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Music-Evoked Autobiographical Memories of a Young Adult Cohort: What Can They Tell Music Educators?

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Abstract

Musical engagement both in school and in out-of-school contexts during the adolescent years has been well-documented in music education literature, with a focus on diverse aspects of everyday musical experiences and consumption. Knowing adolescents' musical culture and how they integrate music in their everyday lives can help music educators better navigate ways to support students in building a musical life beyond school. The present study aims to expand the existing literature on adolescents' musical engagement through a retrospective narrative of young adults. By exploring music-evoked autobiographical memories of our study participants, we aim to examine how they engaged and interacted with music in their teenage years and seek possible implications for music educators. As part of a large-scale research project on music-evoked nostalgia, 140 undergraduate students (aged 18 – 25) at a large state university in the U.S. took part in a one-on-one music experiment in which they identified and listened to five pieces of music most likely to bring back valued memories. Participants also completed a series of questionnaires and participated in an interview to share personal memories associated with the self-selected music. Data collection has recently been completed, resulting in 700 pieces of music and over 35 hours of interview data. We are currently analyzing data, focusing on the musical elements of the collected music (e.g., styles/genres, popularity, country of origin, arousal/valence level) to identify any common characteristics. Interview data from 50 randomly selected participants are also being analyzed, with a particular focus on participants' memories on how and where they learned the music. A preliminary analysis shows that popular music predominated participants' self-selected repertoire (over 95%) but these were from widely varied time periods, which may suggest "cascading reminiscence bumps." In addition, several (tentative) themes emerged from the interview data: (1) active music sharing in the home environment as well as among peers; (2) heavy influences of digital technologies and media, along with multimodal experience of music listening; (3) taste in music and identity formation; (4) the significance of music for the emotional function in the adolescent years. Detailed analysis of data, accompanied with implications for music teaching and learning, will be presented at the conference.