

Personality of Musicians: Age, Gender, and Instrumental Group Differences

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ABSTRACT

Background

It is clear that much of musical behavior, in general, is mediated by individual characteristics in the domains of cognitive abilities, motivation and structure of personality. The idiosyncratic complex of these features represents a frame of reference through which experiences are processed and outcomes delivered. Its complexity gives a “personal mark” to the processes of perception, cognition and emotional arousal which take place during different musical activities, such as listening, performing, creating and learning music. Knowing more about musical and personal potentials and skills broadens the understanding of the processes of music perception and cognition, giving them the place and the time “in person”. The aim of this paper is to present a research on personality profiles of musicians by applying a newer personality paradigm and, therefore, giving fresh perspectives of the personality of musicians. This study presents a part of the results of a wider research project which is dealing with the structure of musicians’ personality, by using the new paradigm – the Big-Five personality model and inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1995). It creates a possibility to compare these results to the previously established ones based on the Cattell’s theoretical framework and used in the Kemp’s landmark study (Kemp, 1996).

Aims

Our aims were to investigate personality profiles of musicians and to confirm differences between them by taking into consideration their age group, gender and musical direction (vocal/instrumental performers and music theory) within in the framework of the Big-Five personality model.

Method

The sample consisted of 366 musicians, the pupils of specialized secondary music schools (N=136), the students of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade (N=113) and professional musicians/teachers working in specialized music schools and at the University of Arts Belgrade (N=117). The participants were aged 14 to 64 and included 125 males and 241 females. According to the instrument they play, musicians were grouped as follows: pianists (N=125), string players (N=103) and wind instrument players/solo singers (N=53) and the fourth group, which was consisted of non-performers/music theorists (N=71). Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R) was used to measure personality dimensions of the musicians. The participants rated 240 items on a scale from 1 to 5, which load onto the Big-Five personality dimensions (Neuroticism, Extroversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness), each of which contains six facets (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

Results

The findings considering age group differences showed that there are specific personality dimensions for each age group and that they have to do with the developmental, educational and/or professional phase in musicians’ life course, as well as with their experiences during the long-term dealing with music. The results of the statistical analysis (Oneway ANOVA) pointed out interesting differences in all age groups. Namely, the secondary music school pupils have significantly higher scores on Neuroticism ($F=(2)9.41$, $p<0.00$) which speaks about their emotional sensibility, anxiety, impulsiveness and vulnerability, typical for the adolescent period. This could also be understood as a part of their reaction to high achievement expectations and demands on perfection in performance. In the previous researches, anxiety was found to be the characteristic of only the groups of highly successful performers (English sample). On the other hand, pupils are highly Extraverted ($F=(2)13.88$, $p<0.00$), that is to say, warm, gregarious, assertive, active, seeking for excitement and positive emotions.

Openness is confirmed as the characteristic of the group of music students ($F=(2)12.05$, $p<0.00$) and is, on the level of facets, represented with significantly higher Fantasy, Aesthetics and Feelings. These data are in congruence with findings of other authors which speak about Openness to new experiences as something typical of the creative people, and they also imply independency in thinking, active imagination, aesthetic sensibility, inner-receptivity, preference of diversity, intellectual curiosity and divergent thinking. This dimension is probably the one that is important for selection of young musicians for the higher level of music education. Openness to Experiences enables specific perceptive scope and influences cognitive processing patterns of young musicians.

Interestingly enough, adult musicians achieve higher scores on Agreeableness ($F=(2)19.16$, $p<0.000$) and Conscientiousness ($F=(2)16.75$, $p<0.00$), which supposes directedness towards other people, as well as the growing responsibility throughout aging. Agreeableness is represented with significantly higher scores on Trust, Straightforwardness, Compliance and Tender-mindedness. Conscientiousness pertains to Deliberate thinking, Order, Competence and Self-discipline in task accomplishments, as the aspects of self-control, as well as striving for Achievement and Dutifulness. The results considering Extraversion of music students and Agreeableness of professionals are rather different from Kemp’s, who reported about Introversion as one of the main personality traits of musicians among the three age levels. The incompatibility of the results also refers to Conscientiousness of adult musicians, which was not the case in Kemp’s sample; it was the attribute of the music high school students. These discrepancies could be interpreted as a consequence of general cultural differences and specific “musical identity” acculturation.

Regarding gender, statistically significant differences on three of the Big-five dimensions were found in favor of female musicians: on Openness ($F=(1)28.21$, $p<0.00$), Agreeableness ($F=(1)19.95$, $p<0.00$) and Conscientiousness ($F=(1)7.06$; $p<0.01$), respectively. The female musicians seem to have personality profile which showed to be more oriented towards Imagination, Emotions and Aesthetic, as well as Warmth, Straightforwardness, Compliance and Altruism, interest in other people's well-being. They are significantly more oriented towards fulfilling Duties, Achievement and Self-discipline.

Instrumental groups differ on Extraversion ($F=(3)3.90$, $p<0.03$; Wind players/Singers), Openness ($F=(3)3.95$, $p<0.01$; Wind players/Singers, Music theoreticians, Pianists) and Agreeableness ($F=(3)2.84$, $p<0.04$; Pianists, Music theoreticians). Pianists, themselves, differ from other groups by achieving higher scores on Altruism and Dutifulness, while Strings group showed Aloofness which was ascertained by other authors.

Conclusions

These findings confirmed the existing results of other authors to a certain extent, but they also bring new insights into the personality structure of musicians. Comparing some of the newly found results to the previous ones introduces a possibility to infer about existence of cultural differences. It could be concluded that the interrelated effect of developmental phase's impact and long-term educational and professional engagement in musical activities exists and is reflected in the personality profiles of musicians. This means that a specific way of life and experiences influence the forming of structural layers of musicians' individuality and that it certainly has an imprint on certain patterns of music perception and cognition.

Keywords

Musical potentials, personality, musicians, Big-Five personality model.

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