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Conceptualizing the subjective experience of listening to music in everyday life.

Background

Empirical studies of everyday listening often frame the way individuals experience music primarily in terms of emotion and mood. Yet emotions - at least as represented by categorical and dimensional models of emotion - do not account for the entirety of subjective experience. The term 'musical affect' may equally relate to aesthetic, spiritual, and 'flow' experiences, in addition to a range of altered states of consciousness (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010), including the construct of trance.

Aims and Main Contribution

Alternative ways of conceptualising and mapping experience suggest new understandings of the subjective, frequently multimodal, experience of music in daily life. This paper explores categorizations of aspects of conscious experience, such as checklists of basic dimensions of characteristics of transformations of consciousness (e.g. Pekala's Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory (PCI), or Gabrielsson and Lindström Wik's descriptive system for strong experiences with music (SEM-DSM), together with the potential impact of specific kinds of consciousness upon experience (e.g. the notion of present centred (core or primary), and autobiographical (extended/higher order) forms of consciousness (Damasio, 1999, Edelman, 1989). Three recent empirical studies (Herbert, 2011) which used unstructured diaries and semi-structured interviews to explore the psychological processes of everyday involving experiences with music in a range of 'real-world' UK scenarios are discussed.

Implications

Free phenomenological report is highlighted as a valuable, if partial means of charting subjective experience. Importantly, it constitutes a method that provides insight into the totality of experience, so enabling researchers to move beyond the confines of emotion.

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