

## **“Can’t live without music”: Engaging and disengaging from music listening**

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### **Background**

Listening to music is a popular leisure activity. Investigations of music in everyday life are dominated by a functional perspective, drawn from work using the theory of Uses and Gratifications. In so doing, we may have neglected to fully appreciate the value people place on music listening. Therefore, the present study considered if, and why, people value music listening and probed instances when they may not want to listen to music in everyday life.

### **Aims**

This study considered if, and why, people value music listening and also probed instances when they may not want to listen to music in everyday life. This research was therefore guided by two questions: (1) How is the value of music listening expressed? and (2) Are there any times/situations when people do not want to listen to music?

### **Methods**

A total of 319 university students residing in Australia (76.50% female, Mean age = 20.64 years) completed an online questionnaire. The majority of the sample considered themselves to be ‘non-musicians’; however, the sample reported listening to an average of three hours of music daily and considered music to be very important in their lives (Mean = 6.14 on a 7-point scale). Participants responded to open-ended questions directly addressing the two research questions and thematic analyses were conducted.

### **Results**

Inductive thematic analysis yielded thirteen themes synthesising how participants valued listening to music, such as appreciation, emotion, time and engagement, cognitive factors and mood regulation. Reasons for not listening to music were summarised by eight themes dominated by interference with activities that required focus or concentration, followed by environmental context, affective responses, music engagement and inversely, a preference for silence or other auditory stimuli. Fifteen percent of participants stated there was never a time they did not want to listen to music.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

By taking a macroscopic approach with the present research, we posit that Uses and Gratifications theory can be interpreted as inhabiting one of two branches of an axiological theory of value, with aesthetics on the other branch. Thus, while Uses and Gratifications is an appropriate framework to understand music listening from the perspective of ‘listening as valued as a means to an end’, it may be less able to interpret music listening’s worth when identified as ‘a means in and of itself’. It is worth noting, however, that within the axiological theory of value the two branches are not mutually exclusive; indeed, the distinction between means and ends is a fuzzy line. We posit that forms of musical engagement, such as music listening, can fall within this intersection.

**Keywords**

Music listening; everyday; uses and gratifications; value; engagement