
The Effects of Background Music in a Simulated Initial Counselling Session with Female Subjects

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Résumé

Cette étude examine les effets d'un fond de musique instrumentale douce, de style baroque, sur la profondeur de l'auto-exploration du client dans les dyades de counseling. Trois niveaux ont été définis: animé, lent et sans musique. Les sujets étaient douze étudiantes du premier cycle, et les conseillers quatre étudiants en counseling du 2e cycle, dans leur année finale. Les sessions ont été analysées sur enregistrement vidéo, au moyen du barème en neuf points de profondeur d'auto-exploration (Truax et Carkhuff, 1967). Il ressort d'une analyse de variance que les deux niveaux avec musique se sont accompagnés d'une augmentation marquée de la profondeur de l'auto-exploration ($p < .01$), et des évaluations entre les groupes ont indiqué un accroissement notable de l'auto-exploration ($p < .01$) dans les conditions de musique lente par rapport à celle de musique animée.

Abstract

This study examined the effects of a background of soft, instrumental music, from the baroque era, on depth of client self-exploration, in counselling dyads. There were three levels of music: lively, slow, and no music. The subjects were twelve female undergraduates, and the counsellors were four final-year, graduate counselling students. Audiotapes of the sessions were analyzed, using the nine-point Depth of Client Self-Exploration Scale (Truax & Carkhuff, 1967). An analysis of Variance revealed significantly greater depth of client self-exploration ($p < .01$) for both music conditions over the no music condition, and between-group t-tests indicated significantly greater depth of client self-exploration ($p < .01$) for the slow music condition over the lively music condition.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a background of barely-audible, baroque, instrumental music on depth of client self-exploration in a counselling setting. Although little research has been done linking music with counselling effectiveness, related fields, such as medicine and psychiatry, are replete with evidence of the effects of music on human functioning. Historically, Masserman (1973) cites the use of music in early Greek and Roman Sanatoria, as "providing aesthetic expression and encouraging group belongingness through feelings of conjoint rhythm and harmony." Hippocrates is said to have taken his mental patients to the temple to listen to music; the Arabs equipped their hospitals with music rooms in the thirteenth century (Mann, 1950), and music was an integral part of the physician's training and practice from 800 A.D. to 1800 A.D. (Taylor, 1981).

Today music is still a useful adjunct to the "healing sciences." In hospital wards and operating theatres, music has been found to reduce

staff fatigue (Barrett, 1961); calm and distract patients (Barrett, 1961; Kane, 1914; Licht, 1946; McGlinn, 1930; Naidu, 1982; Pickrell, Metzger, Wilde, Broadbent, & Edwards, 1950); reduce the need for anesthetic and medication (Light, Haymond, Livingston, & Willard, 1949; Light, Love, Benson, & Morch, 1954; Padfield, 1976); ease labour and delivery (Clark, McCorkle, & Williams, 1981; Hanser, Larson, & O'Connell, 1983), and to calm and quieten newborns (Murooka, 1974; Murooka, Koie, & Suda, 1976).

In psychiatric settings, music has been used to increase verbalization (Dollins, 1956; Michel, 1977; Sears, 1968); to calm patients (Altshuler, 1944; Hope 1971); to change patients' moods (Gilman & Paperte, 1949; Shatin, 1970); to induce activity in the apathetic (Skelly & Haselrud, 1952); to increase interaction (Parriott, 1969; Sears, 1968); to bring patients back to reality (Bigelow & Ruben, 1970; Mann, 1950); to provoke feelings and introspection (Baumel, 1973), and to promote a positive attitude toward the therapist (Kahans & Calford, 1982; Michel, 1977).

In the field of counselling, Schiff and Frances (1974) found, in counselling groups, that backgrounds of pop music evoked memories and emotion, and promoted rapport with the therapist, and Boyum (1978) reported similar effects for pop music in individual counselling. In 1973, Prueter and Mezzano examined the effect of a more "classical" form of background music on client-counsellor interaction. They found that "soothing" music—from the works of composers such as Brahms, Debussy, and Sibelius—promoted more client-counsellor interaction than did their "stimulating" music, or no music backgrounds. Their "stimulating" music was march-oriented, from the works of Sousa, Khachaturian, Denza, and Strauss.

