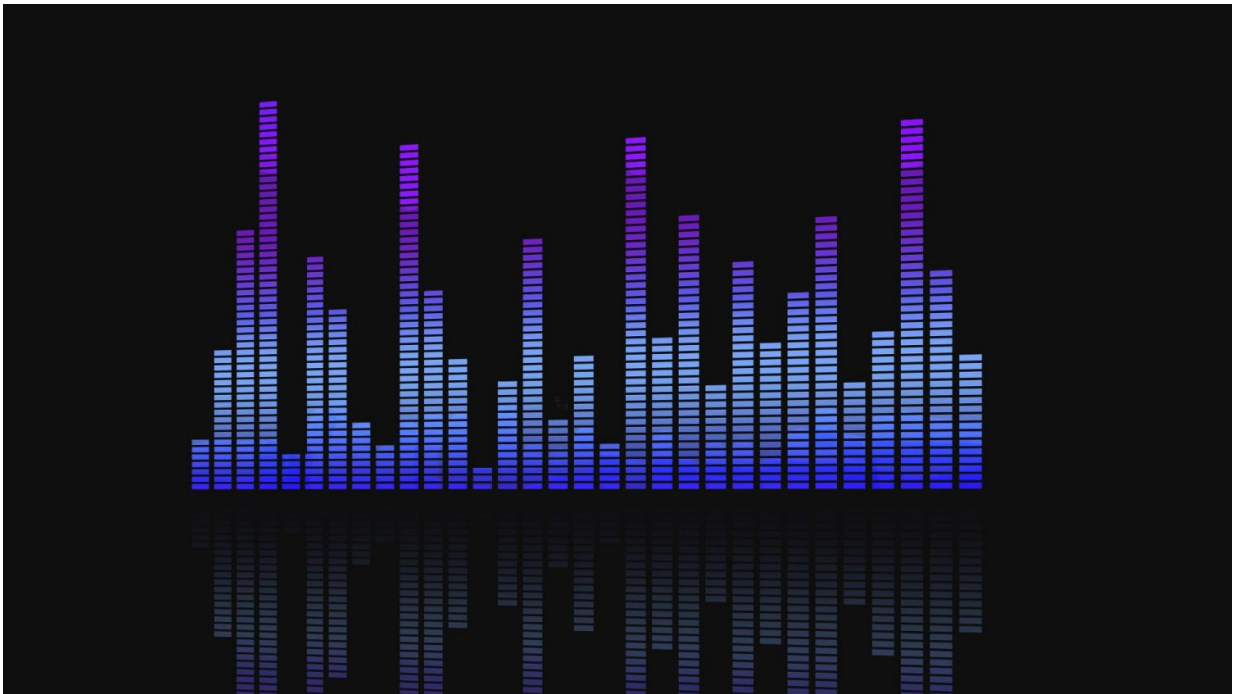


# Motivational music increases risk-taking but does not improve sports performance

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A new study finds that listening to motivational music during sport activities and exercise increases risk-taking behavior but does not improve overall performance. The effect was more noticeable among men and participants who selected their own playlist. The study, published in *Frontiers in Psychology*, also found that self-selected music had the power to enhance self-esteem among those who were already

performing well, but not among participants who were performing poorly.

Listening to motivational music has become a popular way of enhancing mood, motivation and positive self-evaluation during sports and exercise. There is an abundance of anecdotal evidence of music being used in this way, such as the famous Maori "Haka" performed by New Zealand's national rugby team to get into the right mindset before games. However, the psychological processes and mechanisms that explain the motivational power of music are poorly understood.

"While the role of music in evoking emotional responses and its use for mood regulation have been a subject of considerable scientific interest, the question of how listening to music relates to changes in self-evaluative cognitions has rarely been discussed," says Dr. Paul Elvers of the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics and one of the study's authors. "This is surprising, given that self-evaluative cognitions and attitudes such as self-esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy are considered to be sensitive to external stimuli such as music."

The research team investigated whether listening to motivational music can boost performance in a ball game, enhance self-evaluative cognition and/or lead to riskier [behavior](#). The study divided 150 [participants](#) into three groups that performed a ball-throwing task from fixed distances and filled in questionnaires while listening to either participant-selected music, experimenter-selected music or no music at all. To assess risk-taking behavior, the participants were also allowed to choose the distances to the basket themselves. The participants received monetarily incentivized points for each successful trial.

The data show that listening to music did not have any positive or negative impact on overall performance or on self-evaluative cognitions, trait self-esteem or sport-related anxiety. However, it did increase the

sense of self-esteem in participants who were performing well and also increased risk-taking behavior—particularly in male participants and participants who could choose their own motivational music. Moreover, the researchers also found that those who made riskier choices earned higher monetary rewards.

"The results suggest that [psychological processes](#) linked to motivation and emotion play an important role for understanding the functions and effects of music in sports and exercise," says Dr. Elvers. "The gender differences in risk-taking behavior that we found in our study align with what previous studies have documented."

However, more research is required to fully understand the impact of motivational music on the intricate phenomena of self-enhancement, performance and risky behavior during sports and exercise.

"We gathered evidence of the ability of music to increase risk-taking behavior, but more research is needed to improve the robustness of this finding. Additional research is also needed to address the potential mechanisms that may account for the finding. We believe that [music](#)'s ability to induce pleasure as well as its function with respect to self-enhancement serve as promising candidates for future investigations," Dr. Elvers concludes.

**More information:** Paul Elvers et al, The Sound of Success: Investigating Cognitive and Behavioral Effects of Motivational Music in Sports, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2017). [DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2017.02026](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.02026)

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