

'Beautiful but sad' music can help people feel better

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New research from psychologists at the universities of Kent and Limerick has found that music that is felt to be 'beautiful but sad' can help people feel better when they're feeling blue.

The research investigated the effects of what the researchers described as Self-Identified Sad Music (SISM) on people's moods, paying particular attention to their reasons for choosing a particular [piece of music](#) when they were experiencing sadness - and the effect it had on them.

The study identified a number of motives for sad people to select a particular piece of music they perceive as 'sad', but found that in some cases their goal in listening is not necessarily to enhance mood. In fact, choosing music identified as 'beautiful' was the only strategy that directly predicted mood enhancement, the researchers found.

In the research, 220 people were asked to recall an adverse emotional event they had experienced, and the music they listened to afterwards which they felt portrayed sadness. It followed earlier research from the same team that identified that people do choose to listen to sad music when they're feeling sad.

Dr Annemieke van den Tol, Lecturer in Social Psychology at Kent's School of Psychology, explained that the study found that among the factors influencing music choice were its memory triggers for a particular event or time; its perceived high aesthetic value - which

involves selecting music that the person considers to be beautiful; and music that conveys a particular message.

She said: 'We found in our research that people's music choice is linked to the individual's own expectations for listening to music and its effects on them.

'The results showed that if an individual has intended to achieve mood enhancement through listening to 'sad' music, this was in fact often achieved by first thinking about their situation or being distracted, rather than directly through listening to the music chosen.

'Indeed, where respondents indicated they had chosen music with the intention of triggering memories, this had a negative impact on creating a better mood.

'The only selection strategy that was found to directly predict mood enhancement was where the [music](#) was perceived by the listener to have high aesthetic value.'

More information: The research, titled Listening to sad music in adverse situations: How music selection strategies relate to self-regulatory goals, listening effects and mood enhancement is published in the *Psychology of Music*.

Provided by University of Kent

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