

Henna-Riikka Peltola

# Kind of Blue

Emotions Experienced in Relation  
to Nominally Sad Music



JYVÄSKYLÄ STUDIES IN HUMANITIES 278

Henna-Riikka Peltola

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*“Yksinäisyys. Talvi. Pimeys. Ihana ylväs melankolia, joka paisui ja paisui ja muuttui lopulta euforiaksi. Olin rakastunut. Rakastunut tähän musiikkiin, rakastunut elämään, rakastunut sen katoavaan kauneuteen. - - Se tunne? Melankolinen euforia. Vai euforinen melankolia. Kutsui sitä kummalla nimellä tahansa, tunne on suloinen ja juovuttava. Tunne, jossa tekee mieli rypeä; tunne johon voi jäädä koukkuun.”*

(Loneliness. Winter. Darkness. Wonderful, noble melancholy that kept expanding until it finally turned into euphoria. I was in love. In love with this music, in love with life, in love with the transient beauty of life. - - That feeling? Melancholic euphoria. Or euphoric melancholia. No matter how you name it, the feeling is sweet and intoxicating. Feeling, in which you want to swim in; feeling that can get you hooked on.)

-Juha Itkonen

## ABSTRACT

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The present work investigates emotions evoked by music listening from various perspectives. The research focused on the listeners' subjective experiences of listening to self-defined sad music (i.e. music that sounds sad or is otherwise associated with sadness). The work comprises four studies, each investigating different aspects of these emotional experiences. *Study I* addressed this issue by examining the metaphorical language used for describing such experiences. In *Study II*, the descriptions were classified into three types of "sadness" that differed depending on the valence and arousal of the overall experience and the contextual aspects. *Study III* explored the attitudes towards sad music and involved a representative sample of the Finnish population. *Study IV* investigated the ways in which people share their experiences with other people listening to the same piece of nominally sad music. The main findings of every study contributed to the larger picture of experiences related to sad music. The shared metaphorical language used in communicating experiences to others revealed deeper, socio-culturally shared structures of experiences. The classification of different kinds of "sadness" gave rise to different contextual aspects of conceptualisation that affect the experiences. Concerning the attitudes towards sad music, by using a representative sample of population, the aspects of previous studies were tested on a larger scale. Besides verifying the existence of the phenomenon, identifying the contextual and preferential aspects made the claim of (social) context even stronger. Finally, by examining the ways in which people negotiate the socially shared meanings of these kinds of emotional experiences, this study revealed new aspects of conceptualisation (both music *and* emotion) that affected the listeners' experiences. In sum, the current work paints a more comprehensive picture of the myriad ways in which people experience, conceptualise, and share emotions associated with nominally sad music than the previous studies on music and sadness.

Keywords: music, emotion, experience, sad music, sadness, everyday listening

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Four years ago, I reached a crossroads in my life. The trail seemed to split in two opposite directions: on one hand, there was the future that I had been aiming towards my whole life, but on the other there was an alternate future, which I did not know much about and which seemed simultaneously scary and fascinating. To my own surprise, I found myself taking the path to the unknown, which, in four years, led to a whole new world of research, discoveries, and personal growth. The best part of that journey has been the fact that I have never needed to travel alone, but always had supportive company nearby whenever I needed a helping hand or good advice. Now, it is time to express my gratitude to the people who have made this process of writing a doctoral dissertation possible.

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Jyväskylä, November 2015  
Henna-Riikka Peltola

## LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

List of the publications (reprinted after the introductory part) included in this thesis:

- I Peltola, H.-R., & Saesma, T. 2014. Spatial and bodily metaphors in narrating the experience of listening to sad music. *Musicae Scientiae*, 18 (3), 292-306.
- II Peltola, H.-R., & Eerola, T. (in press). Fifty shades of blue: Classification of music-evoked sadness. *Musicae Scientiae*. doi:10.1177/1029864915611206
- III Eerola, T., Peltola, H.-R., & Vuoskoski, J. 2015. Attitudes toward sad music are related to both preferential and contextual strategies. *Psychomusicology: Music, Mind, and Brain*, 25 (2), 116-123. doi:10.1037/pmu0000096
- IV Peltola, H.-R. (submitted). Sharing experienced sadness: Negotiating meanings of self-defined sad music within a group interview session.

## **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION TO THE PUBLICATIONS**

- I The author was the first author of the publication. She designed the study and the questions for the Survey, collected and analysed the data, and wrote the majority of the article. The co-author helped with the analysis and assisted in designing the theoretical framework. She also took part in the writing of the article.
- II The author was the first author of the publication. She designed the study and the questions for the Survey and collected and analysed the data in co-operation with the second author. The co-author took part in coding of the data as well as the writing of the article.
- III The author was the second author of the publication. She designed the statements for the Survey, based on the previous qualitative data used in Publications I and II. She also collected the data. The first author designed the study and analysed the data. All the three authors participated in interpreting the results of the analysis. The article was written by all the three authors collaboratively.
- IV The author was the sole author of Publication IV.

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ABSTRACT

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Listening to music touches us emotionally. It can make us experience indescribable feelings. It can make us laugh and cry. It can also help us relax, uplift us, and give us energy. One of the most important reasons why people engage with music is to experience emotions (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010). Usually, people seek feelings of pleasure from music. Sometimes, the pleasure comes from the feelings of sadness and melancholy.

Although it is assumed that people tend to seek positive emotions because they are beneficial and avoid negative ones because they are harmful (e.g. Bonnano, Goering, & Coifman, 2008; Fredrickson & Cohn, 2008), in the context of art, however, strong emotional experiences are often those that are related to tragedy. This phenomenon is considered paradoxical, since people seem to strive for emotional experiences that are not comparable to their everyday emotions: The negative emotions, such as sadness, that they tend to avoid in real life, give them satisfaction in the context of certain art forms, such as literature, films, or music. In the field of music research, it has been widely acknowledged that emotions experienced while listening to nominally sad music are usually pleasant ones. Many studies (e.g. Juslin et al., 2011; Vuoskoski et al., 2012; Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2012; Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014) have demonstrated that sad music induces mainly positive and somewhat mixed feelings in the listener. In other words, even if people say certain music makes them feel sad, the feeling, nevertheless, feels strangely pleasurable to them. Although the topic has been studied many times before, we still do not know much about the actual experiences people go through while listening to music that is considered sad. More importantly, as previous studies have aimed to explain the paradoxical pleasure experienced when listening to sad music, the actual emotional experiences have been left out from these investigations.

Often, the concept of “happy” and “sad” music is taken for granted. There are many distinguished musical features in Western music, which convey easily recognisable emotional expressions of happiness and sadness. Even a lay person is probably able to articulate at least the most obvious features also, of course, identified by music scholars (e.g. Hevner, 1935; Vieillard et al., 2008):

Happy music is in the major mode and has a fast tempo, whereas sad music is slow and in the minor mode. Traditionally, in music psychology, the assumption was that listeners passively receive emotional cues from music and that the music is capable of producing significant, uniform emotions, and behavioural effects (Garofalo, 2010). However, the listener need not be a helpless victim of the power of music, but be actively conceptualising and ascribing different kinds of emotional meanings to the music she hears.

One of the fundamental assumptions of this thesis is that music is not only used for expressing certain emotions but also used in the conceptualisation of those emotional states and negotiation of socially shared meanings of both music and emotion. As Dibben (2006, p. 171) states: “[I want to] argue not only that music represents or embodies a particular emotional experience, but also that it contributes to the construction of the very idea of what emotion is and of how it is experienced”. Thus, music is not seen as an external stimulus inducing internal psychological changes in the listener, but as a resource or a medium with which emotional experiences are constructed by the listener in a certain historical and sociocultural context (e.g. DeNora, 2003).

This thesis is situated in the interdisciplinary field of music and emotion research. Studies in this field are investigating the ways in which music is related to people’s emotions in order to explain the underlying mechanisms of emotion induction and recognition, providing both empirical and theoretical perspectives in this regard. The field is multidisciplinary and diverse, but as a whole, inclined towards behavioural and neuroscientific research. This thesis aims to broaden the perspective presented in previous studies. The use of concepts and theoretical tools not only from music psychology and musicology but also from cultural studies, music sociology, cognitive linguistics, affective sciences, and phenomenology, gives this work a distinguished, multi-paradigmatic perspective on musical emotions.

The overall aim of this thesis is to explore and understand emotional experiences evoked by listening to the type of music that the informants themselves associate with sadness, instead of making them listen to the type of music that the researcher thinks sounds sad. Specifically, the research aims to make visible the myriad ways in which people experience, conceptualise, and share their emotions with others. The research questions guiding this thesis are as follows:

- What kinds of attitudes do people in general have towards nominally sad music?
- How do people in general describe their emotional experiences of listening to self-identified sad music?
- How do the sociocultural aspects of music listening contribute to the negotiations of these emotional experiences related to nominally sad music?

The present work investigates the topic from a multidisciplinary perspective in order to deepen the theoretical and conceptual understanding of the phenomenon in question. Therefore, this thesis employs a range of methods: Collecting



free descriptions from a wide pool of informants enabled an analysis of the kinds of experiences people have in general when listening to sad music, surveys gave new information about attitudes towards sad music, and group interviews revealed some of the intersubjective aspects of the meaning-making processes involved in these subjective emotional experiences.

This thesis aims not to belittle the achievements of previous studies, which have studied the topic using the methods in experimental psychology, for example, but rather aims to shed light on the subjective and intersubjective aspects of the experiences in question, something that has not been attained in previous studies owing to their methodological choices, and thus enrich the larger picture of emotional reactions involved in the listening of sad music. Furthermore, it is expected that the results of this thesis will contribute to the wider field of music and emotion research and, hopefully, broaden both the theoretical understanding of people's emotional engagement with music and the methodological toolkit required for studying this phenomenon.

This dissertation consists of four peer-reviewed journal articles and a summary, which brings the various themes touched upon in the present research together and outlines the main findings and their contribution to the field. The following chapters 2 and 3 will outline the theoretical background of this work. These reviews and discussions on the epistemological issues of emotions as well as previous studies on music and sadness aim to provide a unified framework for this dissertation. Chapter 4 will present the theoretical position and rationale behind the methodological choices made in the studies. Chapter 5 will summarise all the four studies included in this thesis and present the overall results. Finally, chapter 6 will outline the main findings, limitations, and implications of this work.

## 2 EXPERIENCING EMOTIONS

Emotions are an important part of human existence and everyday life. Despite their perennial role, it may be surprising to realise how little we know about what emotions actually *are* and what they are *for*. This may be because emotions and their effects were largely ignored by mainstream psychology during the twentieth century (e.g. Rozin, 2002). On the other hand, in philosophy, the discussion on the nature of emotions has been going on for centuries without reaching a consensus. According to Solomon (2008, p. 3), “[j]ust when it seems that an adequate definition is in place, some new theory rears its unwelcome head and challenges our understanding”. Furthermore, the *experience* of having an emotion is also a rather mysterious phenomenon. Although it is possible to observe behavioural or physical changes related to emotional reactions, there are no objective means for measuring individual emotions. It has been argued that emotions exist only as experiences (e.g. Barrett, 2006). Thus, investigating the experiential, phenomenological aspects of emotions is a crucial point, yet one that is often neglected.

In this chapter, the phenomenology of (inter)subjective experiences will be discussed briefly. When using the terms such as “phenomenological” or “phenomenology”, I am referring to a subjective experience of an individual, not to a branch of philosophy known as phenomenology. In addition, the concepts of affect and emotion and the related terms will be defined, and an overview of the different aspects of emotions will be presented.

### 2.1 Phenomenological qualities of experience

To gain a better understanding of emotional experiences, it is important to understand the phenomenological qualities of any subjective experience. *Experience* is a phenomenon often studied within many fields of research related to human action, behaviour, or social relations. However, the meaning of the term “experience” can vary tremendously depending on the research tradition. Some

difficult questions are posed concerning the phenomena: Is experience something that happens to a person, or is it the person herself guiding the experience as it happens? Does one need to be conscious of her experiences? Does it always feel like something to have an experience? Is it possible to grasp an experience while it occurs or can it be reflected on only afterwards?

These kinds of questions have puzzled philosophers since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when early phenomenologists, such as Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, started pondering on the subjective, human lived experience. During the last 100 years or so, subjectivity and lived experience have been studied within the fields of philosophy (e.g. Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962; Sartre, 1943/1976; Zahavi, 2006), psychology and cognitive sciences (e.g. Damasio, 1999; Giorgi, 1985; Thompson, 2007), sociology (e.g. Denzin, 1989; Lupton, 1997), and cultural and feminist studies (e.g. Ramazanoglu & Holland, 1999).

### **2.1.1 Embodiment and verbalisation of experience**

It can be argued that all human experiences are embodied (e.g. Nussbaum, 2001) because we are embodied creatures; thus, our entire existence in the world and everything we do is “perceived through body”, as Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962, p. 216) famously proposed. Many attempts have been made to understand the dynamics of subjectivity and make the different dimensions of experience visible. Many scholars agree that lived experience has a temporal structure and that it can never be grasped in the moment it happens but only be reflected upon as a past presence (Manen, 1990). Ramazanoglu and Holland (1999, cited in Ellis & Flaherty, 1992) suggest that experience takes place simultaneously on several levels; every experience involves – at the very least – the level of events, the socially shared level of valuing the experiences, the bodily or material level, and the discursive level of narration.

The question of verbalisation and reflection – whether the lived experiences are radically changed or not when reflected upon and put into words – has been regularly raised since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992; Zahavi, 2006). Many phenomenologists argue that although we articulate and modify the lived experience while studying it, the articulation springs from the actual experience, thereby revealing its relevant aspects (Zahavi, 2006, pp. 80, 81). On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that language is a sociocultural process that is not fixed in its meanings. Hence, the articulations of the experience can be seen only as indirect representations of what they intent to represent (Denzin, 1992, p. 23). Nevertheless, it is through verbalisations and communication that experience can be accessed and shared with others (e.g. Ramazanoglu & Holland, 1999).

One way to express the meaning of an abstract, pre-linguistic, subjective experience is describing it by using metaphorical language. Metaphors are not a solely poetic way of expression, as laymen might assume, but they can be seen as a natural outcome of the human mind and language (e.g. Gibbs, 2008). Furthermore, a metaphor is not simply a literary device for transferring our experiences to others, but it is also a process – or a mechanism, if one prefers that term

– whereby experiential domains can be connected to each other (Barcelona, 2000). According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999), the entire human conceptual system is thoroughly metaphorical. Thus, a metaphor is a crucial tool for *conceptualisation* and meaning-making of human experience. Acts of conceptualisation, in general, refer to different kinds of cognitive meaning-making processes, where a person categorises mental representations of “entities (natural and artifactual), situations, experience, and action” (Niedenthal, 2008, p. 587). These kinds of “acts of meaning” can take place rapidly and automatically without much conscious effort (Shweder et al., 2008, p. 410).

The conceptual structure of experience is shaped by the body, brain and our modes of functioning in the world; thus, “metaphorical modes of thought” are subconscious and constantly used when making sense of the surrounding world (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 1999). The unique nature of the human body determines the structure of our conceptualisation and abstract thought (Lakoff, 2003), but these are also shaped by our cultural interpretations of bodily experiences (Johnson & Larson, 2003; Yu, 2008). In other words, conceptualisations are both embodied and socio-culturally constructed. There are two kinds of *conceptual metaphors*: *Primary metaphors* are likely to have some universal, embodied basis (such as our concepts of spatial dimensions), whereas *complex metaphors* tend to be culture-specific (such as our concepts of social relationships etc.) (e.g., Yu, 2008). According to this cognitive view on metaphors, conceptual metaphors shape our understanding of our subjective experiences, while *linguistic metaphors* are used to communicate them to others (Crawford, 2009).

Metaphorical modes of thought become apparent when investigating abstract experiential concepts, such as emotions – or music. Emotional language is highly figurative, but there are no emotion-specific metaphors (Kövecses, 2008). Describing emotional states is rather difficult without using metaphors, such as referring to different kinds of natural forces or physical movements. Likewise, talking and thinking about music is very much dependent on the use of metaphorical language, since the Western musical discourse is metaphorical to the core: try to describe a melody line without using physical metaphors of rising and falling, for example, and you will realise the fundamental role of metaphors in how we conceptualise music (see e.g. Johnson & Larson, 2003).

### 2.1.2 Different perspectives of experience

When investigating subjective experiences, one has direct access to her own experiences of the world. Hence, traditionally, phenomenologists have concentrated on *the first-person perspective* of a subjective experience (e.g., Zahavi, 2006, p. 12). In other words, the focus of research is on the researcher’s own experiences and the ways in which they articulate their self-awareness. However, studying human phenomena does not need to be limited to this. Since it is the “experienced as ‘experienced’ that interests phenomenology”, as Giorgi (2009, p. 69) points out, one should be able to grasp the others’ perspectives as well. After all, it is important to be able to look at the other’s perspective and under-

stand other points of views for human communication and everyday interaction.

For a long time, the *first-person* (experiential) and *third-person* (observational) perspectives were used to demonstrate a person's relationship, as a subject, with her object-world (Fuchs, 2013). However, this kind of duality limits our conception of interaction, as it excludes all forms of non-verbal, inter-bodily, and empathetic ways of communication and mutual understanding, by reducing human interaction to a subject-object relationship. Therefore, it has been proposed to introduce the notion of the *second-person perspective* to fill the gap between the subjective and objective perspectives with an intersubjective perspective, which includes pre-reflective awareness of the self *and* others, based on the interaction (Fuchs, 2013). The second-person perspective includes the perception of others' intentions and non-verbal expressions viewed in a meaningful context as well as the awareness that the others are also aware of oneself being in that same situation and interacting with them. As Fuchs (2013) proposes, the second-person perspective is *co-experiential*.

All the three perspectives on experience are relevant to the process of understanding emotional experiences. The first-person perspective offers a medium to explore and articulate one's own self-awareness of a subjective experience. The second-person perspective sheds light on the ways in which shared meanings and functionality of emotions arise from interaction. The third-person perspective allows us to observe others' behaviour and expression of emotions from a distance.

Although all the studies in this thesis focus on subjective interpretations of emotional experiences, the aim was not to grasp the phenomenological qualities of "raw" lived experience of an individual, but to explore the ways in which people (in general) conceptualise, describe, and share their experiences – a perspective that is observed largely in music sociology, but not as much in psychology or phenomenology. Thus, *experience* is being studied mostly from the third-person perspective, that is to say, by collecting writings/self-reports about subjective experiences and interpreting them without any verbal communication or other forms of interaction with the informants. This perspective is frequently used within studies in music psychology, so it was chosen here in order to engage in a dialogue with previous studies. However, in Study IV, there is an attempt to gain a more intersubjective, second-person perspective, since the researcher was present in the interactive group interview situation, co-experiencing the music listening and the sharing of experiences as they took place and, finally, describing the social interaction of the rest of the group within the report.

## 2.2 Affect and emotion

Although the topic of human emotions has been an area of discussion among scholars for centuries, systematic research on emotions in psychology has been

conducted only since the early 1990s. Since the last 25 years or so, scientific interest in this area has been growing, as the value of studying emotions – their significance in human cognition, personality, health, and social issues – is becoming evident (Lewis, Haviland-Jones & Barrett, 2008). Besides psychology, emotions are generally discussed in the fields of cognitive science, neuroscience, philosophy as well as social and cultural studies, arts, and religious studies.

Emotion research cannot be discussed without mentioning about research on *affect*. Different disciplines focus on affect, which is often used as an umbrella term for all kinds of affective states. Because of the multidisciplinary views as well as different kinds of contributions to the field, there are some inconsistencies in the use of terminologies and concepts. For instance, in psychology, the term affect usually refers to a set of all valenced (negative–positive) mental states (e.g. Rozin, 2002). Thus, emotion is subsumed under the concept of affect. Barrett (2006, p. 31) proposes that *core affect* is an essential basis of emotional life, a kind of a “neurophysiological barometer of the individual’s relation to an environment” that includes all sensory, motor, and somatic information. She sees the core affect as a very simple form of response that distinguishes whether the stimuli or events are helpful or harmful to a given person in a given situation. It can influence behaviour without being interpreted, at which time it functions unconsciously, but it can also be conceptualised as being certain emotion(s). Within the fields of social and cultural studies, however, affect is used to refer to certain kinds of deep-level affective processes that take place in the pre-linguistic space “between stimulus and reaction, and between reaction and consciousness”, not limited by conscious acts of meaning-making or representations (Papoulias & Callard, 2010, pp. 34–35). What these views have in common is that they consider affect to be a dynamic process that takes place in a non-linguistic, often unconscious level, and emotion to be only one form of affect (see also Stern, 2010).