The present study examined the effects of a barely audible background of baroque, instrumental music on depth of client self-exploration in initial interviews, in individual counselling.

The barely audible background of instrumental music was used in order to minimize distraction. Slow baroque music was chosen for its apparently greater effectiveness over other forms of music in inducing "alpha states" in the listener—states which are described as conditions of relaxed alertness accompanied by feelings of well-being (Ostrander & Schroeder, 1979). Feelings of well-being have, in turn, been associated with increased access to pleasant memories (Natale & Hantas, 1982), and heightened interpersonal attraction (Gouaux, 1971), and should, therefore, facilitate the counselling process.

Because of the above, it was hypothesized that a background of baroque, instrumental music would induce greater depth of client self-exploration than would a no music background, and that the slow music background would be more effective in this regard than would the lively music background.

METHOD

Clients

The clients were twelve female volunteers (average age 21 years) selected, on the basis of availability within the time constraints of the study, from two undergraduate educational psychology courses, at the University of Alberta. As the courses were oriented toward school counselling, participation in the study was offered as an opportunity to experience counselling from the client's point of view. Client participants were told that they could discuss anything they wished. Females were used throughout the study to control the sex variable.

Counsellors

Four female graduate counselling students were chosen from among other volunteers on the basis of availability. They were in their final stage of the masters' program; had completed the practicum, and were already working as full-time counsellors.

Each was asked to counsel three students, for a period of 30 minutes each, and to treat the students as they would their everyday clients. They were told that there might be background music, but no reason was given as to its purpose or that of the study. Both clients and counsellors were informed that the sessions would be audio-taped by the researcher, and they were guaranteed anonymity.

Music

The independent variable in this study was baroque instrumental music. Slow and lively movements from the works of Bach, Corelli, Handel, and Telemann were selected. Three levels were used: (a) slow (60 beats per minute), (b) lively (120 beats per minute), and (c) no music. The "slow" and "lively" selections were recorded on either side of a single 90-minute audio-cassette. The selected movements were not recorded in any particular sequence, nor was any attempt made to match successive excerpts harmonically. There were approximately two seconds of silence between pieces.

Setting

The rooms normally used for counselling, in the Faculty of Education Clinic, at the University of Alberta, were used in this study. Each seven-foot-square room is carpeted, and contains a coffee table, two comfortable armchairs, a fixed video-camera, and a microphone. Each room is lit by a ceiling mounted fluorescent fixture. The background music was provided by a Sony 110-B cassette player/recorder, placed on the coffee table. In the "no music" conditions, the player was also left on

the coffee table, in order to maintain consistency in the setting. All sessions were audio-taped.

Instrument

The dependent variable, depth of client self-exploration, was evaluated according to the “Basic Scale of Depth of Client Self-Exploration” (Truax & Carkhuff, 1967, p. 194). This instrument measures client self-exploration on a nine-point scale. Clear explanations and examples are provided as to the rating procedure. Estimates of inter-rater reliability arrived at in this study, are presented in the following section.

Procedure

At the outset of the study, the counsellors were supplied with copies of the list of volunteer clients, which contained their phone numbers and availability times. They were then asked to contact the three clients whose times best suited their own schedules. This approach worked well, with adjustments being made among clients and counsellors. To control for the possible effects of order of background music presentation, each counsellor was randomly assigned to one of four different schedules of background music presentation such that there was one counsellor for each schedule. Because each counsellor interviewed clients under each of the three music conditions, each served as her own control with regard to counselling style.

Prior to each counselling session, the cassette player was switched on and the volume was adjusted so that, when the client and counsellor entered the room, the music was already playing, but was barely audible.

The middle 10-minute segment of each session was recorded, and the resulting 12 recordings were then copied onto three pairs of 60-minute cassettes. The copying was randomized, so that the order of session presentation on each pair of cassettes was different from that of the other two.

