



Sounds like joy or feels like joy: Insights into categorization of the musical emotion

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The study aimed at verifying 1) what aspect of music listeners refer to while categorizing their emotional responses to music (Bigand et al., 2005), and 2) whether listeners do indeed categorize their own emotional responses to music when asked to do so. 18 psychology students, nonmusicians, participated in the study. 12 of them freely categorized the emotional expression of 27 musical excerpts on one hand, and their own emotional responses to these pieces on the other, with music played in the original or reverse order. The task of other 6 participants, unaware of the previous task instruction, was to identify the categorization rule in reference to the categories they were presented. They correctly recognized the rule which indicates that it is indeed the emotional aspect of music which forms the basis of category formation. Four categorization tasks revealed a 0.92 correlation between the categorization of listeners' emotional responses and the emotional expression of music, and a 0.85 correlation between the categorization of listeners' emotional responses to the excerpts played in the original and the reverse order. The results suggest that when recognizing our emotional responses to music, especially in the experimental conditions, we rely on the expressive features of music. Moreover, it seems that the representation of our own emotional responses to music and its emotional expression interlock. Categorization is mostly based on the acoustic features of music, and in this respect musical structure is of lesser importance than mode, register, instrumentation, and tempo. The linguistic form of the emotional response category and the emotional expression category labels is also analyzed.