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, questions such as “What qualifies as an emotion?” or “Where do emotional feelings come from?” have divided researchers. Different theories on emotion have emphasised different aspects of the phenomenon, as summarised by Prinz (2004): Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the relevance of the body in emotional experience was emphasised – as long as bodily feelings last, the emotional experience occurs. Since the 1960s onwards, cognition started playing an increasingly important role in emotion theories. The *cognitive labelling theory* considers emotion as a process, where bodily changes are followed by cognitive interpretation of those states. Bodily arousal is thus “labelled” as being somehow emotionally meaningful. Cognition overtook body completely in the *dimensional appraisal theory*, which was introduced by Magda Arnold (1960) and later advanced by Richard Lazarus (1991). According to this theory, emotions include appraisal judgments that are drawn from a set of dimensions, estimating whether the perceived situation or the emotionally significant object itself, “is harmful or beneficial, whether it involves objects that are present or absent, and whether those objects are difficult to or easy to attain or



avoid". Different emotions are thus seen as being the result of these appraisal questions (Prinz, 2004, pp. 4-14).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many scholars acknowledge the defects in this purely cognitive view of emotions and are striving to bring the body back into the discussion. This strife has been going on in the humanities and social sciences since the 1990s, when the so-called *affective turn* led to a new interest in embodied and affective states (Papoulias & Callard, 2010; Sedgwick, 2003), but psychologists (e.g. Frijda & Sundararajan, 2007; Niedenthal, 2007) have also been increasingly more interested in the embodied aspects of emotions. For instance, in the *Handbook of Affective Sciences*, Davidson, Scherer and Goldsmith (2002, p. xiii) define *emotion* as being one of the six major affective phenomena that "refers to a relatively brief episode of coordinated brain, autonomic, and behavioural changes that facilitate a response to an external or internal event of significance for the organism". Thus, emotion is a fundamentally embodied phenomenon although it is rather commonly agreed by most scholars that the cognitive dimension is also included here (e.g. Cates, 2003). Rozin (2002) suggests that unlike the simpler and direct concept of affect, emotion involves a complex attribution or appraisal process. Nussbaum (2001) goes even further, proposing that besides being embodied, emotions *are* cognitions, in the sense that cognition is composed of emotion in a dynamic fashion, as there is an evaluative aspect always included in the process of experiencing emotions. As for Barrett (2006; Barrett et al., 2007), she adds to the cognitive labelling theory by placing emphasis on the cognitive act of conceptualising bodily information, *affect*, into certain emotions.

### 2.2.1 Basic emotions

According to current knowledge, emotions are thought to be an important part of the intelligent capacity and evolutionary survival of our species although humans are not the only animals who experience emotions (e.g. Frijda, 2008). Any living organism's motivation to obtain things that are good for it - such as nutrition, optimal temperature, or elements related to reproduction - and avoid things that are harmful increases its likelihood of survival. Thus, affect - the existence of pleasure and pain - has an important role in capturing the focus or directing behaviour to the most beneficial manner (Rozin, 2002). The rich and diverse emotion system of human beings can be seen as an evolutionary outcome of this valenced survival mechanism.

Since all human cultures have concepts for emotions or emotional experiences, many scholars (e.g. Ekman, 1972, 1999; Johnson-Laird & Oatley, 1992) argue that at least the so-called basic emotions (fear, anger, sadness, happiness, and disgust) would have some universal, innate, embodied basis (for music-related emotions, see Peretz, 2001). The basic-emotions hypotheses propose that these emotions, or emotion categories, are related to specified brain functions and embodied information and, therefore, occur in most or all cultures and languages (Niedenthal, 2007; Frijda, 2008). The supporting evidence for the universality of basic emotions has been presented by studies focusing on facial expres-

sions: mostly, people from different cultures are capable of producing and recognising facial expressions associated with basic emotions although people perform worse when evaluating the facial expressions of the people from other cultures than of those from their own (Heine, 2008). Neuroscience, on the other hand, has been able to provide an incoherent view on the neural underpinnings of the basic emotions, as both the dimensional views (arousal-valence) and basic emotion views are supported by neuroimaging studies, and often, emotions seem to be generated via the interplay of many basic brain processes rather than regions unique to affective states (for a meta-analysis, see Kober et al., 2008; Vytal & Hamann, 2010).

However, basic-emotions theories have been criticised for ignoring the nuances of emotional experiences and the cultural and contextual aspects affecting these experiences (e.g. Barrett, 2006, 2007; Wierzbicka, 1992). Other emotion models have tried to make these nuances visible. For instance, the “discrete emotions” view proposes that emotions are somewhat consistent with basic emotions, but they are derived from situational factors (see e.g. Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003). It is crucial to acknowledge the significance of contextual aspects, since emotions are not only biological entities but also historical and sociocultural phenomena. The emotional life of people is, and has been, different in different times and different societies, depending on the contemporary cultural standards set for emotions (e.g. Stearns, 2008) and/or the emotion lexicon (e.g. Scherer et al., 2013). Hence, the *cultural evolution* of the social surroundings also shapes emotional experiences. Considering that emotions – similar to any human experience – are the result of *conceptualisation* leads to the inclusion of these cultural and contextual aspects to the process of experiencing emotions. Barrett’s (2006) *conceptual act model* of emotion is of particular relevance to this thesis, as the studies included herein (with the exception of Study III) utilise it as a theoretical basis for explaining the concept of emotion.

### 2.2.2 Conceptualisation of emotions

While there is evidence for some universality in the recognition of emotions (e.g. Ekman, 1999; Niedenthal, 2007), there is also evidence for cultural diversity. Especially in the case of *emotional experience*, there is a variation in the intensity with which people in different cultures experience emotions or the degree to which they experience negative versus positive feelings (Heine, 2008; Miyamoto & Ma, 2011). One possible explanation for this variation is the conceptualisation of these experiences and *emotion concepts*, which are very much dependent on the surrounding culture, social settings, and native language.

When conceptualising emotions, people use their explicit knowledge about emotions, which has an effect on their emotional experiences. According to Niedenthal (2008), people seem to have at least three classes of information about emotions: 1) information about the situational conditions and elicitors of emotion, 2) information about the actions that are likely to be taken if a certain emotion is experienced, and 3) information about the “introspective states that



constitute the ‘hot’ component of emotions”, such as bodily changes (e.g. higher heart rate or trembling of muscles) (ibid., p. 588).

Barrett (2006) proposes that the phenomenological qualities of emotions are derived from “stereotyped, specific patterns of somatovisceral activity, brain activation, and behavior”. Therefore, people have learned to associate their thoughts, bodily feelings, and action tendencies to their interaction with the world and categorise the process as a certain emotion. This kind of categorisation is the result of at least two components: *affect* and conceptual knowledge about emotion (Ibid., p. 30). Although embodied information plays a critical role in the conceptualisation of emotions, the nuances of individual and cultural differences are also evident in the conceptualised content, as selective attention tends to be assigned to different aspects of embodied emotion (Niedenthal, 2008, p. 597). Individual differences in *emotional granularity*, meaning the precision of verbalising the emotional experiences using differentiated terms and discrete emotion labels (Barrett, 2006, pp. 25, 26), may be related to the differences in personality traits, for example, but is, nevertheless, dependent on the language and existing emotion lexicon.

The proper lexicon for inner affective states is learned through one’s interaction with her surrounding environment. Both culture and language are involved in a person’s learning and internalising of the emotion system of their social surroundings (e.g. Wierzbicka, 1999; Kövecses, 2000). The differences in emotional lexicons vary notably in different languages, and it is not only the number of emotion words that they know but also the way in which they “carve up the emotional space” that makes the difference (Heine, 2008, p. 352). Also, cultural knowledge is an important input for the conceptual content, as there are different “scripts” in different cultures about *how* and *what* emotions should be experienced (e.g. Mesquita & Ellsworth, 2001; Miyamoto & Ma, 2011). In the process of conceptualisation, culture-specific metaphorical language guides both the meaning-making and verbalisation of bodily experiences into an abstract concept of emotion (Yu, 2008). Even the experiences of non-verbal embodied feelings are intermediate sociocultural elements, since “the ways in which we perceive our bodies, regulate them, decorate them, move them, evaluate them morally [- -] are all shaped via the sociocultural and historical context in which we live” (Lupton, 1998, p. 32). Thus, besides being embodied experiences, emotions are, at the same time, forms of cultural narratives that we learn from our surrounding society; they are extant in the culture that we are born in, and our sense of self and others is formed by these narratives (c.f., Dibben, 2006, p. 174). It is important to notice that *culture* here does not refer only to certain nationalities or language borders, since there can be many sub-cultures within a culture that may all have different scripts or narratives – whatever term one wishes to use. Hence, the differences between people’s emotional conceptualisation may be dependent on their age, gender, and socialisation history (c.f., Brody & Hall, 2008), rather than only their nationality or native language.

Besides being important for individual experiences, emotion concepts are crucial in communicating experiences to others as well as understanding and

reacting to their experiences (e.g. Niedenthal, 2008). In other words, they have a certain relevance in the social sharing of affective experiences. In addition, language plays an important role in the *intersubjectivity* of emotions, since we learn the proper lexicon for the emotional states in social contexts, where others are present and aware of us expressing those states (Rudd, 2003). Thus, besides being subjective experiences, emotions are also inherently social phenomena.

### 2.2.3 Emotions as social processes

Although in psychology emotions are often studied as experiences of an individual or even isolated from their social context (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992), they are not independent from social behaviour and interpersonal interaction. On the contrary, emotions are a fundamental part of an organism's environment, as they partly arise through interactions or anticipated interactions with others (Salovey, 2002). Emotions and emotional expressions play an important role in the development and regulation of interpersonal relationships (Ekman, 1999), since they are "products of cultural definitions and social relations" (Lupton, 1998, p. 2).

The social functionality of emotions has been highlighted especially in psychological studies on the physical expression of basic emotions (e.g. Ekman, 1972, 1999; Keltner & Haidt, 1999), where they have been considered a part of the (universal) signalling system (Salovey, 2002). In addition, emotions are needed for social bonding, which is vital for our thriving as social creatures (e.g. Fischer & Manstead, 2008). Although, as Ekman (1999, p. 46) points out, emotions do occur also when we are alone and not thinking about others, still, it is mostly the social contexts that elicit and develop emotions (Fischer & Manstead, 2008). Emotions are also considered integral to the maintenance of social relationships (Lupton, 1998). With the help of emotions, we can associate with others by promoting interpersonal relationships or distance ourselves – or others – from intergroup situations. However, even if a given emotion serves a certain social function, it may still have different social effects depending on the social setting (Fischer & Manstead, 2008, pp. 464, 465). Hence, a response to some emotional expressions, e.g. a declaration of love or shedding of tears, may vary greatly depending on the person and situation in question.

Also, it is important to note that the social context of emotions need not be a concrete one. A person is capable of evoking emotions in others just by imagining what people have done or what they might do to her. In these kinds of imaginary situations, people's affective expectations have an effect on not only the emotional experience that takes place in that specific moment but also their subsequent emotional experiences (e.g. Leary, 2002). Furthermore, since others are an important aspect of one's identity in the first place (*ibid.*, p. 776), there is a certain fundamental intersubjective quality in human consciousness and self-awareness (see also Thompson, 2001; Zahavi, 2006). Self-reflection and expectations of emotional reactions in a certain social context are, for their part, one component of conceptual knowledge about emotion, affecting the emotional experiences.

To summarise, the sub-chapter 2.2 shows that emotions are embodied, experiential states that exist between people in a historical, sociocultural context, and are learned, shared and communicated via social interactions. In Barrett's words (2012, p. 413), "emotions are, *at the same time*, socially constructed and biologically evident". Although emotions have a certain biological basis, they may, eventually, only exist as experiences.

### 3 EXPERIENCING EMOTIONS IN RELATION TO MUSIC LISTENING

Music's capability of evoking affective states in the listener has interested philosophers since the days of ancient Greeks, but the actual study of music and emotion is a relatively young branch of research. It was only in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the real breakthrough took place (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010). Although the perspectives of composers (e.g., Simonton, 2010; Thompson & Robitaille, 1992) and performers (e.g., Lamont, 2012; Timmers, 2007; Van Zijl & Sloboda, 2010) have been explored, the majority of the previous studies have concentrated on the listener's emotional reactions to music as well as their capability of recognising the emotional expression of music (see e.g., Juslin & Sloboda, 2010). The definition for the concept of *emotion* given by Juslin and Sloboda (2010, p. 10) is widely used: the term refers to brief but affective reaction that comprises of sub-components, such as subjective feeling, physiological arousal, emotion expression, action tendency, and regulation. There are different conceptual frameworks for emotions in music that have been dominated the previous research: discrete (the basic emotion model) and dimensional models of emotions. According to the discrete model, emotions are derived from innate basic emotions, whereas dimensional models propose that affective states arise from different physiological systems and are mapped onto a two- or three-dimensional plane of arousal, valence, and tension (for a review, see Eerola & Vuoskoski, 2011). In addition, there is a nine-factor Geneva Emotion Music Scale (GEMS) model that aims to describe *aesthetic emotions*, such as wonder, transcendence, or nostalgia, which, in the context of music, often seem to be more adequate than utilitarian emotions (Zentner et al., 2008).

There is evidence that some universal features of emotion in music may exist, but there are culture-specific features as well, since the musical and affective meanings are influenced and by learning and exposure (for a review, see Swaminathan & Schellenberg, 2015). Emotions that are induced by music, also known as *musical emotions* (e.g., Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008), and emotions that are perceived from music are theoretically different (Gabrielsson, 2002), but, often, there is a strong interdependency between the two (Evans & Schubert, 2008).

In music psychology, the notion of music being capable of positively affecting the listener's mood emphasises its beneficial role in the listener's everyday life. Indeed, there are many ways in which music can be used as a tool for emotion induction and regulation: often people engage with music to purposely induce a change in their emotions – to change or release emotions, to match their current emotional state, to comfort themselves, to relieve stress, or just enjoy themselves by listening to music (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010). Some music researchers have even considered affect regulation to be playing a leading role in music-related behaviour. Studies have shown that affect regulation may be one of the main reasons why people engage with music (e.g. DeNora, 1999; Juslin & Laukka, 2004). Regulation may or may not be a conscious act, and it may include not only the regulation of specific emotions but also moods (Saarikallio, 2011).

However, not all emotional responses to music listening seem to be pre-meditated. Music has the capability to “take over” and lead the listener to strong experiences that make her feel helpless or immersed in the music and thus losing herself in it completely (Gabrielsson, 2011). Furthermore, music is capable of expressing negative emotions, such as sadness, fear, or anger. The paradoxical responses to this kind of music as well as the most relevant concepts of the field will be discussed in this chapter.

### 3.1 Ambiguous sadness and the paradox of tragedy

The mainstream view on sadness in psychology is that it is a negative emotion that people tend to avoid (e.g. Russell, 1980; Bonnanno et al., 2008). In the context of arts though, sadness and tragedy have been elements of entertainment since the days of ancient Greeks. When engaging with music, films, or theatre performances, people often seem to seek for the kinds of emotional experiences that would not give them pleasure in everyday life. Indeed, this *paradox of tragedy* (see e.g. Smuts, 2009) appears to be a rather mysterious phenomenon. What is it about tragedy that makes it a pleasant feeling for some people? How are the emotions related to fiction formed in the first place? Are the emotions evoked by (tragic) art comparable with everyday emotions?

Many theories have proposed why fictional tragedy fascinates us. Some arguments from Greek philosophers still echo within current research. For instance, Plato suggested that tragedy allows people to indulge (socially) in dangerous emotions (Eagleton, 2003), which is a view similar to Goldstein's (2009). According to Goldstein, we are able to experience strong negative emotions in the context of the arts because we suspend our disbelief, and we can enjoy them because we know that they are not a real menace to us. Thus, the enjoyment of forbidden or menacing emotions would be somewhat homologous to other “guilty pleasures” in life – they are enjoyable, although (or precisely because) they are not that good for you. The so-called *control theories* are in line with this view, as they place an emphasis on the active agency of an audience member,

proposing that since we have control over the situation and we can choose whether we want to experience the emotional responses (and when we cannot take it anymore, just walk away), the feeling of power makes the painful emotions pleasurable (Smuts, 2009).

Aristotle argued that a purifying *catharsis*, which provides emotional therapy to the viewers, is the source of pleasure in tragedy (Eagleton, 2003). This idea is popular among contemporary philosophers as well (see Smuts, 2009). In the field of music research, it is renewed especially within the studies of music and affect-regulation, where the emphasis has been placed on the beneficial emotional effects of regulating negative emotions with the help of sad-sounding music (e.g. Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013; Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014).

Other proposed solutions to the paradox are as follows: *conversion theory*, which suggests that the painful emotions evoked by art are converted into pleasure through a more eminent emotion or the overall experience is pleasurable in retrospect, so the pain is forgotten; *compensation theories*, which suggest that besides the feelings of pain, the artwork provides certain compensatory pleasures that the audience values more or they have a greater power over them than the pain; *meta-response theories*, which propose that we want to engage with tragic art because we take pleasure in our own reactions to such fictions in a rather self-congratulatory way (e.g. feeling glad that we are the kind of people who can feel pity of empathy when witnessing the suffering of others); and *rich experience theory*, which proposes that we desire painful aesthetic experiences for their multifaceted nature, since they appeal to both our cognitive and affective capacities (Smuts, 2009).

In addition to these, some neurobiological explanations have also been offered. For instance, Trimble (2012) suggests that feelings induced by tragic art forms – the so-called “tragic joy” – differ from everyday feelings because of their evolutionary and neuroanatomical bases. He proposes that “tragic joy” is a result of decreased activity of the *amygdala* – a brain region that responds to the evaluation of emotional stimuli. According to Trimble, this decreased activity leads to a sensation of pleasant intimacy, similar to feelings associated with love, social bonding, and aesthetic appreciation of beauty (*ibid.*, pp. 154–157, 159). In this regard, Huron (2011) proposes that a hormone called prolactin, which offers protection from mental harm in the case of genuine loss, makes the experience pleasurable. Without real-life loss, the carry-over effects induced by prolactin are felt as positive, comforting, and relaxing. Nevertheless, an all-encompassing theory of pleasurable tragedy has not yet been acknowledged, as all these theories leave many questions unanswered.

### 3.1.1 Defining sad music

Distinct musical features portray sadness in Western music culture. According to many authors (e.g. Hevner, 1935; Crowder, 1985; Vieillard et al., 2008; Juslin & Lindström, 2010), the most important musical cues for the expression of sadness are low-pitched range, slow tempi, and minor mode. Many previous studies (e.g. Larsen & Stasty, 2011; Ladinig & Glenn, 2012; Kawakami et al., 2013;



Vuoskoski et al., 2012) on music-induced emotions have relied on music excerpts chosen by the researchers, using these criteria for proper emotional expression. Often, the researchers have selected music excerpts that represent specific musical genres, typically Western classical instrumental music or film music. The use of these kinds of excerpts aims to induce similar emotions in the listener, but minimises the recording of possible extramusical associations (e.g. Vuoskoski et al., 2012), such as autobiographical memories or narratives conveyed by lyrics. Although the participants should not be familiar with the individual excerpts, they are familiar enough with the musical style to be able to recognise and, hopefully, react emotionally to the played excerpts.

However, researchers have also started to investigate *self-selected* or *self-defined sad music*, which is music that the listener herself perceives as portraying or evoking sadness and chooses to listen to it (e.g. Brattico et al., 2011; Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013; Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2012). This kind of self-defined interpretation of music may be particularly important in case of voluntary music listening, especially if the person is seeking mood-regulation, as both individual and situational factors affect the emotional responses to music (see e.g. Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013). Also, it is important to note that in the case of self-identified (sad) music, the musical features may play only a minor role in the process of emotional interpretation because owing to some individual factors or autobiographical associations, the “listener can perceive just about *any* emotion in the music” (Juslin, 2013, p. 10). Nevertheless, as certain fixed musical connotations express sadness in music, often, there is also a discrepancy between the culturally determined concepts of sad music and individual ones.

Self-defined sad music is of particular relevance to the present work. All the studies within this thesis focus on the listener’s conceptualisation of sad music rather than the external standards of musical representation of sadness.

### 3.1.2 Emotions induced by sad music

It is argued that, in general, the emotions evoked by music are mainly positive (e.g. Sloboda & Juslin, 2010; Juslin, 2013). According to previous studies, sad music is no exception: people have been repeatedly reporting that listening to sad music induces pleasant, if somewhat, mixed feelings (e.g. Juslin et al., 2011; Vuoskoski et al., 2012; Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2012; Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014) as well as highly aesthetic experiences (Zentner et al., 2008; Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2013).

There are many possible reasons why music that expresses sadness may lead the listener to feel emotions other than sadness. Besides the explanations described in the chapter about the paradox of tragedy, music researchers have delineated certain music-specific versions for inducing pleasurable emotions by sad music. For instance, contextual fit plays an important role in the induction of emotions (see e.g. Scherer & Zentner, 2001; Gabrielsson, 2001); if sad music is played in an inappropriate situation, it may evoke irritation or even humorous feelings in the listener, for example. There are eight psychological mechanisms for induction of musical emotions, proposed by Juslin and Västfjäll (2008; up-

dated by Juslin et al., 2011), out of which three are probably the most pertinent ones to the experience of listening to sad music: *episodic memories*, which refer to specific, emotional memories that music evokes; *contagion*, which refers to the process where the listener internally mimics the emotional content expressed by music; and *evaluative conditioning*, which refers to emotions induced by learnt associations between the emotional stimulus and the said piece of music.

Certain personality traits, such as *openness to experience*, *empathy*, *fantasy*, *empathetic concern*, *absorption*, and *rumination* have been found to be linked with preferences for sad music (Garrido & Schubert, 2011; Vuoskoski et al., 2012; Garrido & Schubert, 2013). Also, situational and motivational factors seem to have an effect on the pleasant aspects of the listening experience. For instance, many people choose to listen to self-identified sad music when they are experiencing some emotional distress (Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013). Other motivations have been categorised by Taruffi and Koelsch (2014) as follows: *social* (attachment and social bonding), *memory* (retrieving autobiographical memories), *relaxation and arousal* (mood and arousal regulation), *nature* (using sad music as a reflection of the environment), *musical features* (aesthetical function), *introspection* (cognitive function: to improve self-awareness), *background* (sad music provides a pleasant background), *fantasy* (cognitive function: to engage in creative thinking), *intense emotion* (emotional function: to seek strong experiences), *positive mood* (emotional function: to engage in sad music only in a positive mood), and *cognitive* (cognitive function: to engage in rational thinking). Nonetheless, there are people who altogether avoid listening to sad music (Peltola & Saresma, 2014; Peltola & Eerola, in press; Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014).

