of SEM supplemented by questionnaires reveals the diversity of possible components in the experience of music and illustrates how they may be related to different musical, personal, and situational factors.