Male versus female: Vocal Preferences in Popular Music & Appreciation of Music

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In the new generation of technological advancement, it seems that almost every person has some sort of device to listen to music. Whether it’s a CD player, walkman, or the now popular iPod or mp3 player, people are getting into the hype of downloading and listening to new music. Each individual can practically choose any particular song they want, download it and compile it together in a “playlist,” and listen to their favorite songs. This brings into question what kind of songs people like to listen to, but also seeks to explore the emotions and reactions to specific songs and types of music that are perceived, which are said to differ among each individual. Grewe, Nagel, Kopiez & Altenmüller (2007).

It is not uncommon now for new popular artists to remake an old version of a popular song. For example, the pop artist Jessica Simpson sang a slightly more upbeat version of the song “Take My Breath Away,” originally done by the band Berlin. It would seem that the younger generations like to listen to the remakes more than the older version of the song, yet some people still prefer the “oldies but goodies.” In this case, would there be more appreciation toward the original artist, or the artist who sang the remake just as beautifully? Research in the past has explored this, and tests run by Hevner (1930), states that, “These tests are founded on the assumption that the creation of an artist whose work has been generally acclaimed for its merit is more beautiful than the same creation altered by a deliberate attempt to spoil its various beautiful qualities.”

Each individual has their own musical taste, but one cannot go to say that they have a better taste in music than another, and it could be called good or bad if it goes along with or differs from the views of an average musician that hails from the same country, culture, and period. Vernon, (1930). However, one can consider some artists to be more credible than others, due to their popularity and musical performance. Thus, there may be a bias toward some popular artists, even if one does not like them in particular. However, Mursell (1932) notes from references by another study by Sherman, says that, “an accomplished singer could not convey to listeners with any precision an intended emotion by singing a single note.” This notes that even a well-known singer/artist cannot immediately gain a listener’s attention just by singing one note; the singer would have to perform a whole song to be recognized.

So while people have their specific preference for the kinds of music they like to listen to, the question is why do they like it? If so, is there a preference for a male or a female vocalist? These questions break new ground on the study of music and psychology. While much research on the connection between music and different areas of psychology have been done in the past, it is only recently that research has begun to explore music preference and its relation to personality and emotion. According to Rentfrow and Gosling (2003), they believe that a large part of the studies have been done by a small cadre of music educators and music psychologists.

The phenomena to be explored would be whether males would prefer a male vocalist over a female vocalist, regardless of the genre of the song. It is believed that females have no particular preference and is divided somewhat evenly between a male or female vocalist, and may be just the preference for the musical merit of the song itself. Such an experiment has not been explored in the past, as past research has concentrated on mostly musical compositions of classical music, rather than the new music of this generation with songs that contain a vocalist. This study seeks to find a significant difference between sexes and their preferences for a male or female vocalist.

Method

Participants

Participants included a large, random sample of an equal number of both males and females for the experiment. A majority of the participants were college students attending the University of Hawaii at Hilo, as well as residents from the community of Hilo. All participants were of random ages, all over the age...
of 18 as stated in the requirements before participating in the experiment.

Materials

The materials for this experiment included a CD with recordings of popular songs of different genres. The genres were limited to six groups: Pop, Country, R&B, Rock, Classical, and Reggae. A stereo was also used to play the CD with the recordings. A radio headset was also used for each participant to listen to the recordings in privacy, as well as a rating scale questionnaire.

The goal of the rating scale implemented was to measure the preference for either male or female vocalist for each one of the randomly played songs from the CD of which the participant would mark their choice after hearing each song.

Procedure

Each researcher involved in the experiment went out to recruit as many participants as possible. The researcher would ask to announce in a college classroom whether anyone would like to participate in the experiment. For community participants, the researchers would go out to a public area to recruit participants. Flyers were also posted with contact information to participants who were interested.

Participants were given instructions on what to do before being asked to sit in a simple research room, at a table in front of a stereo. The researcher would ask the participant to put on the radio headset, press the play button on the stereo, and then leave the room. The first song on the CD would play, and after it had finished, a 10 second pause would cue the participant to rate the song they had just heard on the rating scale sheet, they had received. After the 10 second pause, the next song would begin.

The rating scale sheet listed the number of each song, and indicated whether a male or female sang the particular song. The scale ranged from 0 (Strongly dislike) to 10 (Strongly like), for the participant to indicate the degree of preference toward the song.

A total of 12 songs were contained on the CD, each playing a random song. Six songs were sung by female vocalists, the other six by male vocalists. Each song was of a different genre: Pop, Country, R&B, Rock, Classical and Reggae. Each pair of songs would be exactly the same song, but one song would be done by a male vocalist and the other by a female. However, the same song would not be played right after another. Each song was arranged randomly on the CD.

All of the songs, whether sung by a male or female, were all done by the same male or female vocalist. This measure was taken to ensure that the participant would recognize the song, but not recognize the particular artist of the song, so as not to give any particular preference toward the song. Knowledge of the original artist who sang the song popular at the time may provide the participant with a bias toward the particular song.

REFERENCES