However, what emotion labels do people give to their feelings evoked by sad music listening? There have been some attempts to identify the emotions people experience in relation to sad music. Usually, this is done by conducting surveys in which people are asked to rate emotion words by their relevance to their experiences of music listening. In many cases, the list of words is based on The Geneva Emotional Music Scales (GEMS) by Zentner et al. (2008). The list of most common emotions induced by sad music vary only a little depending on the study. The top five of emotion words seems to be *nostalgia*, *peacefulness*, *tenderness*, *wonder*, and *sadness* (Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014; Vuoskoski et al., 2012). These are considered as *aesthetic* emotions (Vuoskoski et al., 2012) or *vicarious* emotions (Kawakami et al., 2014) and, thus, somewhat distinct from everyday emotions.

However, none of the previous studies has been able to explain the core paradox that lies in these experiences of emotionally reacting to sad music listening. Why do some people call the emotion “sadness” if they find it pleasant? Why does crying feel good when the tears are shed by sad-sounding music? How can an emotion be devastating and pleasurable at the same time? I propose that by investigating the paradoxical nature of music-induced sadness, we actually stumble upon a larger problem in the field. It is not *sadness* that is the difficulty here, but it is the entire concept of emotion in music research that con-



fuses us. The tragedy paradox is only the tip of the iceberg. I will provide reasons supporting this argument in the following sub-chapter.

### 3.2 Problematic concept of emotion in music research

The theoretical concepts of affective phenomena used in the field of music and emotion research are similar to those used in the mainstream affective sciences: *Affect* is used as an umbrella term encompassing all “valenced” (positive/negative) states, whereas *emotion* refers to a brief but intensive affective reaction with a number of sub-components, such as physiological arousal, subjective *feeling*, and expression of the experienced state (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010). Although research in this field often tackles all of these concepts, the field is still known as “music and emotion research”, mainly for historical reasons and “for the sake of clear communication” (ibid., pp. 10, 11). This, however, is not completely unproblematic because there is a danger that this conceptualisation narrows the multifaceted phenomena. I argue that there are at least three conceptual defects within the research on music and emotions, which are preventing us from understanding the experiential dimensions of musical emotions: (a) considering (musical) emotions as natural kinds, (b) ignoring the contextual and social aspects of musical emotions, and (c) ignoring the phenomenological aspects of musical emotions.

*Considering (musical) emotions as natural kinds* – Although many kinds of emotion models are used in music and emotion research (Zentner & Eerola, 2010), there is a broad acceptance of basic-emotions theories (e.g. Fritz et al., 2009, 2012; Juslin, 2013; Peretz, 2001). It has been acknowledged that musical emotions may be more complex and subtle than basic emotions (e.g. Eerola & Vuoskoski, 2012; see also Hunter & Schellenberg, 2010), but, nevertheless, the majority of the studies focus on basic emotions (e.g. Fritz et al., 2009; Paquette et al., 2013) or certain music-specific emotions (e.g. Zentner et al., 2008; Istók et al., 2009) that are considered as more or less unified, inherent, or natural kinds. Juslin (2013) suggests that basic emotions are *iconic* and, thus, universally recognised, while more complex emotions rely on “culture-specific” cues, and these distinctions are the result of different levels of conceptualisation. However, this conceptualisation covers only the *recognition* of music’s emotional content, not the experienced emotions. Musical features of basic emotions may be easily recognised (e.g. Bigand et al., 2005) even across different cultures (Balkwill et al., 2004; Laukka et al., 2013), but how they are experienced remains to be explored.

There has been a debate about whether musical emotions qualify as real emotions or not. This debate springs from the somewhat problematic idea that (basic) emotions have unified meanings and a fixed behavioural effect. From this viewpoint, there are “real” and “unreal” emotions, and the ones music is evoking cannot qualify as real, since they are induced by a “fictional” trigger, i.e. music (e.g. Kivy, 1989). An alternative explanation is that there are sub-types of

basic emotions, and only some of these (e.g. happy, sad) would be natural kinds. Hence, most of the musical emotions would be music-specific and different from everyday emotions (Zentner et al., 2008). Nevertheless, there is evidence that music-induced emotions have similarities with emotions experienced in other contexts, as they involve similar physiological reactions (e.g. Lunqvist et al., 2009), brain activations (e.g. Sammler et al., 2007; Alluri et al., 2013), and cognitive changes (e.g. Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2012). These findings challenge the view of basic emotions as natural kinds with unified meanings, as they make visible the multiple aspects of emotional experiences in different contexts. I propose that considering emotions as acts of conceptualisation would explain this paradox to some extent.

Instead of treating musical emotions as natural kinds, if they are considered conceptualisations, there is no reason to doubt the “realness” of emotions evoked by music or a need for sub-categorising experienced emotions into basic, complex, and music-specific emotions. Instead, research could concentrate on “how emotions *become* real experiences” (Barrett, 2012, p. 416) and the role of music in these experiences. Therefore, the differences and similarities between musical emotions and everyday emotions might not appear as puzzling or paradoxical but can be seen as the result of different kinds of conceptualisations.

*Ignoring contextual and social aspects of musical emotions* – It has been recognised that social context and extramusical information do affect how music-related emotions are perceived and felt (e.g. Egerman et al., 2013; Juslin, 2013; Liljeström et al., 2013; Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2013), but these aspects have received surprisingly little attention in the field of music and emotion research. Musical emotions are not often treated as social or cultural phenomena although it should be obvious that music does not happen in a vacuum, but rather it is an intentional, interpersonal activity. The intersubjective qualities of *both* music *and* emotions seem to be ignored in many previous studies despite the fact that music is often considered to be a “form of human communication” (e.g. Shepherd, 1991, p. 77), or “language of the emotions” (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010, p. 3), implying that it is an inherently social phenomenon.

In the field of music sociology, studies on everyday music-related action (*musicking*) have exposed the interplay between cultural activity, emotional experience, and subjective experiences associated with, for example, health (DeNora, 2010, p. 163). From the sociological perspective, the affordances of musical emotions are seen as *relational*, meaning they emerge “from the interactions between actors, materials (musical and other), and conventions of use” (*ibid.*, p. 165). Thus, the focus is not on how music affects people, but rather on how people actively make links or *articulations* (DeNora, 2003, p. 172) between different forms of music and forms of their social life.

The view of the listener being an active agent is the constitutive basis of studies on music and affect regulation. However, often the social aspects are neglected, even if they are recognised, since the focus of music psychological research is on the discovery of “internal explanations for human behaviour” (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007, p. 89). Hence, when investigating an individual’s

self-regulatory behaviour, researchers tend to consider their informants and their internal processes as somehow separate from their environment – instead of considering them as subjects whose emotion concepts and the concept of self are formed by the interaction and cultural scripts already existing in the social group they are living in. This kind of essentialist conception of subjectivity, where feelings are thought to arise from internal states (DeNora, 2010, p. 173), eventually leads to the exclusion of intersubjective qualities of musical emotions from the investigation.

*Ignoring the phenomenological aspects of musical emotions* – The subjective experience of hearing and listening, in general, has not received as much attention as sight and vision, possibly owing to our Western views, which often give prime importance to “the noblest of the senses”, sight (Petitmengin et al., 2009). In music research, the situation is ironically not much better. Since the focus of research has mostly been on *emotions* rather than *feelings*, the subjective perspective of emotional experiences are widely neglected – with the key exception of Gabrielsson’s Strong Experiences with Music project (see Gabrielsson, 2011). In many cases, because the researchers are striving for objectivity, the self-reports are excluded altogether, as they are seen as limited, invalid, and biased (see e.g. Västfjäll, 2010). Even if perceived and felt emotions are studied using different kinds of self-report methodologies (Zentner & Eerola, 2010), it is often done from the observational, third-person perspective without much (if any) interaction with the participants.

The lack of a phenomenological understanding of musical emotions has been recognised, and there have been demands for a “more dynamic and animated understanding of musical engagement than the term ‘emotion’ seems sometimes to afford” (Clarke, 2014, p. 356). However, these demands have not yet been concretised, as there are no real studies on subjective experiences of musical emotions in the field of music psychology.

In summary, the theoretical concepts of music-related affective phenomena are needed in scientific work in order to study these phenomena systematically. Nevertheless, the concepts are limited and they guide the research in a specific direction – and sometimes exclude important aspects of the phenomenon. In the field of music and emotion, new concepts should be introduced so that the sociocultural, intersubjective, and phenomenological qualities of musical emotions can be better understood.

## 4 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL POSITIONING OF THE THESIS

This thesis aims to broaden the perspective of previous studies in the field of music and emotion research. The use of concepts and theoretical tools from music psychology and musicology, cultural studies, music sociology, cognitive linguistics, affective sciences, and phenomenology, enables this work to have a novel, multi-discipline perspective on musical emotions.

### 4.1 Theoretical concepts

One of the fundamental assumptions of this thesis is that all human experiences, including emotions and music listening, are embodied (c.f., Nussbaum, 2001). Yet, there is a cognitive content involved in these experiences, especially in the processes of both meaning-making and communication. All the studies within this thesis focus on the conceptualisation of emotions that are highly dependent on cognitive capacities. Emotions are considered to be both biologically evident and socially constructed at the same time (c.f., Barrett, 2012). The operational definitions of *affect*, *emotion*, and *feeling* are broadly used as suggested by Juslin and Sloboda (2010) although not completely congruently, as the theoretical position is largely built on Barrett's (2006) *conceptual act model of emotion*. Since the focus of research is on the subjective emotional experiences of the listener and the ways in which people describe these experiences, the term *feeling* is frequently used. It refers to the informants' own descriptions of the phenomenological and often metaphorical qualities of the experience (e.g. "feeling of bursting"). The term *emotion* or *emotional* refers to the described experience that has been somehow recognised or labelled by the informant (e.g. "being sad") and *affect* the overall embodied, "valenced" state (e.g. "pleasant - unpleasant" or "pleasurable - painful").

Furthermore, music is not considered a stimulus that triggers internal emotional reactions but a dynamic "technology of emotion construction" that

provides a resource for emotional states and their achievement (DeNora, 2010, pp. 168, 173). Thus, the listener's *agency*, i.e. her engagement with a social structure called music and the active construing of her own emotional response by making *articulations* between music and emotional states (DeNora, 2003, pp. 171, 172) as well as the conceptualising of *both* the music *and* the emotion, are emphasised in this thesis.

This thesis is not aiming to solve the entire puzzle of the paradox of tragedy nor is it aiming to build an all-encompassing theory of musical emotions or music-induced sadness. Instead, the overall aim is to explore and understand emotional experiences evoked by listening to self-identified sad music. The term "self-identified" refers to the type of music that the informants themselves associate with sadness, instead of the type of music that the researcher thinks sounds sad. Specifically, the research aims to reveal the myriad ways in which people conceptualise, experience, and share their emotions with others.

## 4.2 Methods

The distinguished feature of this dissertation is that it sheds light on a wide range of research methods and paradigms used in the studies. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches have been used in a complementary manner to investigate the experiences of musical emotions as comprehensively as possible.

Different studies have investigated different aspects of the same phenomenon. The aim of the multi-method approach was to gain a rich view of people's experiences of listening to nominally sad music. This kind of mixed-methods investigation that utilises a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative components or different sorts of qualitative data as well as different epistemological perspectives, is assumed to strengthen the research findings (e.g. Howitt, 2010, pp. 370, 371) and broaden narrow focus of an individual study. Also, it recognises qualitative and quantitative research not as a strict alternative but as existing on a continuum of different views on the empirical world (c.f., Balnaves & Caputi, 2001, p. 7).

### 4.2.1 Qualitative approach

The main research question of this thesis – What kinds of emotional experiences do people have in relation to nominally sad music? – is investigated in all of the studies included to this dissertation, but it is explored in Studies I, II, and IV. These studies provide new insights into these experiences by using qualitative research methods.

Qualitative methods are used to provide a detailed description and analysis of the quality and substance of human experience (Marvasti, 2004, p. 7). Often, the aim is to examine the construction of meaning, understand the details of people's lives or frames of reference, and reflect on the role of the research in the generation of data (Gibson & Brown, 2009, p. 8). A research paradigm usual-

ly involves constructivist assumptions of reality, which assume that our social reality is subjective, situational, and culturally variable and ideologically conscious (Marvasti, 2004, p. 5). Although the positivist approaches are rejected within a qualitative research tradition (Howitt, 2010, p. 7), researchers may still rely on gathering empirical evidence of “the social world we all agree is out there” (Marvasti, 2004, p. 8). Typically, the research process is relatively unstructured and inductive, as it aims to generate new theories and concepts rather than test existing hypotheses. Also, research takes place in a natural setting, examining of the constraints of everyday life by usually focusing on an individual instead of groups or classes of individuals, and resulting in a large amount of rich textual data (Howitt, 2010, p. 10).

The aim of Study I was to explore the ways in which people describe and conceptualise their experiences of listening to nominally sad music. Since there were no pre-assumptions of these descriptions, the natural choice was to investigate the topic inductively instead of deductive testing. Collecting the descriptions from a large amount of informants rather than focusing on a smaller, carefully selected focus group was an atypical decision for qualitative research. However, as the aim was to explore people’s experiences, in general, this kind of textual data that was large in quantity – although it did lack depth in case of an individual informant – was considered the most suitable. Data-led thematic analysis (e.g. Braun & Clarke, 2006) was chosen as the method to identify reoccurring themes within the data. The focus of the analysis sharpened as the analysis process progressed and the theoretical framework as well as the used concepts were generated during this process, which is typical for qualitative research. Because of the large amount of data, only certain findings could be included in the study.

In Study II, the same data set was re-analysed in order to expose the aspects of people’s conceptualisations that required exclusion in the investigation of Study I. This time, instead of being data-led, the analysis was theory-led (see Braun & Clarke, 2008), as the author was already familiar with the data. The co-author participated in the re-coding of the data and negotiated the analysis. Again, this decision was rather unusual for postmodern qualitative research paradigms that emphasised the researcher’s subjectivity, such as critical theory or constructivism (e.g. Lincoln & Guba, 2000) although it is somewhat common in psychology as a way of triangulation and validation (e.g. Howitt, 2010, p. 317). However, as the main focus was on culturally shared conceptualisations of emotional experiences, the interpretations of *both* of the researchers as well as the negotiation on these interpretations during the analysis were seen as relevant aspects of the analysis process and saturation. Also, the coding was based on previously collected evaluations of Finnish emotion terms, which was thought to bring a wider sociocultural extension to the analysis, as the classification was not based purely on the researcher(s) interpretation of the used language but on collectively agreed meanings of the terms.

The researcher’s position in Studies I and II was rather distant and “objective” for qualitative research, and the research was only capable of grasping the



observational *third-person perspective* of these emotional experiences (see e.g., Fuchs, 2013). In Study IV, there was an attempt to get closer to the informants and *co-experience* music listening situations with them.

Group interview was selected as the data-gathering method for Study IV because the aim was to investigate social sharing and negotiations of meanings of music-related emotional experiences. Group interview is often used when investigating a “particular concrete situation” involving a *focus group* working together. Typically, the research focused on the group dynamics and interaction and how they affect individual’s perceptions, information processing, or decision-making (e.g. Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook, 2007).

The interview setting, where the informants brought their own selected tracks of music, provided an interesting social context for music listening, as the informants needed to share and negotiate their experiences of listening to not only nominally sad music but also self-defined sad music. The emotional vulnerability of the situation – where one’s own definition of emotionally meaningful piece of music is exposed to others and discussed with them – was considered to be challenging, but also revealing in the sense that it brought to light the complex and dynamic social context of music listening. Furthermore, listening to the same tracks of music during the interview session gave the informants the opportunity to investigate and reflect on their lived experience right when it took place and not only retrospectively. Focusing on the listening and discussing the tracks twice revealed the fluctuating nature of experience, as many times the informants described that their “original” experiences changed during the multiple listening, verbalisation, and social negotiations of the experiences.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to analyse the data. IPA aims to explore how individuals make sense of their personal experiences. Hence, it is largely intersubjective as well as interpretative, as “the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world” (Smith, 2004, p. 40). In other words, the researcher is empathically trying to understand her informants’ experiences, not by observing them but by interacting and co-experiencing with them (cf., Fuchs, 2013). In this study, the researcher was very much co-experiencing the music listening situations although she did not play an active role in the discussions of the group. Nevertheless, being part of the situation, listening to the same music as the informants and reacting to it, asking clarifying questions, and seeing all the non-verbal forms of communication gave her in-depth knowledge of the social sharing of the informants’ experiences.

IPA is an inductive analysis method, but at the same time, it aims to make a contribution to psychology by sharing constructs and concepts with mainstream psychology and thus is able to engage in a dialogue with existing research (Smith, 2004; Howitt, 2010). However, constructing the framework only with psychological concepts was considered to be a limitation, as the aim was not to discover internal explanations for the informant’s behaviour (c.f. Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007), but to investigate their experiences as relational

products of social sharing. Thus, the concepts from musicology, cultural studies, and sociology related to music were included in the framework.

Concerning the methodological choices for Studies I, II, and IV, qualitative approaches were selected in order to explore people's subjective experiences and the ways of meaning-making, which are in general the aims of qualitative research (e.g. Gibson & Brown, 2009). All the decisions concerning the data gathering and analysis in Studies I and II were considered to best serve the aims of research. In Study IV, the ideals for qualitative research were better fulfilled, as the data gathering, analysis, and researcher's position were more typical for postmodern qualitative research tradition.

However, this thesis aims to broaden the view on musical emotions, and since there were questions that could not be answered by investigating only qualitative data, a study with quantitative approach was also conducted. Furthermore, it was assumed that mixed research methods would better serve the aim of engaging in a dialogue with previous work on music and emotion, as the findings of similar studies are comparable. Thus, designing a survey based on qualitative data was considered to build a bridge between the existing array of studies and the research interest of the present work.

#### 4.2.2 Quantitative approach

Considering the free descriptions of volunteers in Studies I and II, it seemed to be obvious that the experiences of listening to sad music as well as the attitudes towards it were more versatile than those reported in previous studies. In order to shed light on these general attitudes, using quantitative research methods was necessary. Quantitative methods are used when observations are being measured to find statistically significant evidence about phenomenon (e.g. Balnaves & Caputi, 2001, p. 33) as well as causal explanations (e.g. Rolfe, 2013, p. 13). The aim is to develop generalisations and test theories in order to understand the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 1994, p. 7). One of the most important tasks for quantitative methods, especially statistics, in humanities and social sciences is establishing the target phenomenon and verifying the existence of the phenomenon in hand (Yang, 2010, p. 11).

Quantitative research has a positivistic research paradigm, which refers to the collection of quantitative (numerical) data through the methods of science. The (post-)positivist method aims to discover general causalities by reasoning and observing the empirical world by observing it repeatedly. In case of human beings, one needs to calculate the average score of observations or responses in order to create general categories or themes (Rolfe, 2013, pp. 13, 14.). Positivistic assumptions on reality differ from constructivism as they assume that knowledge is objective and not dependent on the individuals (researchers and participants) involved in the research (Creswell, 1994, p. 4).

The aim of Study III was to investigate the general attitudes towards nominally sad music and explore the reasons and motivations of listening to it in everyday life. The survey methodology was found to be the most suitable one for this study. Survey is a method for collecting data from people about their



demographic information (e.g. education), attitudes (e.g. motivation, beliefs), and behaviour. Surveys are usually carried out in the form of a questionnaire (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001, p. 76). The questionnaire for Study III was derived from the qualitative data set used in Studies I and II; all the statements in the questionnaire were generated from the free descriptions of previous informants.

For the sake of investigating groups of population, the following quantitative research can be conducted: *exploratory research* is conducted for studying a new area and/or testing methods, *descriptive research* focuses on providing an overview of the demographics of a population and shed light on public opinions, and *explanatory research* aims to explain the reasons behind the discovered trends (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001, p. 17). The aim of Study III was to explore the full range of attitudes, establish the target phenomenon by investigating the prevalence of the enjoyment of sad music, and investigate the underlying reasons behind the possible enjoyment. Thus, the research approach was mostly exploratory, but descriptive and explanatory components were also included. For the sake of establishing the target phenomenon, it was crucial to utilise a representative sample from the Finnish population instead of small convenience samples, often used in previous studies. By doing this, it was possible to avoid the potential biases and drawbacks inherent in utilising convenience samples – such as painting an overly positive picture of the phenomenon by recruiting participants, who like sad music and are interested in the topic in the first place, or musically trained volunteers, whose attitudes might not be comparable to the attitudes of the whole population.

The data were subjected to factor analysis, which is an analysis method used when aiming to understand the structure of a set of variables (Field, 2013, p. 666) – in this case, the participant's subjective ratings of statements concerning nominally sad music. The aim was to explain the correlating variables by clustering them into “explanatory clusters”, also known as factors. Factors are a way of reflecting constructs of the data that cannot be measured directly, since the items compounding a factor are all related to a certain structure or aspect of construction (Ibid., p. 667, 668). Thus, different kinds of attitudes towards sad music could be grouped together to reveal general patterns of attitudes. Furthermore, the relation of these patterns to background factors, such as age, gender, and musical expertise, was explored.

Adopting both qualitative and quantitative methods is challenging since they represent different paradigms and different assumptions of reality and knowledge. Some scholars have been sceptical about the eligibility of this kind of task (e.g. Lincoln & Guba, 2000) although others do advocate such enterprises (e.g. Bryman, 2007). However, such a mixed-methods approach adds versatility to this dissertation. It was assumed here that, despite the differences, these approaches do not rule each other out, but can be used in a complementary manner. In this thesis, both the approaches generated valuable information, and, thus, strengthened the overall findings and conclusions. Moreover, the aim of bringing different research traditions closer to each other was also accomplished.

## 5 SUMMARIES OF THE STUDIES

The four studies included in this dissertation are summarised below. The studies are described in more detail in the original publications. Studies I, II, and III investigated peoples' experiences in general, from the third-person perspective, whereas Study IV attempted to present the second-person perspective of the intersubjective qualities of the emotional experiences.

