

Apr 20th, 11:00 AM - 2:00 PM

The Relationship Between Music Preference, Moral Competence, and Spiritual Well-being in Christian College Students

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Stokes, Elizabeth; Metzler, Gabrielle; Hwang, Chi-en; and Wu, Di, "The Relationship Between Music Preference, Moral Competence, and Spiritual Well-being in Christian College Students" (2016). *The Research and Scholarship Symposium*. 35.
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The Relationship between Music Preference, Moral Competence, and Spiritual Well-being in Christian College Students

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Abstract

We tested the hypothesis that Christians who listen to primarily Christian music with lyrics have higher moral competence and spiritual well-being than those that listen to mostly non-Christian music with lyrics. We surveyed students of Cedarville University aged 18-25 using the Moral Competence Test (MCT) and Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS). Results show that there is no significant difference in the MCT scores between those who primarily listen to Christian music with lyrics and those who primarily listen to secular music with lyrics. Christians who listen to Christian music with lyrics more scored significantly higher than their counterparts on the SWBS.



Purpose

- Music plays a major role in most people's lives
- The purpose of this study is to examine the connection between music preference, moral competence, and spiritual well-being

Literature Review

- Adolescents who listened to music containing sexual and violent content are more likely to commit sexual and violent acts one year later (Pallida-Walker, 2015)
- One study suggested that people are more likely to aid others if they listen to prosocial music (Greitemeyer, 2009)
- Some qualitative studies indicated that Christian music has a positive influence on Christians as it is uplifting, helps them feel closer to God, unites their bodies with the Holy Spirit, and assists them to reflect on Scripture (Williams & Banjo, 2013; Ungureanu-Pamfil, 2011; Cherwien, as cited in Westermeyer, 2013)

Research Hypotheses

- Christians who primarily listen to Christian music with lyrics have higher moral competence than those who primarily listen to mostly non-Christian music with lyrics (hypothesis 1).
- Christians who primarily listen to Christian music with lyrics will score higher on the spiritual well-being scale than those who listen to mostly non-Christian music with lyrics (hypothesis 2).

Participants

- Participants were recruited via campus-wide email
 - Residential Christian students at Cedarville University
 - Between the ages of 18-25 (mean = 19 years)
 - The sample size was: Males = 139, Females = 168 (307 total)
 - Ethnicity was 90% Caucasian
- Participant Groups:
 - Christian music: 60% or more Christian music
 - Non-Christian music: 50% or less Christian music

Method

- Emailed Survey Study containing:
 - Moral Competence Test (MCT): based on Kohlberg's moral reasoning theory and contains two moral dilemmas.
 - Spiritual Well-being Scale (SWBS): uses twenty Likert-scale questions that deal with religious transcendent concerns (Religious Well-being, RWB) and existential concerns (Existential Well-being, EWB)
 - Music preference and demographics: non-Christian vs. Christian music with lyrics preference and percent listening to Christian music

Results

- No gender difference was found in all three measures
- Independent samples t-tests was used to compare the variables for hypothesis 1 and 2.
- Hypothesis 1:
 - There was no significant difference between the students who primarily listen to Christian music with lyrics ($M = 54.57$, $sd = 47.86$) and the students who primarily listen to secular music with lyrics ($M = 63.43$, $sd = 58.99$) on their c-score (moral competence scale) (see Table 1).

Results cont.

- Hypothesis 2:
 - There was a significant difference ($p < 0.01$) between the students who primarily listen to Christian music with lyrics and the students who primarily listen to secular music with lyrics on the RWB scores (see Table 1).
 - There was a significant difference ($p < 0.01$) between the students who primarily listen to Christian music with lyrics and the students who primarily listen to secular music with lyrics on the EWB scores (see Table 1).

Table 1 : Means, SDs and t-statistics for the Groups

	Time in Christian Music	N	Mean(SD)	t-value
C-score (MCT Score)	50% or less	205	64.59 (58.99)	1.526
	60% or more	104	54.39 (47.86)	
Religious Well-being (RWB)	50% or less	199	51.75 (8.42)	-3.265 **
	60% or more	109	54.42 (5.86)	
Existential Well-being (EWB)	50% or less	202	46.47 (7.21)	-2.641**
	60% or more	104	48.63 (6.56)	

** = $p < 0.01$

Discussion

Hypothesis 1 (not confirmed):

- The difference in MCT scores is not statistically significant but is worth noting according to Lind (Lind, 2014)
- In the MCT we are comparing high scores to very high scores
 - MCT: high is considered anything over 30 points
- Therefore, there may be a ceiling effect for the MCT in our sample

Discussion cont.

Hypothesis 2 (confirmed):

- Those who primarily listen to Christian music scored higher on both the RWB and the EWB than those who primarily listen to non-Christian music.
- In the SWBS, we are comparing high scores to even higher scores
 - SWBS: highest score possible is 60 points for each subscale (EWB and RWB)
- Therefore, there may be a ceiling effect for the RWB in our sample.

Limitations

- Due to our sample and their culture/environment, we do not have a group of people exposed to only secular music. All participants were exposed to other types of music through their environment.
 - Ex.: Even those who only choose to listen to non-Christian music on the population's campus are still exposed to Christian music at school gatherings, etc.
- The lack of diversity also makes the statistics smaller, making the differences harder to track.

Future Study

- Further research should use a more diverse campus and population so that there is more variety in the scores.
- An experimental study is needed to provide answers to the causal relationship between music preference and moral competence.
- A future study should use a test that measures morality better than the MCT which measures moral competence.

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