Three female counselling psychologists, all of whom are currently in private practice, then independently rated one pair of tapes each, so that each rated all the sessions. The “Basic Scale of Depth of Client Self-Exploration” was used as the measure—a score of 9 points being the maximum rating.

An analysis of variance of repeated measure of a single factor (Winer, 1971, pp. 283-288) provided an acceptable estimate ($r=.81$) of inter-rater reliability. A further analysis of variance of the mean scores for each music condition (Table 1) was used to establish a relationship between background music and client self-exploration, and between-group t-tests (Table 2) compared the relative effects of each of the music conditions.

RESULTS

The results of the analysis of variance (Table 1), and the t-tests (Table 2), indicate that, in these initial interviews:

1. there are overall differences among the three groups ($p < .01$).
2. the slow music condition was associated with greater depth of client self-exploration ($p < .01$) than was the no music condition.
3. there was greater depth of client self-exploration ($p < .005$) in the lively music condition than in the no music condition, and
4. depth of client self-exploration was greater ($p < .01$) in the slow music condition than in the lively music condition.

TABLE 1

Analysis of Variance of Effect of Background Music

<i>Source of Variance</i>	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Squares</i>	<i>F</i>
A	36.69	2	18.35	6.93**
Error	76.81	29	2.65	
Total	113.5	31		

**F .01=5.42, $p < .01$

TABLE 2

Relative Effectiveness of Music Conditions on Client Self-Exploration: Between-Condition t-Tests

<i>Music Condition</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t_{crit}</i>	<i>t_{obs}</i>
Slow Music vs Lively Music	11 9	7.0 4.9	18	2.552	2.747*
Slow Music vs No Music	11 12	7.0 4.6	21	2.518	2.819
Lively Music vs No Music	9 12	4.9 4.6	19	2.861	3.451**

* indicates significance ($p < .01$), one-tailed.

** indicates significance ($p < .005$), one-tailed.

It might be noted that the reason for the small discrepancy of N's in Table 2 is that two sessions could not be rated due to background interference.

The hypothesis of this study, that a barely audible background of baroque, instrumental music would be associated with greater depth of

client self-exploration, in initial counselling interviews, than would a background of no music, was supported. Slow music was found to be more effective in this regard than lively music.

Future studies in this area might take into account the effects of musical training on response to music. A number of authors (Brenneis, 1971; Heinlein, 1928; Henkin, 1957; Hunter, 1974; Sears, 1958; Sopchak, 1955) have found this to be a significant variable. Differences between males and females might also be explored. Current evidence (Peretti, 1975; Sears, 1958) suggests that females may be more responsive to music than males.

Insofar as depth of client self-exploration can be equated with client-counsellor interaction, as predictors of successful counselling outcome, and insofar as soft, "slow" music can be equated with "soothing" music, then the results of this study largely support the findings of the earlier study by Prueter and Mezzano (1973). However, whereas Prueter and Mezzano found their no music condition more productive of client-counsellor interaction than their "stimulating" music condition, the current study found the background which was designated as "lively" to be significantly better than the no music condition, as regards depth of client self-exploration.

It is possible that the baroque music, which was used in this study, by virtue of its complexity and lack of obvious melody line, was less distracting than the "catchy" march-oriented music, which was used in the "stimulating" condition of the Prueter and Mezzano study. It is also possible that the string music, which predominated in the selections used in the present study, has a more positive effect on the mood of the listener, than does orchestra or band music.

In summary, although there are limitations to the research just presented, there is support that soft, instrumental, baroque music can influence the degree of self-exploration of a client. This has obvious direct implications for counselling practice. There are also research implications. For example, further research might examine the effects of music on mood shift, or on sudden recall of forgotten memories. Other, more qualitative methodologies might be used to elicit, in more depth, the experiences of counsellors and clients related to music backgrounds.

It is the view of the authors that the use of music as an important adjunct to counselling warrants further exploration.

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