### 5.1 Study I: Metaphorical language used in describing experiences related to self-defined sad music

The starting point of the study was to explore the ways in which people describe their emotional experiences of listening to music that they consider sad. The aim was to investigate the ways in which they conceptualised their experiences. During the analysis, it became obvious that the use of metaphors was one prominent form of conceptualisation. Thus, the analysis focused on the metaphorical language people use in the free descriptions of these experiences and identified conceptual metaphors existing in these texts. The purpose of this analytical strategy was to get a glimpse of the embodied aspects of the experiences, which are both conceptualised and communicated to others by using metaphors (Crawford, 2009; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

The research data in the study were collected via an online questionnaire; in all, 363 volunteers answered to answers open-ended questions about their emotional experiences related to listening to sad music. The mean age of the informants was 26 years, and 78% of them were women. Most of the informants (63%) were non-musicians.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) focusing on the metaphorical language was conducted, and it resulted in categorising the identified metaphors under two overlapping categories: (I) *spatial metaphors*, and (II) *metaphors of movement*. Within the second category, *special metaphors of music* were also identified. Six conceptual metaphors were found to occur in the descriptions:

EMOTION/THE BODY IS A CONTAINER; MUSIC IS A MESSENGER; MUSIC/EMOTION IS A PHYSICAL FORCE; EMOTION RISES UP; SAD IS DOWN; and FEELING/MUSIC IS A LIQUID. The interwoven quality of these metaphors appeared as a circle, where the spatial metaphors formed the most general category, encompassing the sub-categories, metaphors of movement and music. The three categories identified in this study were compatible with the three categories of conceptual metaphor presented by Lakoff and Johnson (1980): spatial metaphors are equivalent to *orientational metaphors*, metaphors of movement, to *structural metaphors*, and metaphors of music, to *ontological metaphors*.

In this study, the similarities in metaphorical language were interpreted as a sign of similarities in the conceptualisation of the emotional experiences across the different informants. This conceptualisation was seen as a result of similar embodied basis of the experiences, the conceptual knowledge of the music, and emotion carried by the surrounding culture as well as the native language of the informants.

## 5.2 Study II: Classification of music-evoked sadness

In Study II, the starting point was similar to the Study I: the aim was again to explore the people's free descriptions of their emotional experiences evoked by self-identified sad music. The same qualitative data set was re-analysed, but with a focus on the descriptions of valence and arousal of the experiences, since they are usually communicated when people describe their feelings of emotional experiences, even if they lack the proper vocabulary for the actual emotions (Barrett, 2006). The main purpose was to distinguish different ways of conceptualising experiences related to sadness occurring in the descriptions. The second aim of the study was to find links between these experiences and emotion regulation mechanisms.

Again, a theory-led thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was conducted by distinguishing descriptions based on their valence and arousal level. The classification was based on ratings of valence and arousal of the most common Finnish affect terms, collected in a pilot study. Three broad themes emerged from the analysis: (1) experiences with negative valence and high arousal, (2) experiences with negative valence and low arousal, and (3) experiences with positive valence.

The three themes were named as (1) *Grief*, (2) *Melancholia*, and (3) *Sweet sorrow*, based on the representative emotion of each theme. The themes were overlapping in actual practice, since it was typical that there was more than one theme appearing in the participants' accounts.

The theme *Grief* had three sub-themes, (i) *Grief and bereavement*, (ii) *Cathartic grief*, and (iii) *Anxiousness*; all of them consisted of highly unpleasant and painful experiences that often led to avoidance of the kind of sad music that was involved in these unwanted experiences. The experiences in the first and

the last sub-themes had negative emotional outcomes, whereas the experiences in the second sub-theme had some positive outcomes in the form of a cathartic purification. All of these sub-themes had strong intersubjective qualities, and usually, feelings of personal loss (by death or separation) – either real or imaginary – were somehow involved in these experiences, with the exception of *Anxiousness* that, in some cases, did not have any apparent extramusical cause.

The theme *Melancholia* had two sub-themes: (i) *Longing* and (ii) *(Self-)pity*. Both of them illustrated unpleasant experiences that are sometimes avoided, or, at least, not sought by the listener. The first sub-theme had a strong intersubjective quality, as the mechanism affecting the emotional experience was linked with personal memories. The second sub-theme was related to different mechanisms, either cognitive re-evaluation of one's situation, empathy, or emotional contagion, but all of these had experientially negative outcomes.

Finally, the theme *Sweet sorrow* had two sub-themes, (i) *Consolation*, and (ii) *Aesthetic pleasure*. Both of them consisted of pleasurable experiences that are highly appreciated and sought after by the listener. The first sub-theme covered experiences with many strategies for self-regulation: (re-)experiencing emotions, cognitive re-evaluation, getting comfort, "peer support" from the music, and relaxation. The second sub-theme illustrated experiences where the emotional reaction (*[re]-experiencing affect*) is mainly caused by aesthetic appreciation of a certain piece of music as well as cultural conventions concerning the emotional meaning of that music. Within the whole theme, congruence between the mood of the listener and the emotional content of the music played a crucial role in making the experience pleasurable.

The classification of three distinct categories of experiences related to sadness associated with music brought out both negative (*Grief* and *Melancholia*) and positive emotions (*Sweet sorrow*) within these descriptions. They also revealed important differences in how contextual aspects affect the conceptualisation of emotions induced by self-defined sad music. Furthermore, variations in the ways in which people conceptualise sadness and sad music seem to lead to differences in both their affect regulation processes and the overall emotional experience. The study demonstrated that negative emotions do have a place within the experiences of listening to sad music. Also, many of the experiences are the outcome of undesired emotional reaction – or a "reversed" affect regulation process. These three types of experiences were also linked to different contextual situations in which music was related to different affect regulation mechanisms.

### 5.3 Study III: Attitudes towards self-defined sad music

The aim of the Study III was to explore attitudes towards sad music of a representative sample population. The research questions guiding the study were as follows:

- (1) What is the full range of the attitudes towards sad music?
- (2) What is the prevalence of the enjoyment of sad music?
- (3) What are the underlying reasons behind the possible enjoyment of sad music?

A survey was designed to obtain answers to these questions. Besides exploring the prevalence of experiences related to sad music, the aim was also to study the demographic factors potentially affecting the participants' appraisals. The survey was administered to a nationally representative sample of Finnish adults ( $N = 1500$ ). A total of 386 participants responded, out of which 204 (52.8%) were women (8.8% did not reveal their gender), and the age range was 18–65 years ( $M = 45.5$ ,  $SD = 13.6$ ). The questionnaire consisted of 30 items that were designed to broadly assess people's attitudes towards sad music. The statements were derived from the qualitative data set used in Studies I and II – the free descriptions were used as framework for generating a list of statements as diverse as possible (including statements concerning both positive and negative attitudes towards sad music). Participants rated each statement using a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The participants' ratings were subjected to factor analysis. After the initial analysis, five items were eliminated because they did not contribute to a simple factor structure and failed to meet the minimum criteria of having a primary factor loading of 0.4 or above and no cross-loadings of 0.3 or above. A factor analysis of the remaining 25 items was conducted using oblimin rotation, with the 6 factors explaining 51% of the variance ( $RMSEA = 0.0487$ ). All items had primary loadings over 0.5. In this solution, the inter-item correlations within the factors were adequate (between 0.63 and 0.86). The factors were labelled as AVOIDANCE (F1), AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL (F2), REVIVAL (F3), APPRECIATION (F4), INTERSUBJECTIVE (F5), and AMPLIFICATION (F6). AVOIDANCE comprised statements on music-related sadness being experienced negatively. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL comprised statements pointing out that music or the sadness induced was related to personal memories and situations from the past. REVIVAL comprised statements on the positive experience resembling previously indicated mood regulation factors (Saarikallio, 2008). APPRECIATION comprised statements related to sad music's ability to make one appreciate the value and purpose in life. INTERSUBJECTIVE comprised items related to social aspects and peer support. Finally, AMPLIFICATION comprised items related to intensification of negative emotions beyond voluntary control. INTERSUBJECTIVE and AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL showed the highest correlation since the statements included in them often related to particular persons or situations that were connected through memories. Also, AVOIDANCE was negatively related to APPRECIATION, and a weakly positive correlation between AVOIDANCE and AMPLIFICATION demonstrated that the latter factor is not inherently meant to amplify negative or positive aspects of sad music. Although no significant associations between most of the background variables and the

factor scores were found, Age, Gender and Frequency of music listening emerged as contributing variables.

The factors were interpreted to represent *preferential* and *contextual* aspects related to attitudes towards self-defined sad music. The first category consisted of APPRECIATION, REVIVAL, and AVOIDANCE, out of which the first two factors seemed to illustrate preference for sad music and resemble the classical approach behaviours (Davidson, Ekman, Saron, Senulis, & Friesen, 1990), whereas the last one illustrated more negative attitudes towards – and even avoidance of – sad music. The second category consisted of AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL, INTERSUBJECTIVE, and AMPLIFICATION. The attitudes of these factors were related to contextual aspects that cannot be classified in terms of negative/positive polarity, as they are often dependent on one's life circumstances, the listening situation, one's prevailing mood, or social connections in one's life.

The results had some similarities with those of previous studies (Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013), but the present study incorporated a wider range of contexts and motivations, thus resulting in a more comprehensive picture of the variety of reasons behind listening to sad music. The overlapping between the present and previous studies suggests that autobiographical and interpersonal aspects play a pivotal role in people's engagement with self-defined sad music.

#### **5.4 Study IV: Social sharing of the experiences of listening to nominally sad music**

The aim of the study IV was to gain an understanding of the intersubjective qualities of musical emotions evoked by listening to nominally sad music. The focus was on the ways people discuss and share their experiences of listening to both self-selected sad music *and* music that some other person has identified as sounding sad. The research questions were as follows:

- (1) How do people discuss their experiences of listening to nominally sad music with others who listen to the same piece of music?
- (2) How does the presence of others (and the possible need to be understood by them) affect these experiences?

A group interview study was designed to tap into these shared emotional experiences. Twelve university students took part in the interviews that consisted of music listening and open discussions on the lived experiences. Three groups were formed. The first group (G1) consisted of two female and two male students of musicology. In the second group (G2), there were three female and two male students of musicology. Since it was assumed that the musical background of the informants affected their experiences, the third group (G3) consisted of three female students from departments other than the music department. The informants were asked to select a piece of self-identified sad music



and provide it to the interviewer beforehand. There were no specified selection criteria for the music; thus, the variety of music samples ranged from classical orchestral music to Finnish rock.

The interviews were aimed to simulate as natural a music listening environment as possible. Each music track was played twice, and after each listening, the informants described and discussed their experiences without any restrictions. The groups were primarily self-organised. The interviewer did not mediate the discussions but only asked clarifying questions or gave the occasional prompt. All interviews were video-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The data were analysed using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach (Smith, 2004). The analysis revealed various themes regarding the shared aspects of the informants' experiences. Four levels of discourses were identified, out of which three were important for social sharing of the experiences: *describing the emotional experience*, *describing the music*, and *interpreting the music*. The fourth level, *autobiographical associations*, was the least occurring theme within the discussions, probably owing to the fact that the meanings of these singular associations were seemingly impossible to negotiate with the rest of the group. Thus, the theme was omitted from the present study.

Each of the three superordinate theme encompassed sub-themes. *Describing the emotional experience* consisted of three sub-themes: (i) emotions represented by music, (ii) emotions induced by music, and (iii) physical reactions. *Describing the music* consisted of two themes: (i) musical features, and (ii) the visual imagery evoked by music. *Interpreting the music* heavily overlapped with the second theme, and it consisted of two sub-themes: (i) cultural connotation(s) for the overall style or genre of the music and (ii) cultural connotation(s) for musical feature or structure. All of the themes conveyed several socially shared meaning-making processes, as the informants negotiated the meanings of both musical expression and emotional content of the music. *Sadness* was not presented as a fixed emotion concept, but various kinds of sadness with different meanings were distinguished in the discussions (e.g. private versus public sadness, masculine versus feminine sadness, comfortable versus frightening/hopeless sadness). The experiences of the informants were affected by their expectations of the musical style, structure, and performance, as well as expectations of the emotional content of music and the meaning of the emotion depicted in the music. Also, social norms and cultural conventions played important roles in the negotiations.

## 5.5 Summary of the results

The main findings of each study contribute to the larger picture of experiences in relation to sad music. In Study I, the metaphorical language of people's free descriptions illustrated how informants conceptualised their experiences by using similar conceptual metaphors. The shared language is used in communicating these experiences to others, but since the use of metaphors shapes our

understanding of experiences related to abstract concepts (Crawford, 2009), such as music or emotions, identifying the conceptual metaphors revealed the presence of deeper, socio-culturally shared structures of experiences. In Study II, the classification of different kinds of “sadness” gave rise to different contextual aspects of conceptualisation that affect the experiences. In Study III, the attitudes towards sad music were explored using a representative sample population, and thus the aspects of previous studies were tested on a larger scale. Besides verifying the existence of the phenomenon, identifying the contextual and preferential aspects made the claim of (social) context even stronger. Finally, in Study IV, the investigation of the ways people negotiate the socially shared meanings of these kinds of emotional experiences revealed new aspects of conceptualisation (both music *and* emotion) that affected their experiences. It also illustrated the ways in which these meanings of musical emotions arise from interaction and shared cultural knowledge, highlighting the fact that besides being individual experiences, music-induced emotions are also social processes.



## 6 DISCUSSION

The aim of this thesis was to investigate the emotional experiences of listening to self-defined sad music. The research aimed to shed light on the ways in which people describe, conceptualise, and share their experiences related to sad music with others. By focusing on one paradoxical concept of *pleasant sadness*, the research presented here was able to critically examine the larger concept of (musical) emotions in music research. In this chapter, the main findings, limitations, and implications of the research will be discussed.

### 6.1 Emotional experiences of the listener

Investigations on auditory experiences, in general, have usually emphasised a physical or psycho-acoustic viewpoint; thus, the experience of listening, as a lived human experience, is rarely studied (Petitmengin et al., 2009). Similarly, listening to music and the emotional reactions evoked by it are often portrayed as parts of an input-output mechanism: first, the music goes to the brain through the ears; then, the brain processes the information, and finally, the body reacts emotionally. However, music is not only sonic information perceived by the auditory system: the whole body is capable of responding to music, for instance, by tensing or relaxing muscles or causing shivers down the spine (e.g. Sloboda, 1991). Still, it is not the body that is the object of perception, but the music we hear – unless the volume is too loud, making our ears hurt, or when we feel the pulsating bass in a nightclub, for example. When listening to music, we may not be aware of all the bodily feelings induced by music, but it is through those feelings that we become conscious of the music itself. Like touching, listening to music is an act where bodily feeling and the experience are inseparable (c.f., Ratcliffe, 2005).

Furthermore, when we listen to music, we simultaneously conceptualise it firstly as being music and not just any random noise, and secondly, as conveying some (emotional) meaning. This understanding is a way of making sense of

the experience of listening to music in the first place. According to quote Johnson and Larson (2003, p. 78): “[t]he way we experience a piece of music will depend importantly on how we understand it, and our understanding is intimately tied to our embodiment, that is, to our sensory-motor capacities and to our emotional makeup”. These experiences may be difficult to verbalise, and the language used in describing them is usually dominated by socio-culturally shared metaphors, as the findings of Study I revealed. Experiences like these seem to be highly existential in the sense that there is a strong feeling of three-dimensional space involved in the descriptions: one is in contact with the music in that space or music *is* the space surrounding the listener. Either way, the feelings evoked by music listening are structuring the listener’s experience of being in a world.

The findings of this work suggest that emotional experiences of listening to sad music are different in terms of variability and context dependency, yet there are similarities within these experiences of different individuals. These similarities are amenable to explanation when emotional experiences related to music listening are regarded as *acts of conceptualisation*, which are intersubjective, socially learned, and shared experiences that take place in a certain historical time and place. By considering (musical) emotions as conceptualisations (c.f., Barrett, 2006), rather than natural kinds, it is possible to understand how the same person experiences different kinds of emotions that are evoked by listening to the same piece of music in different times of her life or experiences similar emotions when listening to different kinds of music. Thus, music is not only representing certain emotions but is also being *used* by the listener in the construction of the idea of those emotions and how they are to be experienced (c.f., Dibben, 2006).

The informants’ accounts in Studies I and II revealed certain conceptualisations of the emotion *sadness* in relation to music: different kinds of music in different situations may all sound sad, but the emotions experienced may differ in radical ways. It can be anxious sadness that feels paralysing and “drowns” the person in grief; it can be comforting sadness that is associated with feelings of acceptance, security, and peer support; or it can be a beautiful sadness that feels poetic and inspiring, giving the listener a feeling of aesthetic awe. All these different kinds of experiences can still be called “sad” via different kinds of conceptualisations in different (musical and social) contexts, as people make articulations of their emotional state with the help of music (c.f., DeNora, 2003). In Study IV, this socially shared conceptualisation was witnessed in action, when the informants negotiated the meanings of their emotional experiences in a social setting involving music listening.

## 6.2 Conceptualisations of sad music

It is not only the emotions evoked by listening to music that are conceptualised by the listener. I argue that listening to music should also be considered a con-

ceptual act or “act of meaning” (Shweder et al., 2008, p. 410). We may not be very aware of this conceptualisation, as it can take place rapidly and without much conscious effort, but every time we hear music, we recognise it as being music and know that it conveys some meaning – an emotional, aesthetic, or narrative meaning. Even if the music does not evoke notable emotions in us at a specific moment, there are still many aspects of the meaning-making process taking place when one engages with music. We may instantly like or dislike the music we hear or we do not really know how we feel about it. Our preference may change during our course of life or may remain pretty much the same. Some days are better for listening to certain pieces of music and on other occasions, the experience of listening to them simply does not feel the same. I see all this as a result of conceptualisation – a process that is dependent on the embodied experience and contextual knowledge. Different psychological mechanisms may be crucial to this process, but, nevertheless, the sociocultural context is as important as the inner explanations of this special form of human behaviour. Without the context – the actual music we hear and recognise as being certain kind of music at a certain time and place – there would be no musical emotions. Moreover, since music is always made and played by certain people to others, listening to music, even listening to it alone from headphones, is *always* an intersubjective act.

Many kinds of (emotional) experiences are evoked by music because many types of music genres exist in our social world. Different musical genres have different cues for emotional expression; thus, there can be many kinds of sad music in one’s life. Therefore, it is not simply a matter of self-definition in a sense that one would perceive “just about any emotion from the music” because of her autobiographical associations, as Juslin (2013, p. 10) suggested. Of course, autobiographical aspects seem to have special relevance to the emotions evoked by sad music, as the findings of this work highlighted. However, in addition to these, socially shared meanings also contribute to these different conceptualisations. There are many types of musical expressions for “sad” or otherwise negative emotions within our music cultures, which the listener is well capable of recognising. This recognition may not occur at a conscious level, especially in the case of everyday music listening, where the experiences tend to be of low intensity, ordinary, or unmemorable (Sloboda, 2010). Nevertheless, different musical expressions and specific musical devices convey different meanings, some of which are learned already in childhood (e.g. Green, 2002; Tagg & Clarida, 2003) effortlessly. However, although these meanings are conventional, they are not fixed entities: they keep developing through social interaction, when people negotiate, share, and reproduce existing meanings as well as give new meanings to old expressive cues, thus developing new musical traditions.

Although there are “obvious” musical features for expressing sadness, such as slow tempi and minor mode (e.g. Eerola, Friberg & Bresin, 2013), they might work only within certain genres, whereas in others, they may not convey the same emotionally expressive content (e.g. Eerola, 2011). For instance, the overall sad expression in classical music is rather different from that in emo-

tional-hard core (emo) music, despite the fact that there might be some similarities (e.g. Saari & Eerola, 2015). Hence, the expressive cues are subtler when comparing the expression of sadness between different musical genres, and the cultural meanings of these conventional cues may differ from each other, thus affecting the overall experience of listening to that music. For instance, sorting the musical expressions of different tracks into “different kinds of sadness”, which is what the informants of the Study IV did, revealed the negotiations and reproduction of the different cultural meanings of different musical conventions.

### 6.3 Limitations and ethical questions

This thesis has certain limitations, which need to be acknowledged. First, most of the studies in this dissertation were investigating the emotional experiences of the listener from the third-person perspective, which can be seen as a rather distant, observational position when studying human experience. The first-person perspective is completely excluded from the investigation; this perspective could have revealed more comprehensive in-depth knowledge about the phenomenon.

Secondly, relying on the retrospective data in Studies I to III is problematic when studying experience, since retrospective descriptions are vulnerable to memory errors. Also, in these cases, the informants were not engaging with actual music, but they were only asked to reminisce. Thus, their lived experiences might have been rather different from what they ended up describing. However, this can also be seen as an advantage of the present study. By concentrating on the memorised experiences of listening to sad music, the informants actually revealed significant personal meanings of those experiences. Also, this approach was chosen for its ecological validity, as it allowed to approach the topic without resorting to laboratory study, which tends to have a particularly limited context and unnatural music listening situation. Furthermore, the similarities in these descriptions exposed the wider sociocultural concepts of sad music and emotions related to it. Nevertheless, one can be sceptical about studying experiences using survey methods and retrospection, as it is questionable whether the cultural representations are actually being investigated rather than the subjective experiences. To these questions, there is no easy answer. It can only be argued that musical emotions are, simultaneously, *both* subjective experiences *and* cultural representations. Moreover, if we want to benefit from the existing array of studies in music and emotions, it is beneficial to combine aspects, such as typical data gathering methods of music psychology, with new theoretical frameworks from other disciplines. Otherwise, initiating a dialogue with previous work on the topic could be a rather difficult task.

