

# **The effects of culture on children's perception of music emotion**

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This study examines the role of culture, lullaby and family music preferences in children's perception of emotion in music. The overarching question addressed is whether or not cultural background, and, more specifically, the mode of the music a child tends to be exposed to early in life affects later emotional responses to music characterized by different modes.

Birth and growth in diverse cultures and societies develop people with different preferences, feelings and thoughts. Customs, lifestyle and many known and unknown features contribute to these differences. Here, the focus is on cross-cultural effects of music exposure and subsequent perception. Work by Kastner (1990) and Nawrot (2003) has revealed that most Western lullabies are in major mode, and that even very young children four-year old demonstrate a positive-major/negative-minor connotation that conforms to the conventional stereotype. The aim here is to compare these results with the situation in Finland, and in Iran where most lullabies are in minor mode.

Quantitative data was obtained from 5-8-year old children and their mothers in Iran and Finland. Respondents completed a background questionnaire, and then answered several questions about 12 Finnish and Iranian music excerpts representing two modes and three genres.

Results show that Iranian children feel more positive (happy or relaxed) in response to minor music than Finnish children, while Iranian and Finnish mothers both feel contentment in response to minor mode. In addition, unlike the Finns, Iranian participants prefer to listen to minor mode.

These results demonstrate both some important effects of early music exposure on later emotional responses to music, and that the role of lullabies in musical development warrants further and more detailed study in general. This study might be seen as one progressive step in identifying the impact of lullabies on such development.