However, other kinds of qualitative data could probably reveal richer details of the lived experiences of listening to sad music than the data examined in this dissertation. For instance, asking people to keep a diary and write about their experiences while listening to the music could provide in-depth views on

their emotions and the ways in which they conceptualise them. Also, individual interviews with music listening included could shed light on aspects of subjective experiences that were not revealed in this work. In Study IV, the presence of others seemed to prevent the informants from describing their autobiographical associations or personal memories related to their self-selected piece of music. It was assumed that this was because these aspects of the experiences were not negotiable, and since the groups tended to concentrate on negotiating the meanings, there was no room for presenting unique autobiographical aspects within these discussions. Furthermore, in individual interviews, the informants might be willing to share the possibly painful aspects of their experiences and discuss their personal relationship with the music in a more open manner than in group discussions. In general, the research topic of this thesis may be considered as a rather sensitive one, since difficult life experiences and emotions may be related to sad music listening in some cases. In fact, there were responses within the data that addressed these kinds of painful, autobiographical aspects. However, as all the informants were consenting adults and as there was no direct manipulation of mood in any of the studies, this research did not need to meet the requirement of approval from the Ethical Board of the University of Jyväskylä.

Finally, the selection of participants, especially in Studies I and II, was somewhat biased, as most of the participants were young, female, university students. Also, recruiting participants using mailing lists and social media sites tends to result in biased convenience samples, in this case young, highly educated people who are interested in the topic. Thus, one needs to be careful in drawing too generalising conclusions based on the findings. However, people who are interested in music and musical emotions are probably more suitable for being informants in this kind of research than those who do not listen to music at all or who do not find it evoking emotional experiences in them. Furthermore, even when the sample of participants was more robust in Study III, the results did not challenge the findings of Studies I and II.

## 6.4 Implications

Although the main aim of this work was not to offer theoretical clarifications pertaining to the field of music and emotion research, the findings of this research challenge many fixed theoretical concepts of music psychology. The concept of emotion presented in this thesis is applicable to studies on not only emotions associated with nominally sad music but also other kinds of musical expressions. Phenomenological, intersubjective, and contextual aspects are an intrinsic part of musical emotions, and they should not be excluded from investigations although they are rather unfeasible to study from a perspective that aims to control the research setting and generalise the findings, such as empirical studies in laboratory settings, surveys or studies using experience sampling

methods (ESM). On the contrary, we need to find ways to develop these existing instruments that take these aspects into account.

Multidisciplinary research, such as the one presented in this dissertation, is key to broadening our understanding of people's emotional experiences in relation to music listening. This understanding has special relevance for future studies on music and affect regulation or music therapy. For instance, the meaning-making process is one of the key targets of emotion regulation (Gross & Barrett, 2011), so investigating music's therapeutic role in this conceptualisation of emotions may provide new perspectives to these processes of regulation. Researchers should embrace different paradigms, and despite the difficulties that the multidisciplinary brings, proceed with it in the future research. Combining philosophical, sociological, and cultural perspectives with the psychological concepts and theories can help fill the gaps in our present knowledge about emotional engagement with music. Furthermore, such efforts are required to shed light on these affective, embodied, and intersubjective experiences that we music researchers have conceptualised as musical emotions.

## YHTEENVETO (FINNISH SUMMARY)

Tämä väitöskirjatutkimus tarkastelee musiikin kuunteluun liittyviä tunnekokemuksia monesta eri näkökulmasta. Tutkimuksen keskiössä on kuulija subjektiivisine kokemuksineen sellaisen musiikin kuuntelusta, jonka hän itse luokittelee surulliseksi (esim. musiikki kuulostaa surulliselta tai se assosioituu suruun jollakin muulla tavalla). Väitöskirja koostuu neljästä osatutkimuksesta, joista jokainen lähestyy aihetta omasta näkökulmastaan. Ensimmäisessä osatutkimuksessa keskityttiin kielenkäytön metaforisuuteen surullisen musiikin herättämien tunnekokemusten kerronnassa. Toisessa osatutkimuksessa osallistujien kuvaukset luokiteltiin kolmeen eri kokemustyyppiin, joissa surulliseksi liittyvät musiikkikokemukset erosivat toisistaan niiden miellyttävyyden, voimakkuuden ja kontekstuaalisten tekijöiden suhteen. Kolmannessa osatutkimuksessa kartoitettiin yleisemmin suomalaisten asenteita koskien surullisena pidettyä musiikkia, hyödyntäen satunnaisotannalla poimittua osallistujajoukkoa. Neljännessä osatutkimuksessa aihetta lähestyttiin ryhmähaastattelujen kautta, joissa osallistajat kuuntelivat yhdessä toistensa valitsemia surullisia musiikkinäytelmiä ja keskustelivat niiden herättämistä tunnekokemuksistaan. Jokaisen osatutkimuksen päätulokset toivat omalta osaltaan uutta tietoa surullisena pidettyyn musiikkiin liittyvistä tunnekokemuksista: ensimmäisessä tutkimuksessa löydetty yhteneväisyydet ihmisten käyttämässä metaforisessa kuvailussa paljastivat näiden kokemusten syvempiä sosiokulttuurisia rakenteita; eri kokemustyyppien luokittelu taas toi näkyväksi kokemusten konseptualisointiin ja tunteiden kokemiseen liittyviä kontekstuaalisia eroavaisuuksia; surullista musiikkia koskevien asenteiden tutkiminen tilastollisesti puolestaan vahvasti aiempia löydöksiä, erityisesti (sosiaalisen) kontekstin merkitystä musiikin herättämiin tunteisiin; ryhmähaastatteluissa käydyt neuvottelut musiikin ja heränneiden tunteiden merkityksestä taas valottivat sekä tunnekokemusten että itse musiikkiin liittyvän konseptualisoinnin sosiaalisesti rakentunutta puolta. Kokonaisuudessaan tämä väitöstutkimus esittelee aiempaa kattavammin ihmisten moninaisia tapoja kokea, konseptualisoida ja jakaa surullisena pitämänsä musiikin herättämiä tunteita.



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## **ORIGINAL PAPERS**

### **I**

#### **SPATIAL AND BODILY METAPHORS IN NARRATING THE EXPERIENCE OF LISTENING TO SAD MUSIC**

by

Henna-Riikka Peltola & Tuija Saresma, 2014

*Musicae Scientiae*, 18 (3), 292-306

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## II

### FIFTY SHADES OF BLUE: CLASSIFICATION OF MUSIC- EVOKED SADNESS

by

Henna-Riikka Peltola & Tuomas Eerola, (in press)

Musicae Scientiae

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### Abstract

It has been repeatedly shown that sad music induces mainly pleasant or mixed emotions, and is particularly relevant for self-regulation goals. However, this is not entirely compatible with the view that sadness is one of the basic emotions experienced in the face of an unpleasant event or a loss. Also, a distinction between grief and sadness is often drawn, which seemingly does not have relevance in relation to musical experiences. The discrepancy between the positive accounts of emotions associated with sad music and those present in ordinary sadness may be related to the previously unacknowledged spectrum of affects associated with music-related sadness. The present study aims to expose the underlying affective experiences of music-related sadness. To examine this, a large qualitative data, consisting of open-ended answers from 363 participants, was subjected to thematic content analysis.

The analysis revealed a range of emotions experienced that were classified into three themes: *Sweet sorrow*, *Melancholia*, and *Grief*. These themes differed depending on the valence of the overall experience and the contextual aspects. Also, the emotion induction mechanisms distinguished the themes and several previously unidentified types of affect regulation were observed. Variations in the ways people conceptualise sadness and music lead to differences in the affect regulation processes. In contrast to past research, the results suggest that truly negative emotions are relevant in association with music-related sadness. Dividing the music-

evoked sadness into different categories of affective experiences helps to explain the current discrepancies and paradoxes surrounding sadness and music.

## Introduction

In everyday language, sadness appears to be an unproblematic concept. People consider it to be a negative emotion that occurs in situations where a person is faced with some unfortunate affair. In the field of psychology, sadness is counted as one of the basic emotions, typically a response to a personal loss (e.g., Barr-Zisowitz, 2000; Bonnano, Goorin, & Coifman, 2008). Furthermore, a distinction between sadness and grief is often made: both are seen as natural reactions to loss, but sadness is considered to be a short-term emotion, whereas grief is seen as more an enduring, yet fluctuating affective state with peaks of high and low arousal emotional experiences (Archer, 1999; Bonnano et al., 2008). Moreover, in adults, grief is associated with multiple negative emotions, such as shock, anger, fear, hostility, and guilt, which typically evoke longer-term coping efforts, whereas sadness – being ephemeral phenomenon – is generally implicated in proximal, short-term coping efforts (Archer, 1999; Bonnano et al., 2008; Littlewood, 1992.) Both sadness and grief are seen as negative experiences that people tend to avoid in their everyday life.

However, in situations involving music, defining sadness becomes rather complicated. It is quite a commonly accepted notion in the field of music and emotion research that if music is capable of arousing felt emotions<sup>1</sup> in the listener, the emotions induced are mainly positive ones (Sloboda & Juslin, 2010; Juslin, 2013). Thus, paradoxically, sadness is often linked with positive emotions: even if we recognise that music is

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<sup>1</sup> Since the exact terminology for affective experiences is diverse, here we resort to operational definitions by Juslin and Sloboda (2010) about affect, emotion, and feeling.

somehow expressing negative emotions, we can still experience it as being pleasurable. Sadness represented by music has been demonstrated to be able to induce pleasant, if somewhat mixed, emotions in the listener (e.g., Juslin et al., 2011; Vuoskoski et al., 2012; Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2012; Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014; Kawakami, Furukawa & Okanoya, 2014), and it may also be able to confer experiences of aesthetic pleasure to listeners (Zentner et al., 2008; Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2013). A notable proportion of people seem to seek out these kinds of experiences, although not all (Eerola et al., in press), and many use sad music as a tool for self-regulation of emotions (Taruffi & Koelsch, 2015; Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013).

Yet, there is much that we do not know about this phenomenon of engaging with self-defined sad music. Despite several studies focusing on this issue, the ultimate reason – or most likely a variety of reasons – behind the enjoyment of experienced sadness has not been fully covered. In our opinion, the first issue of difficulty in this task lies in understanding the nature of these emotional experiences; it is unclear whether the emotion experienced while listening to sad music can actually be classified as sadness, since these experiences are reported to be positive (Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2013; Garrido & Schubert, 2013), and they often comprise of other emotions such as nostalgia and peacefulness (Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2013; Taruffi & Koelsch, 2015) or melancholy (Zentner et al., 2008). We also have evidence that people do exhibit negative biases in their cognitive processes after listening to sad music, similar to those exhibited in a state of sadness evoked by autobiographical recall (Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2012). Hence, the actual emotional experience of listening to sad music is complex and multifaceted,

and unlikely to be clarified with existing self-reports instruments used in previous studies (e.g., GEMS in Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014 and in Vuoskoski et al., 2012; scales from the basic emotions in Vuoskoski et al., 2012; and valence and arousal scales in Garrido & Schubert, 2013 and Vuoskoski et al., 2012), because these instruments are limited and biased by the researchers' own emotion-word lexicon (Frijda, 2009).

The second issue of importance concerns the possible positive bias of the existing studies. Most of the previous research – based on convenience samples of people willing to respond to questions about sad music – emphasises positive feelings experienced by listeners, but these studies may neglect the experiences of those who do not care for sad music; what kinds of feelings do they experience when listening to sad music? Or what about such listeners who even actively avoid this emotion? Is it possible that painful feelings of grief and bereavement exist in relation to listening to sad music, as suggested by studies in ethnomusicology (e.g., Finnegan, 2003) and music therapy (Bailey, 1984)? It has been recognised that listening to sad music induces negative feelings in some people, and the overall experience is rather unpleasant (Peltola & Saresma, 2014; Eerola et al., in press), or memory retrieval during music listening feels displeasing (Van den Tol & Edwards, 2011). It is, of course, possible that differences in personality traits, such as *empathy* or *openness to experience*, which have been observed to be linked with preferences for sad music (Garrido & Schubert, 2011; Vuoskoski et al., 2012; Garrido & Schubert, 2013) might explain a part of the diversity associated with the topic. However, we propose that the way people *conceptualise* sadness and sad music has a larger role in this process. Such



conceptualisations need to be understood in the appropriate *contexts*, which have often been left outside the focus of attention, although it has been shown that extramusical information does contribute to emotions induced by sad-sounding music (Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2013), and that even physical pain can be experienced as pleasant in a certain context (Leknes et al., 2013). In this study, the term context refers broadly to surrounding culture (including music cultures), social settings (including life situation and listening situation), and native language, which are important aspects of *emotion concepts*, affecting the emotional experiences (e.g., Barrett, 2006; Niedenthal, 2008).

The motivation for the present study is to cast light on these unanswered questions.

Thus, the main research questions are:

1. What kind of affect do people experience when they listen to music they consider to be 'sad'?
2. What contextual aspects contribute to experiences induced by listening to music associated with sadness?
3. How do these experiences relate to emotion regulation?

As Juslin (2013, p. 17) has it, "[j]ust as there are different shades of *blue*, there can be different shades of *sadness*." The broad aim of this article is to distinguish these possible shades, and the ways they are experienced by a relatively large sample of listeners.

Before launching into the empirical part, we will clarify the theoretical foundations of the study.

### **How sad experiences in music are constructed and regulated**

Assuming that basic emotions are constituted of emotion categories, or “emotion families”, which each include emotions of a certain theme and their variations (Juslin, 2013), *how* these emotions are experienced by different individuals in different situations may vary greatly. When experiencing emotions, people have explicit knowledge about emotions (Niedenthal, 2008), which has an effect on their overall emotional experience. In this study, instead of considering emotions as purely “natural kinds” or discrete categories, which are usually referring to basic emotion theory (e.g., Zentner & Eerola, 2010), they are considered as *acts of conceptualisation*. Acts of conceptualisation, in general, refer to different kinds of cognitive meaning-making processes, where mental representations of “entities (natural and artifactual), situations, experience, and action” are categorised rapidly and automatically without much conscious effort (Niedenthal, 2008, p. 587; Shweder et al., 2008).

When conceptualising feelings into certain emotions, learned conceptual knowledge (such as embodied information, the specific social setting where the feelings are elicited, as well as the environment’s reactions to that specific emotion) contribute to on how and when those feelings are experienced and labelled as being a specific emotion (see Barrett, 2006; Barrett et al., 2007; Niedenthal, 2008). When people verbalise their

affective state, they are referring to – to quote Barrett (2006, p. 30) – “some physical activity in their brain and body that is occurring as the result of their interaction with the world”. In other words, people categorise their learned associations between their thoughts, bodily feelings, action tendencies, and their interaction with the world in that specific moment as a certain emotion. There is variation in which emotions are experienced and how, based on individual and cultural differences (Barrett, 2006; Mesquita & Ellsworth, 2001; Niedenthal, 2008), yet regardless of these differences, people are able to explicitly describe feelings of *valence* and (in most cases) *arousal* when reporting their experiences of emotion (Barrett, 2006).

Emotion concepts are important for individual experiences, but they have even more crucial role in mutual communication about the experiences with others (e.g., Niedenthal, 2008). They are learned and internalised in the social contexts (e.g., Rudd, 2003), thus the sociocultural meanings of emotions are intermediated in social interaction. Hence, although emotions are biologically evident, they are also socially constructed and shared (Barrett, 2012). In different contexts these conceptualisations of sadness, for example, have different meanings, which may result in different kinds of emotional experiences.

Some variations in music- and sadness-related experiences fall out of this framework quite naturally. Music listening in general should be pleasurable (Sloboda & Juslin, 2010; Juslin, 2013), yet, for instance, recognition of music mimicking negative emotion may cause listeners to describe the experienced feelings as negative, or the actual

painful memories evoked by sad-sounding music lead to displeasure. The way music communicates emotions by means of expressive cues is fairly well understood, even for sadness (Huron, 2008, 2011, Eerola et al., 2013), and the distinction between recognised and felt emotions has been acknowledged (Gabrielsson, 2002). Often there is a strong interdependency (Evans & Schubert, 2008), but the two may diverge. Music that expresses sadness may lead the listener to feel emotions entirely different than sadness due to lack of contextual fit (i.e. sad music in an inappropriate situation), or because a particular mechanism of emotion induction gives rise to a specific emotion, for instance, due to association with powerful memories associated. Eight such mechanisms have been put forward by Juslin and Västfjäll (2008; updated by Juslin et al., 2011), where *episodic memories*, *contagion* and *aesthetic judgment* are probably most pertinent for the experiences of sad music. The mechanisms are useful for distinguishing between sources of emotion, but they do not describe the content of these emotional experiences. For a better understanding of the nature of experiences associated with sad music, that is to say, *what kinds* of feelings are being experienced as certain emotions and *when*, it is necessary to examine how experiences are conceptualised (c.f., Barrett, 2006, 2012). Failing to address the conceptual aspects of these experiences might have led to inconsistent observations and results concerning music and sadness.

General accounts of affect regulation with music have offered frameworks that account for three to nine overlapping strategies such as *communication/self-reflection*, *emotional*, *physiological*, and *cultural/social* (Schäfer & Sedlmeier, 2009; Schäfer et al.,

2013, see also Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007; Goethem & Sloboda, 2011). Despite the large amount of studies on music in mood regulation, the jury is still out on the most parsimonious palette of affect regulation strategies for music in general (Sloboda et al., 2010). Furthermore, fewer studies have examined regulation that is done by using specifically sad or otherwise negative music. The case of negative music is intriguing, because it seems to be in conflict with the *mood management theory*, which assumes that individuals are “hedonically motivated to select media content that facilitates positive mood state” (Stevens & Dillman Carpentier, 2015). Van den Tol and Edwards (2013, see also 2014) proposed four strategies and seven functions of sad music listening for regulative purposes, based on a modest internet survey, of which (a) *seeking connection*, (b) *retrieving memories*, (c) *re-experiencing affects*, and (d) *cognitive strategies* were particularly relevant for self-selected sad music. According to other studies, there are people with certain personality types (e.g., tendency to *ruminate*) who seem to be attracted to sad music, although it does not improve their mental state but actually sustains the dysphoria (Garrido & Schubert, 2011, 2013), or that there are certain situations, such as emotional distress or social isolation, that promote the usage of sad music (Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014). Nevertheless, possibly because of the utilisation of convenience samples (people who actively engage with sad or angry music), the listeners’ active role in seeking to music that matches their internal arousal, and thus improve their mood by listening to self-selected negative music has been emphasised (DeMarco et al, 2015; Sharman & Dingle, 2015; Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014).

Yet, this phenomenon needs more attention, as there are unanswered questions. Besides understanding what the affective experience is like and in which context (situational *and* musical) it takes place, it is crucial to know *what* exactly is being regulated – or if the affect regulation is a voluntary process at all. We aim to demonstrate that focusing on the experiential level of listening to music associated with sadness can reveal the variability in the kind of affect experienced in relation to sad music. We argue that there are contextual aspects affecting on how people conceptualise both *sadness* and *sad music*, and that variations in these lead to differences in both the experience and regulation of these.

### **Method and data**

To understand the issue of what the experiences associated with sad music are, we asked people to describe their emotional experiences induced by self-defined sad music. The data collection was part of a large research project and the qualitative dataset used in this study had already been analysed for another study (Peltola & Saresma, 2014), in which the metaphoric contents of the descriptions were explored

#### **Data collection procedure**

Data were collected in February 2012 via online questionnaire (for details, see Peltola & Saresma, 2014). There were three open-ended questions concerning sad music:

1. In general, does listening to sad music evoke any feelings in you? If yes, please describe these feelings.
2. Recall the last time you heard/listened to sad music. Did it evoke any feelings in you? If yes, please describe these feelings.
3. Has music (no matter what genre) ever evoked sadness-related feelings in you? If yes, please describe these feelings and consider what might have caused them.

The answers to these three open-ended questions form the qualitative dataset analysed in this study. The term “sad music” was not explicitly defined for the participant, as the aim was to grasp participants’ own concepts of sad music and the experiences relating to that. The responses consisted of brief lists of emotions to questions 1 and short descriptions of the reasons for question 3. In terms of words, the data consisted of 11,402 words (median number of words per participant was 17, minimum 1, maximum 180 words), which, in turn, consisted of 1,447 separately coded items (whole, or partial sentences). In sum, the majority of the answers were short descriptions of certain emotions, but there were also long, detailed accounts of emotional experiences in the data.

### **Participants**

Participants were invited to partake in the study via email invitation distributed to mailing lists of student organisations at the University of Jyväskylä and also on social media sites. 373 answers were received from Finnish volunteers, ranging in age from 19 to 75

years ( $M = 26.11$ ,  $SD = 7.5$ ). Of all the participants, 290 were women (77.7 %), 53 were men, and 30 did not indicate their gender. Similar tendencies to obtain a higher number of responses from women have regularly been observed in other samples of Finnish respondents to voluntary surveys involving media and leisure time activities (e.g. Purhonen, Gronow, & Rahkonen, 2009). For more details, see Peltola and Saresma, 2014.

Respondents were each coded with a letter and number: the letter indicating their gender (N = non-identified gender, F = female, M = male), and the number ranking them according to when their response was received.

### **Thematic content analysis**

The research paradigm of the study involved constructionist assumptions of social reality being subjective, situational, and culturally variable, which is typical for qualitative research (e.g., Marvasti, 2004). The main focus of the analysis was on socio-culturally shared conceptualisations of emotional experiences in relation to sad music listening. The material was analysed utilising thematic content analysis, which is a descriptive analytic method for identifying a limited amount of themes in textual data (Howitt, 2010). Because of the previous inductive analysis (Peltola & Saresma, 2014), the first author was already familiar with the data. Thus, instead of being data-led the analysis was theory-driven (see Braun & Clarke, 2008), focusing on the valence and arousal level of the participants' emotional experiences.



Based on the assumption that people describe feelings of valence and arousal when conceptualising and reporting their experiences of emotion (Barrett, 2006), the coded data was categorised firstly based on the valence, and secondly on the arousal level. The classification was done based on ratings of valence and arousal of the most common Finnish affect terms relevant to music<sup>2</sup>. This previously collected pre-categorisation was considered as an important tool in extending the analysis from researcher's subjective interpretation of the language used in the participants' accounts to collectively agreed meanings of these terms, and thus, to bring a wider sociocultural extension to the analysis. For the same reason the second author, unfamiliar with the data, coded each item using the same criteria as the first author. After his initial coding, intermediate comparison of coding was done with the result that 89% of the codes matched. After discussing and negotiating on the definitions, each unclear item was recoded, resulting in 96,8% match. Although this kind of collaborative coding might seem like a rather unusual decision for the type of qualitative research paradigms that emphasise the researcher's subjectivity (e.g. Lincoln & Cuba, 2000), the mutual negotiation was considered as deepening the socio-culturally shared interpretations of these conceptualisations of experienced emotions.

When the coding was finished, the first author defined and labelled the established themes. Three broad themes of different emotional experiences emerged: (1) experiences with negative valence and high arousal; (2) experiences with negative

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<sup>2</sup> The ratings of the 75 affect words were collected in a pilot study, where participants rated the valence and arousal of terms (N=8, agreement across the words was high,  $r(6)=-.90$ ,  $p<.01$ ). These ratings largely conform to previous ratings carried out in with equivalent English terms,  $r(73)=.87$ ,  $p<.001$  (Warriner, Kuperman & Brysbaert, 2012).

valence and low arousal; and (3) experiences with positive valence. Sub-themes were identified to establish structure around complex themes. The interpretations were again negotiated with the second author throughout the process. The analysis was conducted mainly in Finnish and only during the writing process were the selected quotes translated into English.

## **Results and discussion**

The three experience-related themes were labelled based on the representative emotion, utilising the participants' accounts and their definitions of their experienced emotions. The first group of experiences with high arousal and negative valence was entitled *Grief*, the second one with low arousal and negative valence was called *Melancholia*, and the third one with positive valence *Sweet sorrow*. It is important to notice that these themes are distinguished only for the sake of the analysis, as they often overlap in actual practice. Hence, it was typical that more than one theme was present in participants' accounts. (18% of all the participants had descriptions of emotions from all the three themes, 49% from two themes).

### **Grief**

The theme consists of experiences with high arousal level and negative valence that people described using emotion words such as anger, anxiety, bitterness, despair, fear, and guilt. In the psychology field these emotions are considered part of the grieving process (see Bonnano et al., 2008; Littlewood, 1992). Twelve percent of the all

accounts had descriptions of strong negative emotions experienced while listening to sad music. Within this theme, three sub-themes were identified: (i) *Grief and bereavement*, (ii) *Cathartic grief*, and (iii) *Anxiousness*.

**Grief and bereavement.** The typical context for grieving while listening to sad music seems to be a painful situation in one's life, where a personal loss had taken place. Many participants reported that after losing a family member or a friend, listening to sad music had even been unbearable. F270 described how even unfamiliar sad music reminded her of a deceased loved one, which made her anxious, which is why she tries to avoid listening that [sad] kind of music.

*"I miss [the deceased] and I feel desperate, so I don't listen to sad music nowadays if I can avoid it; if I hear a sad song from the radio, I immediately try to change the channel. However, sometimes, if I'm home alone, I can bear to listen to sad music, because then it doesn't matter if I get teary-eyed."*

F270 did not report that she had actually used music for self-regulation purposes; music induces painful emotions and makes her cry easily, but there is no evidence that she would feel better or even different after having listened to sad music.

Similar accounts were repeatedly found in the data. F258 remembered how she experienced "*anger, sadness, despair, hopelessness, deep hatred and vengeful feelings*" when she listened to sad music after one of her family members had committed suicide. She mentioned how "*in the right moment, certain music is capable of bringing back sad and painful memories*", but did not reveal any details about her

emotional state after the music listening. F131 explained that she constantly listened to music by one specific artist after the death of a friend, and experienced “*sadness, disbelief, longing, despair, anger, and powerlessness.*” For F085, sad music made her “*cry out loud, because I missed my dad who had died a while ago. I felt sadness and bitterness towards life and the fact that people have to grow old.*”

There are similarities between these accounts and the listening strategies *memory triggers* and *re-experiencing affect* identified by van den Tol and Edwards (2013), but an important distinction here is that the participants did *not* report consciously selecting music to be listened to for self-regulative purposes. On the contrary, the music brought back unwanted memories and emotions from participants’ pasts, and the experience was usually reported to be unpleasant or even avoided.

**Cathartic grief.** Catharsis may also result from listening to sad music while one is grieving. Many respondents described how, in emotionally distressing situations, listening to painful music was relieving. These kinds of accounts illustrate the “*comforting and healing power of music*”, as M216 explained it: “[A]t the moment of grief, the music can strengthen the feeling of sadness, and make it an even more concrete and comprehensive experience” and that “*even if it feels even more crushing at that specific moment, the feeling passes more quickly with the help of music.*” For him, music works as a tool for intensifying his feelings and helping him to move on faster. Van den Tol and Edwards (2013) call this kind of self-regulatory function (*re-)experiencing affect*.

In addition to *re-experiencing affect*, the strategy *memory triggers* is again visible in this account. Listening to sad music may indeed be unpleasant, if it reminds one about painful occasions in one's past. Sad music is a painful reminder of a traumatic event for F325, and she therefore does not enjoy listening to it.:

*"I really don't like to listen to sad music, because it brings up memories of the time when an important person passed away. [...] I remember just how sorrowful and desolate I was back then, and those feelings attack me again; instantly I feel just as sad, anxious and sorrowful as I did then. I have a vivid memory of all that pain I was going through. If I hear the music unexpectedly, it induces despair in me and makes me want to turn the music off. On the other hand, if I let myself go through these feelings, I usually feel relieved afterwards".*

For her, listening to sad music appears to be a difficult yet useful self-regulatory strategy – whenever she is psychologically strong enough to implement it. Clearly it requires preparation, as she refers to her desire to turn off the music if it plays unexpectedly. Still, if she forces herself to re-experience these feelings, music-induced catharsis music may occur.

F081 explained that when she had difficulties in her life, such as ill-health or the death of a loved one, sad music induced a *"wide range of desperate feelings, from hatred to powerlessness."* Music had also brought her *"memories that are painful and sad."* Although unpleasant, she too finds this useful, *"because while I'm listening to music, these feelings are bearable, and I can relive them again."* For her, the experience is not

as distressing as for F325; the music soothes the re-experienced feelings and makes the pain tolerable. M068 pointed out that music's temporality is one of the most important aspects in this process, because

*“while my own sadness feels like it will never end, in music the sadness gets somehow solved (it feels cathartic for me), and even if there wasn't really resolution in the music, the song will end eventually – and that is the path I already know.”*

These accounts illustrate the conscious self-regulatory function of listening to sad music (e.g. Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007; Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013). Even if some participants did not actually choose to listen to the music that made them grieve, the music offered them relief nonetheless, if they were willing to give themselves up to the experience. These descriptions are examples of the necessary function of grief; although a painful and distressing process, grieving is beneficial if the person involved is regaining a sense of understanding of their loss (Littlewood, 1992).

**Anxiousness.** Contrary to catharsis, sad music is capable of inducing anxiety in some listeners. Descriptions of the kind of irrational fear recurred in these accounts. Many participants reported that listening to sad music induces fear of death and loss in them. M050 described how sad music made him experience *“[f]ear of losing a friend (although I know that it is not very probable that he will die any time soon), and it also makes me admit to myself that we, as humans, are mortals.”* F009 confessed that she does not really understand why she listens to sad music in the first place, because it only induces

negative feelings in her, such as *“longing, sadness, deep sorrow, and fear of death”*, whereas F307 explained: *“[when I listen to sad music] I start to fear losing my loved ones.”* These fears could be interpreted as a result of participants re-evaluating their situation (*cognitive function* by Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013), but contrary to the cathartic result of self-regulation, the emotions experienced are highly unpleasant. The accounts presented above illustrate the complex inter-subjective connection between the music, the listener, and his/her emotions in their social context.

Not limited only to the fear of losing those closest to us, sad music seems to also induce undefined anxiousness in people. These accounts have described contextless experiences of fear, despair, and anxiety. F291 explained how *“[m]usic brings out unconscious feelings in me, or feelings that I’ve already forgotten I had, such as sadness, fear, bitterness, anger, despair, and maybe most of all that fear.”* Participants reported painful feelings, such as *“fear of a loss, sadness, longing, pining that makes me cry”* (F349), *“yearning, longing, fear, anxiety, sadness and guilt”* (F282). F071 stated that she has been *“weepy, inconsolable and desperate”* when listening to sad music, while for F199, typical feelings induced by sad music are *“anxiety, despair, powerlessness, longing and shame.”*

Some participants explicated that even listening to unfamiliar sad music makes them feel so bad they have actively started to avoid it. F092 stated that she cannot listen to sad music unless she listens to something happier afterwards as an ‘antidote’.

*“Listening to sad music makes me feel like I’m drowning in a depression from which I cannot escape. It makes me sad, anxious and bitter.”*

For F320, the whole existence of sad music is a mystery, since she does not understand why anybody would enjoy listening to it.

*“Sad music makes me anxious. I can’t get why anybody even makes sad music. If I have to listen to it, I get bored and tired. I start thinking negative things, and everything feels depressing and hopeless.”*

She does not seem to appreciate any aesthetic value of sad-sounding music, but her account reveals that it is not simply a matter of disliking the music; listening of that kind of music affects her both mentally and physically in an unpleasant way.

These descriptions appear to illustrate *emotional contagion* (Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008) where the listener “catches” the emotion perceived from the music by internally mimicking it. F341 seemed to have recognised this type of contagion:

*“It feels like the negative feeling [of the music] is somehow transmitted to me. The music itself can be good, but it doesn’t make me feel good. [Last time when listening to sad music] I thought that the song was good, but it still induced unpleasant feelings, such as anxiety and depression, in me.”*

For her, the unpleasant feelings are not related to aesthetic value of the music, as it may be the case with F320, but even the music that she thinks sounds good is capable of making her feel anxious. Besides being contagious, sadness expressed by music may lower one’s mood, as is in the case for F040:



*“Last time I listened to a song that was depressing and full of hopelessness, I had to stop in the middle. It not only induced sadness in me, but also anger and disgust. I turned the music off, but after a while I noticed I was still in a bad mood.”*

Unlike listeners who use sad music for *mood enhancement* (Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013; Schäfer et al., 2013), her mood is affected by the music in a negative way.

### **Melancholia**

Fifty-four percent of all the accounts described experiencing negative emotions with a low arousal level while listening to sad music. Accounts describing sadness, depression, disappointment, or tiredness came under the theme *Melancholia*. In psychology, these kinds of emotions are often considered signs of resignation, and that they turn one’s attention inward, which is an essential part of experiencing sadness (e.g. Bonnano et al., 2008). Two sub-themes were identified within this theme: (i) *Longing*, and (ii) *(Self-)pity*.

**Longing.** Feelings of longing were usually linked with participants’ memories, and appeared most frequently within the accounts from this category. Again, functional *memory triggers* (Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013) are present, but without conscious selection of music by participants. Typically the music evoked memories, which induced certain feelings, making the experience unpleasant. In the case of happy memories, people experienced feelings of longing, loneliness, or sadness, of which they did not report as having pleasurable aspects. Often some specific piece of music seemed to be

linked to a certain memory, but also descriptions of memories evoked by unfamiliar or non-specified music were identified from the data. F004 stated that she was “*shedding tears [when listening to sad music] because of the memories that induced desperate longing and yearning for another person’s presence.*”

Similar to *Grief*, there is a strong inter-subjective quality within this theme. Memories of other people and social situations were predominantly mentioned in the accounts. F119 described how sad music is capable of

*“bringing back memories of a person or situation that is not even sad per se, but still induces feelings of sadness in me. For example, if I hear a song that I relate to good times in my life, I can become sad that those days are over. At the same time happy memories induce warm feelings of longing and love, she continues, “but also melancholy and yearning.”*

Her quote is an example of the ambivalent nature of emotional experience, which seems to be typical for sad music listening: positive feelings intermingle with negative ones, leaving the listener in a state of bittersweet melancholia.

In the case of sad memories, participants re-experienced painful feelings from their past. F153 reported both good and bad memories that make her experience feelings of sadness:

*“[Sad music induced] melancholic feelings and evoked sad memories. Music can bring back painful memories, or it can remind me of good times and important*

*people who have since disappeared from my life. This induces longing and feelings of loss in me.”*

In accounts like hers, there are similarities with *Grief*, but the quality of negative emotions seems to be less painful and their arousal level lower. The unpleasant aspects of reminiscing and re-experiencing feelings are visible in these accounts. F356 explained how

*“melancholic/sad music brings back old sad feelings or memories, which itself often feels unpleasant. Also, it often feels unpleasant or frustrating, because you don’t feel like having those emotions at that specific moment.”*

Unwillingness to re-experience or process somewhat traumatic feelings and episodes from her past influences F356’s listening experience. In addition to this, she mentioned incongruousness between the feelings induced by music and her current mood; again, the music triggers emotional reaction at the wrong moment leaving the listener feeling frustrated.

**(Self-)pity.** Besides autobiographical aspects, sad music seems to induce sad mood and negative feelings without any apparent link to a person’s past life. These kinds of reactions were described by participants who explained how listening to sad music made them empathise with the narrative of the music and thus induce undesired feelings in them. This is quite a contrary process to *distraction* (Van den Tol and Edwards, 2013), where people seek out sad music to create distance from their sad

feelings. In these cases, sad music actually reminded the participants of the tragic aspects of life, or made them reflect on their own situation of the narrative conveyed by music. F017 reported she had felt sad while listening to sad music, because

*“I felt the music having a link to my own life: it told about my difficulties and made me think about my life story and the misfortunes I’ve had. I also thought about my loved ones and their feelings, and that made me sad.”*

Although her description could be interpreted as an example of *cognitive function* of sad music listening (Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013), or a dimension of self-awareness (Schäfer et al., 2013), the cathartic result of self-regulation is missing in this account. Contrary to those who benefit from re-evaluating their lives with the help of music, this participant reported feelings of explicit sadness. Similarly, F090 stated she empathises with sad music quite easily:

*“I often give myself up to sadness, and when I listen to sad music, I miss a person dear to me. I’ve felt myself powerless and also I’ve had feelings of longing [while listening to sad music]. Especially if I’m already sad or feeling vulnerable, sad music can increase my feelings of sadness, longing or melancholia.”*

According to Van den Tol and Edwards (2013), cognitive function of listening to sad music often leads to re-evaluation of one’s situation, and thus decreases the emotional impact of that situation, or provides wider insight by offering ‘peer support’ to a person’s difficulties in life. However, if the person does not actively seek self-regulation, listening to sad music can affect their mood in quite the opposite way. Furthermore, cognitive re-evaluation while listening to sad music has been associated to gaining a more realistic

view on life – an aspect considered to be a comforting self-regulative process in previous studies (e.g. Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014). Yet, on an experiential level, this appears to trigger an unpleasant reaction in some participants. M260 described this type of experience:

*“I should not listen to sad music too much, otherwise I’ll lose my optimistic attitude towards life. [Sad music] makes me think about unfortunate facts of life, and it reminds me that things don’t always go as I wish.”*

His account illustrates how listening to sad music can lead to more realistic negative attitudes, resembling the notion of *ruminatio*n (Smith & Alloy, 2009; Garrido & Schubert, 2011, 2013).

Moreover, reacting to music in an empathetic fashion can also lead to feelings of depression without any apparent reason. Similar with *Anxiousness*, many descriptions within this theme illustrated *emotional contagion*, only using emotion terms with lower arousal level: F058 described how sad music affected her: *“I started to cry, and felt sadness and longing, although I wasn’t sad or melancholic before the music listening.”*

For F141, listening to sad music lowers her mood inexplicably: *“It makes me experience sadness and depression that can go on for a long time, even after I’ve stopped listening to the music already.”*

Some participants seemed to have a strong, empathetic reaction, especially to vocal music in which the lyrics play an important role in inducing feelings. F318 stated that even empathising with imaginary people can induce unpleasant feelings in her:

*“I feel sad and sorrowful for the people whose feelings and misfortunes are transferred to me by music. [...] I can feel empathy for them. It makes me feel so sad that I just really don’t want to listen to that kind of music anymore...”*

However, it is not the lyrics alone that can induce an unpleasant empathic reaction. As F139 described,

*“Sad instrumental music makes me feel sad. I remember once when my boyfriend was playing some sad classical music from YouTube, and I had to tell him to turn it off, because I started to feel sad and didn’t want to listen to it.”*

Again, these kinds of accounts seem to be conflicting with previous conclusions made of sad music listening, where the trait empathy is associated with the liking of sad music (Vuoskoski et al., 2012). Since no personality measures were done in this study, it is impossible to tell if these participants would have scored high on empathy, but based on their descriptions, they seem to have empathised with the music, even when the result was unpleasant. Some discrepancies, however, could be explained by the difference between identifying and engaging in empathic reactions and having self-awareness or detachment from these (Decety & Jackson, 2004).

### **Sweet sorrow**

The last theme consists of accounts describing pleasurable experiences in relation to sad music. Thirty-four percent of the participants reported they had experienced positive feelings, such as nostalgia, comfort, and pleasure, when listening to sad music. These kinds of emotions have often been reported to be typically induced by self-identified sad

music (e.g., Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014; van den Tol & Edwards, 2013). Two sub-themes were identified: (i) *Consolation*, and (ii) *Aesthetic pleasure*.

**Consolation.** As proposed before, people often use music as a tool for self-regulation (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007; Schäfer et al., 2013; Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013). Similar descriptions were found in our data. Participants used sad music to (re-)experience emotions, reflect on their present situation in life, get comfort from the music, or listen to it for relaxation. Often there are feelings of security involved in these experiences. These accounts uniformly presented sad music listening as an overall pleasurable experience.

F043 described her experiences where sad music had acted as a supportive 'other':

*"Listening to sad music makes me think about my own difficulties in life. It kind of strengthens me, because I realise I'm not the only person dealing with these kinds of things. Hence, it induces sadness but also feelings of hope that things can change."*

Contrary to the accounts in *Melancholia*, her experience involves sadness, but the overall feelings are strength and hope. Re-evaluating her situation with the help of music leads to a positive outcome. Music's ability to act as 'peer support' can be comforting and lead to acceptance, as described by F238: *"I feel relieved that somebody understands me, and that the feelings I'm experiencing are justified."*

Many participants stated that they regularly listen to sad music for self-regulative purposes. For F034, listening to sad music seems to be an established practice for self-regulation:

*“If I’m feeling sad, I like to listen to sad music, and it makes me feel even sadder. Sad music is also good for relaxation: whenever I want to calm down, I listen to sad music.”*

Her account reveals two self-regulative functions for listening to sad music. Firstly, she wants to experience emotions and with the help of music she can experience them on a deeper level. Secondly, she uses music to relax. This type of multifaceted process was found repeatedly within this theme: sad music triggers many reactions and induces many types of feelings in the listener, but eventually the results of the experience are positive. F040 tried to describe her experience after stating that it is difficult for her to label music-induced feelings:

*“Maybe it is melancholia and longing that I feel. But also happiness, especially when there is often a section in the music that makes me think things eventually went well, even if the overall feeling in the music would be sad. I also feel respect for the depicted sadness, which is such a powerful emotion. [Last time I listened to sad music] I identified myself in it. I had a chance to project my own feelings to the music and after the music stopped, I felt much better.”*

For her, empathising with the music and re-evaluating her own feelings lead to relief. Besides the self-regulative function, her account reveals aesthetic admiration for the musical representation of “*the powerful emotion*”, sadness. These types of experiences constitute the final sub-theme of our analysis that will be presented next.



**Aesthetic pleasure.** For many participants, listening to sad music appears to be enjoyable mainly for aesthetic reasons. These listeners experience music-induced feelings as being pleasurable; it could be that in these cases the feelings are not quite comparable to “everyday sadness”, but they represent more “musical” or “aesthetic” emotions that are considered pleasant because they do not have any “real-life” consequences (e.g. Kivy, 1989, 1990; Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014). Sad music is described as being so beautiful that the feelings it induces are sometimes even overwhelmingly pleasurable. F025 reported this type of an experience:

*“[When I listened to sad music] I had to close my eyes, because the music was so beautiful, sad, and touching that it made me cry. [...] I wanted to enjoy the beautiful, melancholic moment and savour those pleasant feelings inside me.”*

Aesthetic pleasure can be evoked by the beauty of music. Alternatively, it can be the beauty of *the emotion* itself that evokes pleasure in some participants. In these accounts, there is a certain aesthetic value to sadness – or cultural representations of sadness – that cannot be found in other emotions. F027 described music as inducing “*beautiful wistfulness*” in her, while for M210 “*‘sadness’ can be a heading for many great feelings, such as wistfulness, nostalgia, longing, being touched, or feelings relating to desperate love.*” F107 explained that she enjoys feelings of melancholia and sadness in relation to music, whenever she does not experience those feelings too often in her everyday life:

*“It is great to feel longing and even apathy, because experiencing a wide range of emotions feels empowering and sometimes it gives me even feelings of rapture.”*

N249 stated that for him/her, *“wistful feelings are related to love and happiness. For me, longing is the most common sad feeling induced by music. I think it is very beautiful to long for somebody.”*

These descriptions illustrate the idea of *aesthetic tragedy*, which has existed in Western culture for centuries (see e.g. Eagleton, 2003). Here, avoidable everyday negative feelings are linked with sublime qualities: heartache is not painful but poetic, apathy feels empowering, and sad longing is not a sign of loneliness or loss but a cultured expression of romantic emotions – depicted in a way familiar to us from countless of pieces of visual art, literature, and drama. M210 actually pondered this phenomenon and explained that he has probably conditioned himself to react in a certain way, guided by cultural norms: *“When I think about sad music, I basically think about cinematic music or music familiar to me from TV-shows or computer games – and they are always linked to some narrative and emotional state that they want to convey to the audience.”* However, he stated that he found other types of music – such as Finnish religious songs – sad in a negative way. *“[That music] makes me feel anxious, depressed and sleepy.”* For him, sadness induced by “good sad music” is not necessarily similar to sadness induced by some everyday occasion. This type of an emotional reaction, or (*re-*)*experiencing affect*, may be identical with rewarding listening to sad music, often identified in previous studies (Vuoskoski *et al.*, 2012; Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014). Yet, he

too experienced avoidable feelings in relation to the “other kind of sad music”. Similar to many other participants, he made distinctions between different types of sad music with different functions for him and trigger different kinds of emotional responses.

Distinctions such as these have been recognised before (e.g. Tagg & Clarida, 2003; Juslin, 2013), but they only relate to the recognition of emotions, whereas a fuller account of the process involves conceptualising the experiential aspects of emotions as well. This awareness for conceptualising emotions is particularly relevant for *Sweet sorrow*. Both aspects (recognising and experiencing the emotion) of this process are present in the act of conceptualisation (cf. Barrett, 2006), where people conceptualise both the music they hear and the affect they experience based on their learned conceptual and cultural knowledge about that certain type of music *and* the emotion sadness.

<INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE>

A summary of frequencies of the themes and sub-themes are displayed in Figure 1. For themes, the proportion of items (out of 1451 items) for each theme is shown. For sub-themes, the item counts are shown by the number of participants mentioning each sub-theme to highlight the overlapping sub-themes. For example, there are 43 participants who mention both *Longing* and *(Self)-pity* in their responses, and this theme itself is the most frequent one (54%, 784 items) in the data. The figure illustrates the intertwined quality of the experiences within the themes: there are emotions that cannot be easily

classified, as they are somewhat ambivalent or mixed (cf., Juslin et al., 2011; Vuoskoski et al., 2012; Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2012; Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014; Kawakami et al., 2014).

### Conclusions

We have investigated emotional experiences evoked by listening to self-defined sad music. We focused on (i) the kinds of affects that people experience when listening to sad music, (ii) the contextual aspects relating to these experiences, and finally, (iii) how these experiences relate to emotion regulation. A classification of experiences related to sadness associated with music into three distinct themes resulted in both negative (*Grief* and *Melancholia*) and positive emotions (*Sweet sorrow*). They also revealed important differences in how contextual aspects – such as surrounding culture, social settings, and the type of music that was considered as sounding sad – affect conceptualisation of emotions induced by sad music. Since there seems to be different scripts for sadness in different situational contexts, and since there are different musical cues in different genres, it is possible to have many kinds of emotional reaction to many kinds of sad music. Furthermore, variations in the ways people conceptualise sadness and sad music seem to lead to differences in both their affect regulation processes and the overall emotional experience. Besides these differences, the analysis revealed the ambivalent nature of the conceptualised emotions that have resemblance with previous observations of mixed emotions in relation to sad music listening (e.g., Juslin et al., 2011; Vuoskoski et al., 2012). This study demonstrated that – contrary to most of the ideas in previous literature – negative emotions have a salient place within experiences

of listening to sad music. In addition to pleasurable emotions, people report having unpleasant, and even painful experiences of grief-type of emotions as well as “everyday sadness” induced by music. Also, many of the experiences are the outcome of undesired emotional reaction – not part of the voluntary affect regulation process –, which is an observation given little weight in prior analyses of sadness and music. These three types of experiences were also linked with different contextual situations (life situation, listening situation, the type of music that was heard, listener’s mood etc.) in which music was related to different affect regulation mechanisms.

The most common mechanisms of affect regulation in these descriptions were (1) *memory triggers*, (2) *(re-)experiencing affects*, (3) *emotional contagion*, (4) *social function*, (5) *cognitive function*, and (6) *aesthetic value/judgement*. It is important to notice that, although the same mechanisms were often present within the themes, there were remarkable differences in the valence of these emotional experiences; for instance, *cognitive function* as well as *(re-)experiencing affect* within the themes *Grief* and *Melancholia* have negative outcomes, whereas in *Sweet sorrow* they result in a positive experience. Also, in the case of memories evoked by music, the experiential level appeared to be rather unpleasant, as the emotions were mainly negative ones. These findings raise questions about the appropriateness of the previous affect regulation strategies, or at least they challenge the idea of affect regulation being an active, conscious and goal-directed process (e.g. Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013; Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014). As we have witnessed in the accounts from this study, there seems to be a certain involuntary nature to many of the music-induced experiences, as the

affects experienced while listening to music are not always voluntary and going in the desired direction. Interestingly, there seems to be a connection between the empathetic reaction to music and induced negative emotions, as people reported feeling empathetic sorrow made them want to avoid that type of music. This finding is conflicting with previous results that suggest especially those with strong trait empathy enjoy listening to sad music (Vuoskoski *et al.*, 2012), although it is possible that empathising with sad music might *only* be pleasurable for those with high trait empathy.

The limitations of this study should be addressed. First, the sample of participants is somewhat biased, thus one should be careful not to make strong generalisations based on these findings. Although a convenience sample was utilised, contrary to the previous studies about sadness and music (e.g., Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013; Garrido & Schubert, 2013), the volunteers were *not* told that the main questions concerned sadness. Also, it is possible that similar data collected from people in some other country would be quite different, as Finnish (music) culture – known for its melancholic shades – may have an effect on how *sadness* and *sad music* are/have been conceptualised. Methodological choices made in this study have their own drawbacks: the qualitative data comprised of short open-ended answers is not as rich as full interviews would have been. Furthermore, relying on retrospective data is problematic when studying people's experiences, since retrospective descriptions are vulnerable to memory inaccuracies. It is not possible to verify if the participants' descriptions equate their actual experiences, or if the participants were experiencing rapid alternation between multiple emotions that affected their overall experience. Thematic analysis

concentrating on differences in valence and arousal of emotional experiences led to the classification presented in this article; some other analysis method or chosen focus might have led to other kind of division between the experiences. However, this classification was well motivated based on the previous literature and how people naturally describe their emotional experiences (Barrett, 2006).

Regardless of these limitations, we propose that classifying experiences in a more nuanced fashion will sharpen the focus of research in future studies of music and sadness. The majority of previous studies have involved the emotions that we would call *Sweet sorrow*, as the theme appears to be paradoxical and the positive aspects of these experiences have received the most attention. However, this is clearly not the full story since truly negative experiences dominated the responses (*Grief* and *Melancholia* accounted for 66% of the coded items). This clearly suggests the need for incorporating different types of emotional experiences in relation to sad music within the field of music research as well as affect regulation research. For instance, here ruminative listening seemed to be typical for experiences of *Melancholia*, while *Aesthetic pleasure* appeared to be an entirely different experience. Differences such as these should be acknowledged and incorporated in future study designs for a comprehensive account of the phenomenon.

In conclusion, sadness in relation to music appears to be intriguingly multifaceted phenomenon. The fact that most of the participants had both positive and negative emotional experiences in relation to sad music listening suggests that previous views on

sadness might have been too narrow. We propose that music-associated sadness needs to be broadened and re-defined to encompass the range of emotional responses music is capable of evoking in listeners.

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### **III**

## **ATTITUDES TOWARD SAD MUSIC ARE RELATED TO BOTH PREFERENTIAL AND CONTEXTUAL STRATEGIES**

by

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### **Attitudes towards sad music are related to both preferential and contextual strategies**

Eerola, T., Peltola, H.-R. & Vuoskoski, J. K.

#### **Abstract**

Music-related sadness and its paradoxical pleasurable aspects have puzzled researchers for decades. Previous studies have highlighted the positive effects of listening to sad music, and the listening strategies that focus on mood-regulation. The present study explored people's attitudes towards sad music by focusing on a representative sample of the Finnish population. 358 participants rated their agreement with 30 statements concerning attitudes towards sad music. The ratings were subjected to factor analysis, resulting in 6 factors explaining 51% of the variance ( $RMSEA = 0.049$ ). The factors were labeled AVOIDANCE, AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL, REVIVAL, APPRECIATION, INTERSUBJECTIVE, and AMPLIFICATION, and they were divided into two broad headings, *preferential* and *contextual* attitudes towards sad music. Contextual attitudes seemed to be ambiguous in terms of valence, whereas the preferential attitudes were more clearly identified in terms of positive/negative polarity. The results of the survey suggest that listening to sad music elicits a wide variety of responses that are not fully revealed in previous studies.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In psychology, sadness is commonly considered a negative emotion that people tend to avoid and try to diminish as quickly as possible (Gross, 2008). According to previous emotion regulation research, when feeling bad individuals look for quick distracting activities or pleasurable experiences to reduce their negative emotions (see e.g., Lee *et al.*, 2013). In the context of the arts, however, people have drawn enjoyment and entertainment from sadness and tragedy since the days of the ancient Greeks. Studies in the

field of film research have provided empirical evidence that more sadness actually produces greater enjoyment in people while watching tragic films (Knobloch-Westerwick, Gong, Hagner, & Kerbeykian, 2012; de Wied, Zillmann, & Ordman, 1994). Similarly, the attractions of tragedy, violent entertainment and horror have puzzled researchers in various fields (e.g., Carroll, 1990; Duncum, 2006; Eagleton, 2003; Goldstein, 1999; Trimble, 2012; Zillmann, 1998). These phenomena can be described as paradoxical, since people seem to seek emotional experiences that they should not find pleasant in real life. Also, the emotional power of fiction *per se* can be seen as paradoxical by nature: how can one be affected by what one knows does not exist? It has been argued that when engaging with fiction, we are allowed to experience a variety of emotions vicariously and thus “safely”, since there are no real world consequences associated with the experienced emotions. This is possible by quieting down our appraisal system and suspending our disbelief, so the events in the world of fiction are able to stir emotions in us (Goldstein, 2009).

Music scholars (e.g., Kivy, 1990; Levinson, 1997) have pondered on music-related sadness and its paradoxical pleasurable aspects for decades, and in the field of music and emotions, the topic has received a great deal of interest in the past few years. For instance, several laboratory experiments have demonstrated that sad music fails to be perceived or experienced as negative (Eerola & Vuoskoski, 2011; Vuoskoski, Thompson, McIlwain, & Eerola, 2012), and it has been shown that sad music is sometimes used for mood-regulation purposes (van Goethem, 2010; Lee, Andrade, & Palmer, 2013; Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007). Also, people may use sad music as a therapeutic tool to cope with personal losses, relive certain memories and endure the negative emotions related to these events (Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013), or to understand their feelings and/or to solve the unwanted affects through introspection (van Goethem, 2010). Sad music is a potential medium of experiencing strong emotions: sad-sounding music is often reported to be capable of inducing strong emotional experiences in the listener (Gabrielsson, 2011). Moreover, sadness induced by music has been suggested to be comparable to genuine sadness elicited by autobiographical memories (Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2012), and that certain personality traits – dispositional



empathy among others – are connected with liking for sad music (Garrido & Schubert, 2011; Garrido & Schubert, 2013; Vuoskoski et al., 2012). Interestingly, those who tend to experience more empathic sadness in response to sad music also tend to enjoy sad music more (Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2012; Vuoskoski et al., 2012), suggesting a link between empathic engagement and the potentially positive effects of sad music. A model for the psychological mechanisms underlying the use of sad music for self-regulation was proposed by Van den Tol and Edwards (2013). They investigated the rationale for choosing to listen to sad music when feeling sad, and identified various kinds of strategies for choosing the right kind of music, as well as different regulating functions served by music. As for Garrido and Schubert (2013), they designed an instrument, The Like Sad Music Scale (LSMS), to study individual differences associated with the attraction to negative emotions in music. The scale is based on Oliver's (1993) Sad Film Scale (SFM), and summarizes the enjoyment of sad music using a single factor consisting of 9 items. Using this instrument, they identified three types of listener groups: two with adaptive and one with maladaptive listening strategies.

Since the pleasurable aspects of listening to sad music have been in the focus of research in recent years, the results appear to highlight the fact that sad music in general is very much liked, even though listening to it may not always be beneficial for the listener (e.g., the maladaptive listening strategy in Garrido & Schubert, 2013). Although Garrido and Schubert (2013, p. 160) state that there are people whose “attraction to sad music is a manifestation of maladaptive mood regulation strategies or other generally unhealthy psychological habits”, the majority of the literature puts emphasis on the positive effects of sad music, and on how much people enjoy listening to it. The previous studies investigating the connection between sadness and music have relied on rather small samples of participants, and the selection of these participants seems to have been problematic, since the researchers have often purposely selected volunteers who like sad music and are already interested in the topic in the first place (e.g., Garrido & Schubert, 2013). Also, in many cases most of the participants have been mainly adolescents or young students (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007; Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013; Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2012;

Vuoskoski et al., 2012), or they have been musically trained and/or played an instrument for many years (Garrido & Schubert, 2013). Thus, previous findings may have painted an overly positive picture about the overall enjoyment of sad music, as well as the reasons underlying it. Moreover, many of these studies (e.g., Hunter, Schellenberg, & Griffith, 2011; Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013; van Goethem, 2010) give a rather simplified view on the multifaceted phenomenon; They offer explanations (regarding the reasons for listening to sad music) involving self-regulation or coping purposes, but various other aspects have been left unexamined. For instance, is it possible that sad music could be pleasurable only because of its aesthetic value (Juslin & Isaksson, 2014)? And what about the situations where the listener has not chosen to listen to sad music, but is nevertheless affected by it? Could sad music only be something neutral to listen to without any mood-regulating or coping goals? There are people who do not enjoy listening to sad music and even avoid it, as their overall experience of it is rather unpleasant (Peltola & Saresma, 2014). Could these kinds of negative experiences be more prevalent than the previous studies would suggest? How common is it actually to enjoy listening to sad music in the first place?

### **Rationale of the present study**

The aim of the present study is to explore the attitudes towards sad music in a nationally representative sample. Since past studies on the topic have been based on small convenience samples, they might not have revealed the full spectrum of this complex phenomenon. The main question of the present study therefore is: What is the full range of the attitudes towards sad music? Providing answers to the main question will also allow us to address questions such as what is the prevalence of the enjoyment of sad music, and what are the underlying reasons for the possible enjoyment of sad music. To explore several unaddressed aspects of the attitudes towards sad music in general, a survey methodology was adopted. By choosing to focus on a representative sample of the population, we plan to avoid the potential biases and drawbacks inherent in utilizing convenience samples – commonly used in past studies.

### **MOTIVES FOR LISTENING TO SAD MUSIC**

A survey study was designed to explore the reasons and motivations for listening to sad music in everyday life. In addition to prevalence of experiences and attitudes towards sad music, the aim of the survey was to study demographic factors as potential mediating variables in participants' appraisal.

## **Method**

*Participants and procedure.* A survey was administered to a nationally representative sample of Finnish adults (N=1500). The representativeness was based on age, gender and regional distribution, and this stratification was carried out by the national census organization, StatFin. The participants were recruited through an invitation letter that asked them to take part in a scientific study by completing an online questionnaire. A paper version of the questionnaire was available to those who wanted to participate but did not have internet access, and was sent to them on demand via mail (20 requests for paper version, 19 were returned). In the questionnaire, participants were asked to rate their agreement with 30 statements concerning their attitudes towards sad music and their everyday uses of such music. The statements were derived from a (previously collected) large qualitative dataset concerning the reasons for choosing to listen sad music, as described in the *Questionnaire* section. In addition, various demographic variables (age, gender, education, music listening habits, and place of residence) were collected. The participants also rated the relevance of 126 emotion terms for emotions induced and expressed by music<sup>1</sup>. To prevent fatigue, no other background variables such as personality or medical history were collected.

After sending out one reminder to complete the survey, a total of 386 participants had responded, yielding a response rate of 26%. In self-administered mail surveys, it is typical to obtain less than 50% of the original sampling frame (e.g., Scherer, Wranik, Sangsue, Tran, & Scherer, 2004). There were 204 (52.8%) respondents that were women (8.8% did not reveal their gender), and the age range was 18–65 ( $M = 45.5$ ,  $SD = 13.6$ ). In comparison with the population, the sample had an underrepresentation of young men (<33

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<sup>1</sup> These ratings are not examined in the present study, since they are part of a wider research project.

years) and an overrepresentation of older women (>50 years of age, see Table 1). These two departures from population demographics, however, are similar to those observed in other survey studies on music and literary preferences, where older women tend to respond more frequently (Purhonen, Gronow & Rahkonen, 2009).

<INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE>

Most of the participants (54.4%) indicated that they listen to music at least once a week, although a considerable proportion (26.7%) reported listening to music multiple times each day. For statistical analyses, we divided participants into those who listen to music *rarely* (all who listen to music less than once a week,  $n=27$ ), *often* (all who listen to music from several times a week to at least once a day,  $n=228$ ), and *several times a day* ( $n=103$ ). Most of the participants (41.4%) described themselves as music-loving non-musicians, while the remainder identified themselves either as non-musicians with no particular interest towards music (34.9%), amateur musicians (12.7%), or semi-professional or professional musician 2.2%). 8.8% did not disclose this information. Again, we simplified this information for statistical analyses, calling those *musicians* who either were amateur, semi-, or professional musicians ( $n=58$ ) and everybody else *non-musicians* ( $n=300$ ).

*Questionnaire.* The questionnaire consisted of 30 items that were designed to broadly assess attitudes towards sad music. The statements were derived from a separate, previously collected qualitative data that consisted of 363 volunteers' free descriptions of their experiences of listening to sad music. These descriptions have been subjected to two data-led thematic analyses, first focussing on metaphorical language used in the descriptions (Peltola & Saresma, 2014), and second on experiences of sadness (Peltola & Eerola, submitted). These same free descriptions were used as a framework for generating the list of statements (presented in Table 2) for the present study. We did not constrain the statements solely to the reasons for listening to sad music, since that precludes any potential responses that indicate a high

dislike for sad music. In fact, we included statements reflecting a more negative attitude towards sad music, since these kinds of accounts were repeatedly found in the qualitative descriptions.

Participants were instructed to imagine music that they considered sad, and then rate each item: “Think about music that you somehow consider sounding sad. Below are a number of statements regarding attitudes towards sad music. Please read each statement and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each item.” All items, such as “Listening to sad music induces unpleasant feelings in me” or “Listening to sad music makes me feel grateful for the things in my life” were rated using a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Table 2 contains all 30 items.

## RESULTS

First, an initial screening of missing or anomalous responses and outliers was carried out. The responses of 28 participants were incomplete and were thus removed from the data. None of the statements had serious univariate outliers (all  $p > .50$  in Grubbs’ test), and the mean and standard deviations of the statements were explored (available in Table 2). This confirmed an expected variation in the statements, some having particularly high mean ratings of agreement (item #25 “Feelings induced by sad music are dependent on my current situation in life”), whereas other statements (e.g., item #14 “Listening to sad music induces unpleasant feelings in me”) generated uniform disagreement (i.e., low M and SD). In summary, participants agreed most with the statements emphasizing the importance of lyrics to sadness in music (item #8), relevance of tragedies in personal life (item #28) and the current situation in life (item #25), and ease of empathizing with the sad narrative conveyed by the music (item #29). Items that related to regulation of emotions using sad music typically divided opinions more than other items (e.g., item #3 “I regulate my own negative feelings by listening to sad music”). Items relating to anxiety, irritation, and unpleasant feelings in association with sad music scored the lowest ratings of agreement. Hence, the overall pattern paints a positive picture of the attitudes related to sad music, although contextual aspects of

the experiences have a significant impact on their relevance, corroborating previous observations (Garrido & Schubert, 2013; Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013).

Next, participants' ratings were subjected to factor analysis. Initially, the factor structure underlying the 30 sadness-related statements was explored. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .89, well above the recommended value of .6, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ( $\chi^2(435) = 4672.08, p < .001$ ). Given these indicators, factor analysis was conducted with all 30 items. The number of factors was determined by retaining the factors with eigenvalues over 1, resulting in 6 factors. The initial eigenvalues showed that the first factor explained 11% of the variance, the second factor 9% of the variance, the third factor 7%, the fourth 8%, the fifth 7%, and the sixth 6% of the variance (overall 49%, RMSEA=0.048). There was little difference between the varimax and oblimin rotated solutions, and thus both solutions were examined in the subsequent analyses before deciding on an oblimin rotation for the final solution.

After the initial solution, five items (#6, #7, #11, #23, #30) were eliminated because they did not contribute to a simple factor structure and failed to meet the minimum criteria of having a primary factor loading of .4 or above, and no cross-loadings of .3 or above. Item #30 had factor loadings between .3 and .4 on F1 and F5. Items #6, #7, #11, #23, and #30 had low (<.35) loadings on all components, and thus had low communalities (<.45) and high Hofmann's (1978) row-complexity index (4.0, 3.2, 2.7, 3.0, and 2.5, whereas the rest of the items had a mean of 1.7 and a standard deviation of 0.6). Our interpretation is that several of these items may have afforded conflicting interpretations, for example, item #6 ("I think about my loved ones when I listen to sad music"), and item #11 ("When I listen to sad music, the feelings I experience are often somewhat conflicting"), whereas the other items were singular and not closely interrelated (items #7, #23 and #30).

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A factor analysis of the remaining 25 items was conducted using oblimin rotation, with the six factors explaining 51% of the variance ( $RMSEA=0.0487$ ). All items had primary loadings over .5. In this solution, the inter-item correlations within the factors were adequate (between .63 and .86; see Table 2).

<INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE>

The factors were labeled as AVOIDANCE (F1), AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL (F2), REVIVAL (F3), APPRECIATION (F4), INTERSUBJECTIVE (F5), and AMPLIFICATION (F6). AVOIDANCE comprises statements relating to music-related sadness being experienced negatively: sad music is unpleasant (items #14 and #26), irritating (item #13), makes one feel anxious (item #15) or tired (item #16). AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL comprises statements that music or the sadness induced is related to personal memories and situations from the past (items #22, #28, and #25), that the music is something easy to empathize with (item #29), and that it is listened to only in a certain state of mind (item #1). REVIVAL comprises statements relating to the positive experience of music-related sadness: sad music gives strength (item #12), improves mood (item #24), calms one down (item #2), and helps one to cope when feeling bad (items #3 and #27), all resembling an existing mood regulation factor indicated previously (Saarikallio, 2008). APPRECIATION comprises statements relating to sad music's ability to make one appreciate the value and purpose in life (items #20, #5, #19, and #21). INTERSUBJECTIVE comprises items stating that one is not alone when listening to sad music (item #10), lyrics are an important part of the experienced feelings (item #8), and that music helps one to cope with one's unaccepted feelings by acting as a kind of 'peer support' (item #9). Finally, AMPLIFICATION comprises items relating to intensification of negative emotions beyond voluntary control (items #17, #18 and #4). It is worth noting, though, that this factor displayed the weakest interrater agreements ( $\alpha=.63$ ), which we assume is related to the low number of items associated with the factor.

Since the analysis of factors utilized oblimin rotation, factors display modest correlations, shown in Table 3. Out of the resulting correlations, INTERSUBJECTIVE and AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL show the highest correlation since the statements included in them often relate to particular persons or situations that are connected through memories. Also logically, AVOIDANCE is negatively related to APPRECIATION, and small positive correlation between AVOIDANCE and AMPLIFICATION demonstrates that the latter factor is not inherently meant to amplify negative or positive aspects of sad music.

<INSERT TABLE3 ABOUT HERE>

### **Connections between background variables and the factors**

To explore potential individual differences with respect to the attitudes towards sad music, we investigated the effect of background variables on the factor scores of each of the six factors by carrying out six four-way ANOVAs. The background factors were Gender (male, female), Age (divided into six 8-year bins), Musical Sophistication (non-musicians and musicians), and Frequency of Music Listening (3 levels; rarely, often, and several times a day). The factors AVOIDANCE and APPRECIATION did not portray any differences across the background variables. For the AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL factor, Gender, Age and Frequency of music listening all displayed significant main effects (Gender,  $F(1, 292) = 10.68$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .03$ , Age,  $F(5, 292) = 2.92$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .05$ , and Frequency of listening,  $F(2, 292) = 4.06$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .07$ ). No significant interactions emerged. Women tended to score higher values in the AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL factor (women  $M = 0.13$ , men =  $-0.18$ ), and there was a descending tendency across age, also qualified with negative linear contrast,  $t(1,346) = 2.69$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The frequency of music listening seemed to be associated with higher scores on the AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL factor (mean factor scores were for rarely  $-0.43$ , which is different in Tukey's post-hoc test at level  $p < .05$  from scores of often  $0.03$ , and constantly,  $0.04$ ). To aid interpretation, a full illustration of factor scores for all factors across Age and Gender is shown in Figure 1.



<INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE>

Those who rarely listen to music exhibit higher factor scores in avoidance ( $M=0.30$ ), which is unsurprising, although not significantly different from the means of participants that listen to music often ( $M=-0.02$ ) or several times a day ( $M=-0.04$ ,  $F(2,292)=2.87$ ,  $p=.058$ ). For the REVIVAL factor, there was a significant main effect of Age ( $F(5, 292) = 4.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .07$ ), indicating that age exhibits a clear negative trend across the factor scores (see Figure 1;  $p < .001$ , linear contrast). Again, there were no interaction effects. The INTERSUBJECTIVE factor displayed a main effect of Age ( $F(5, 292) = 2.25$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .05$ ), where older age groups display lower scores (see Figure 1). Finally, the AMPLIFICATION factor yielded two main effects, Age ( $F(5, 292) = 6.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .09$ ), which displayed a similar negative trend across age as the REVIVAL factor (see Figure 1;  $t(5,346)=5.36$ ,  $p < .001$  using a negative linear contrast), and Musical Sophistication ( $F(5, 292) = 4.08$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .09$ ). The latter result suggests that AMPLIFICATION is somewhat linked with the level of musical expertise, as musicians obtained higher factor scores ( $M=0.32$ ) than non-musicians ( $M=-0.06$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The results of the survey suggest that listening to sad music elicits a wide variety of responses. The 25 items that were retained yielded six factors, which were mostly unrelated to background variables (although Age, Frequency of Listening, and Musical Sophistication did contribute to certain factors). However, the factor structure itself reveals a rather more intricate pattern of attitudes towards sad music than previously reported. We interpret these factors as representing *preferential* and *contextual* aspects that relate to attitudes towards music and sadness. The former comprises the factors APPRECIATION, REVIVAL, and AVOIDANCE, where the first two factors include positive attitudes toward – and preference for – sad music that can be seen to resemble classic approach behaviors (Davidson, Ekman,

Saron, Senulis, & Friesen, 1990) already familiar from the previous studies (e.g., Garrido & Schubert, 2013; Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013). The prevalence of the positive attitudes indicates that many listeners are able to draw comfort and physical pleasure (REVIVAL) and perspective for life (APPRECIATION) from sad music. However, the last factor illustrates more negative attitudes toward – and even avoidance of – sad music, which previously have not received much attention. We believe that this tendency to emphasize the approach rather than withdrawal behaviors towards sad music may be the unfortunate by-product of focusing research efforts on volunteers particularly interested in music, the topic itself, or both (e.g., recruiting musicians or people who suffer mild depression). These kinds of convenience and volunteer samples have a high risk of sample selection bias (Hibberts, Johnson, & Hudson, 2012), and therefore do not necessarily accurately reflect the phenomenon in the general population. In the present study, a notable proportion (10–17%) of the respondents gave ratings of 4-5 (moderately or strongly agree) to the items in the AVOIDANCE factor (46 for #13 “Sad music irritates me”, 39 #14 “Listening to sad music induces unpleasant feelings in me”, 51 #15 “Listening to sad music makes me anxious”, 64 #16 “Listening to sad music makes me tired”), suggesting that the prevalence of the appreciation of/liking for sad music may have been overestimated in previous studies. For example, Garrido and Schubert (2013) focused almost solely on the “attractive aspects” of the phenomenon.

The second type of attitudes, comprising three factors – AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL, INTERSUBJECTIVE and AMPLIFICATION – seems to be related to contextual aspects that cannot easily be classified in terms of negative/positive polarity. Many of these attitudes are dependent on one’s life circumstances, the listening context, one’s prevailing mood, or on other people in one’s life. For instance, listening to sad music requires “a certain state of mind”, it can “intensify the negative feelings” one already has in that specific moment, and the feelings induced by sad music are dependent on one’s “current situation in life”. These attitudes seem to be somewhat ambiguous in terms of valence; especially the factors AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL and AMPLIFICATION are ambiguous, since music is capable of inducing both

fond and aversive personal recollections (F2) as well as negative feelings (F6) that can be experienced as desirable or undesirable.

The factors discovered in the present study bear resemblance to some of the listening strategies identified by Van den Tol and Edwards (2013), who explored peoples' rationale for choosing to listen to sad music when feeling sad. For example, memory (F2) plays a significant role in their model, both in strategies for choosing the music ("Memory triggers") and in categories of self-regulative functions ("Retrieving memories"). Intersubjective aspects (F5) of music listening are similarly portrayed in a prominent way in their study, grouped into three separate categories ("Connection", "Social", and "Friend") retaining different kinds of social and 'person-to-person' features of listening to sad music. These parallels suggest that interpersonal and autobiographical aspects are indeed central to people's motivations for listening to sad music – when feeling sad or otherwise. Previous work has shown that people tend to seek out social contact when feeling sad (especially as a result of social loss; Gray, Ishii, & Ambady, 2011), and that sad music can serve as a surrogate for empathic social contact with a friend (Lee et al., 2013). In the present study, the INTERSUBJECTIVE factor correlated strongly with the positive preferential factors APPRECIATION and REVIVAL, as well as with the AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL factor. This suggests that there is a strong interpersonal aspect in the pleasure derived from sad music; an interpretation further supported by previous findings linking dispositional empathy to the enjoyment of sad music (Garrido & Schubert, 2011; Vuoskoski et al., 2012). There is also some previous evidence indicating that autobiographical, emotional memories induced by music are for the most part related to intersubjective situations (Baumgarten, 1992). This might indeed be the case for sad music in particular, as Lee et al. (2013) have shown that sad music is sought out especially after experiencing social loss. The study by Van den Tol and Edwards (2013) also revealed connections between the strategies "Memory triggers" and "Connection", and the function "Social", further suggesting that the interpersonal and autobiographical aspects of sad music are more or less interwoven.

Although no significant associations between most of the background variables and the factor scores were found, Age, Gender and Frequency of music listening emerged as contributing variables. Frequency of listening was mostly connected with contextual attitudes, implying a causal relation; the more important part music plays in one's life, the more contextual meanings it probably receives. Younger participants' higher ratings for REVIVAL and AMPLIFICATION corroborate previous findings that have found adolescents often using music as a tool for mood regulation (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007). Although the youngest participants in the present study were 18 and above, this finding could suggest that young adults are more likely to intentionally seek out strong emotional experiences than older adults. Moreover, as Holbrook and Schindler (1991) suggest, early adulthood might be the period in a person's life when music is associated with emotionally powerful events. Interestingly, AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL was also rated higher in the case of younger female participants (see Figure 2), even though one might think that music-related memories and reminiscing could be important for seniors as well. However, statistically speaking this observation is not entirely clear since the interaction between age and gender was not significant and a main age difference within the women was observed between the oldest age group and the other age groups (Tukey post-hoc tests,  $p < .05$ ). Of course, it is possible that the context of 'sad music' guided younger participants in particular to associate music with memories. It has been suggested that older people develop more positive attitudes towards life and past events, whereas young adults often focus on the more negative aspects of life (Mroczek & Kolarz, 1998; Sutin *et al.*, 2013). Based on the results of the present study, it could be interpreted that listening to sad music evokes memories in younger participants because they are inclined to look back on events of bittersweet quality, while older participants, being nostalgic about their past, do not associate sad music with past episodes in their lives. Of course, it is probable that people of younger generations listen to music more in general compared to elderly ones; hence music is more often involved in their personal life and recollections of past events.

Although we have grouped our factors under two interpretative headings – preferential and contextual attitudes – they are, of course, heavily interrelated. As shown above, there are intersubjective and

contextual aspects in many of the items that cannot be separated from the more individual aspects. Also, many of the contextual aspects may be directly related to preferences and vice versa. For instance, if the feelings experienced while listening to sad music are evoked by fond memories associated with the music, it is likely that the music too is then experienced as pleasant. On the other hand, in the case of aversive memories, the music can be experienced negatively and a person may even start to avoid that particular piece of music.

### **Conclusions**

This study has revealed the complexity of attitudes towards – and the motivations for listening to – sad music. Although the themes identified here are somewhat similar to those reported by Van den Tol and Edwards (2013), the present study incorporated a wider range of contexts and motivations, thus resulting in a more comprehensive picture of the variety of reasons for listening to sad music. Although the materials used in both studies were originally based on people's free descriptions, Van den Tol and Edwards focused on different reasons to listen to sad music *when feeling sad*, whereas our survey was based on descriptions of different emotional experiences relating to sad music listening. Although the theoretical starting points of these two studies were somewhat different, the self-selected participants' style of reporting their experiences seems to be quite similar regardless of the different motivation or context of music listening. When people are asked to write about their experiences of listening to music that they consider 'sad', the issues they address appear to be more or less compatible. This might suggest that the experiences have some universal base, or that the participants have certain assumptions of the type of information that is expected in the research context of sadness and music.

The factor structure presented here still requires confirmatory analyses with separate sets of data to corroborate the overall structure. Even though the present study had a large, nationally representative sample of participants, the fact that the study was conducted in Finland – a Nordic country with a fairly homogeneous population, and especially famous for its emblematic melancholic music culture – may have

had an effect on results, whereupon a survey with identical statements conducted in another country and a different cultural environment might reveal different kinds of attitudes towards sad music. However, the overlap between the present and previous studies suggests that autobiographical and interpersonal aspects play a pivotal role in people's engagement with sad music. Future studies investigating music-induced sadness could benefit from utilizing the statements reported in the present study, as they might help to elucidate why different people have differing reactions to a given piece of nominally sad music. Furthermore, it may be that – as various personality traits have been associated with the enjoyment of sad music – people with different personalities have different listening strategies and different reasons for listening to sad music. It may be that interpersonal engagement – both the empathy received from and felt for the music – plays a crucial role in the pleasure and revival drawn from sad music. Future studies on music-related sadness should pay more attention to background variables of the participants, and avoid using biased samples (adolescents, young university students, people who suffer from depression etc.) to get more versatile view on these intriguing relations between sadness, music and the listener.

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*Tables*

Table 1. Age and gender distribution of the sample and population.

Age	Female		Male	
	Sample	Population	Sample	Population
18-25	8.5%	7.8%	3.7%	8.1%
26-33	8.0%	8.0%	4.8%	8.5%
34-41	5.4%	7.7%	8.5%	8.2%
42-49	5.4%	8.0%	8.0%	8.2%
50-57	15.6%	8.8%	8.0%	8.8%
58-65	14.8%	9.1%	9.4%	8.8%
TOTAL	57.7%	49.4%	42.3%	50.6%

Sample  $n=352$  (6 did not reveal gender), Population  $N = 3,382,741$ .

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Table 2. 30 items and their means and standard deviations, and factor loadings and communalities based on a principle components analysis with oblimin rotation for the 25 retained items.

<b>Items</b>	<b>F1</b>	<b>F2</b>	<b>F3</b>	<b>F4</b>	<b>F5</b>	<b>F6</b>	<b>Comm unality</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
#1 I listen to sad music only in a certain state of mind		.43					.25	3.40	1.19
#2 Listening to sad music relaxes me			.59				.50	3.15	1.16
#3 I regulate my own negative feelings by listening to sad music			.48				.58	2.91	1.32
#4 Sad music intensifies my own negative feelings						.41	.34	2.85	1.23
#5 Listening to sad music makes me feel grateful for the things in my life				.50			.46	2.64	1.16
#6 * I think about my loved ones when I listen to sad music								3.17	1.23
#7 * I often cry when I listen to sad music								2.59	1.29
#8 Sad lyrics are an essential part of the sadness expressed by music					.56		.33	3.85	1.02
#9 When I listen to sad music, I feel that my own negative feelings are justifiable					.55		.55	2.92	1.19
#10 When I listen to sad music, I feel that I am not alone with my feelings					.78		.66	3.31	1.17
#11 * When I listen to sad music, the feelings I experience are often somewhat conflicting								2.68	1.07
#12 Listening to sad music gives me strength			.54				.67	2.87	1.19
#13 Sad music irritates me	.75						.61	2.10	1.14
#14 Listening to sad music induces unpleasant feelings in me	.87						.74	1.97	1.09
#15 Listening to sad music makes me anxious	.87						.79	2.06	1.13
#16 Listening to sad music makes me tired	.70						.49	2.22	1.21
#17 I sometimes deliberately seek sadness by						.51	.50	2.23	1.26

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listening to sad music						
#18 Sad music can make me sad although I felt happy before listening to it	.33		.44	.42	2.86	1.29
#19 Sad music sounds more genuine to me than happy music		.46	.31	.41	3.11	1.32
#20 My appreciation of life grows when I listen to sad music		.86		.77	2.46	1.14
#21 Sad music reminds me that we, as mortal beings, have only a limited amount of time in our lives		.45		.44	2.25	1.22
#22 The feelings I am experiencing while listening to sad music, are evoked by memories associated with the music	.59			.43	3.25	1.17
#23 * After listening to sad music, I feel depressed					2.51	1.09
#24 Listening to sad music uplifts me	.52			.51	2.75	1.10
#25 Feelings induced by sad music are dependent on my current situation in life	.57			.36	3.75	1.09
#26 I do not want to listen to sad music when I am sad	.41	-.34		.35	2.48	1.22
#27 I listen to sad music when I am sad	.38	.47		.56	2.94	1.25
#28 Sad music reminds me of the tragedies of my personal life	.59			.53	3.49	1.11
#29 I easily empathize with the sad atmosphere or narrative conveyed by sad music	.56			.54	3.62	1.16
#30 * Sad music is able to make the atmosphere go down very easily					3.10	1.30
<b>Loadings</b>	3.01	2.37	2.26	1.95	2.00	1.19
<b>Reliability (Cronbach <math>\alpha</math>)</b>	.86	.83	.75	.70	.73	.63

Note. The items with asterisk were eliminated from the final, 25-item measure.

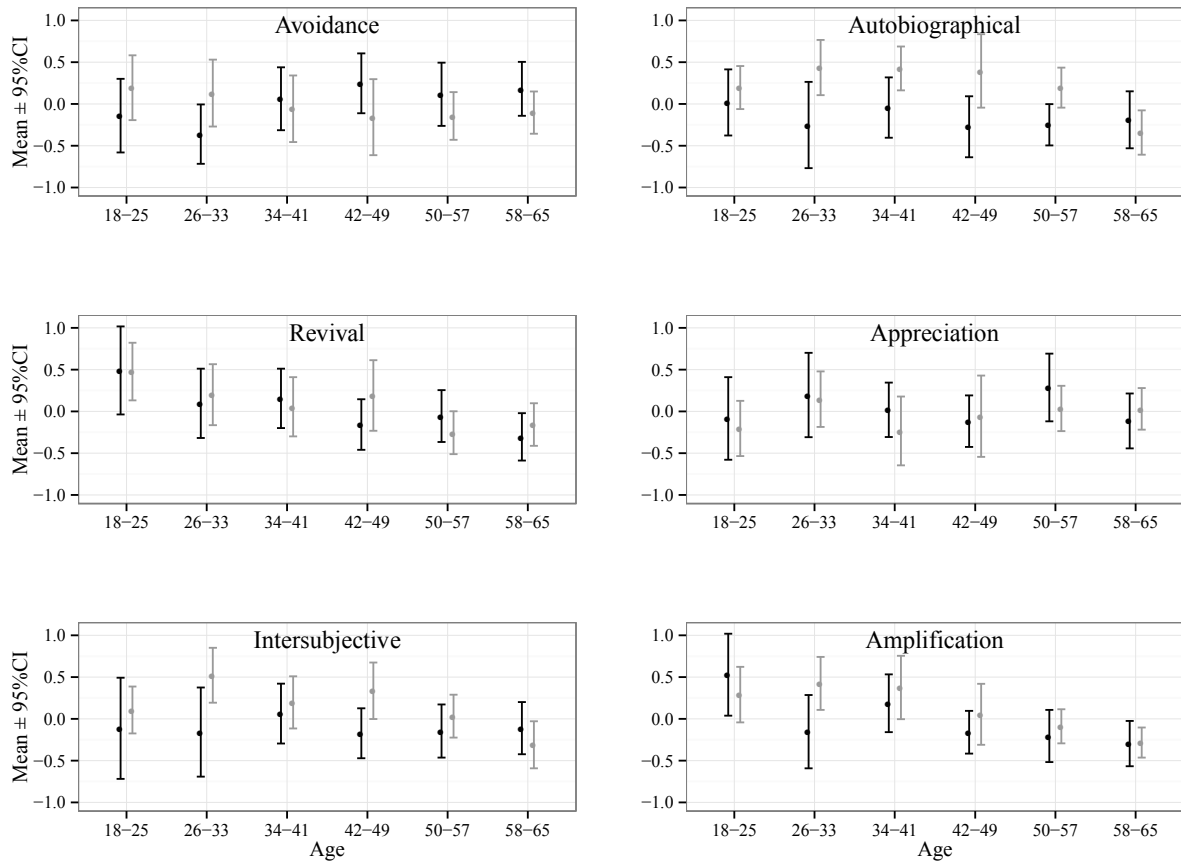
TABLE 3. Factor correlations.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. AVOIDANCE					
2. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL	.06				
3. REVIVAL	-.33**	.20**			
4. APPRECIATION	-.05	.30**	.35**		
5. INTERSUBJECTIVE	-.02	.51**	.41**	.48**	
6. AMPLIFICATION	.13*	.37**	.25**	.22**	.29**

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Figure captions**

Figure 1. Means and 95% confidence intervals for the factor scores (Y axis) across Age (X axis) and Gender (men black, women grey lines) for the six factors.



## IV

### **SHARING EXPERIENCED SADNESS: NEGOTIATING MEANINGS OF SELF-DEFINED SAD MUSIC WITHIN A GROUP INTERVIEW SESSION.**

by

Henna-Riikka Peltola, (submitted)

## **Sharing experienced sadness: Negotiating meanings of self-defined sad music within a group interview session**

### **Abstract**

Sadness induced by music has been a popular research focus within the music and emotion research. Despite the wide consensus in affective sciences that emotional experiences are social processes, the previous studies have only concentrated on individuals. Thus, the intersubjective dimension of musical experience – how music and music-related emotions are experienced between individuals – has not been investigated. To tap into shared emotional experiences, a setup with a group discussing their experiences evoked by sad music listening was constructed. Interpretative phenomenological analysis revealed four levels of discourses present in the sharing of the experiences evoked by joint music listening: (1) describing the emotional experience, (2) describing the music, (3) interpreting the music, and (4) describing autobiographical associations. Negotiated meanings of musical expression and emotional content were present, as the informants distinguished variety of sadness with different meanings in relation to different types of music and musical expression. Expectations on the musical style, structure, and performance, as well as expectations on the emotional content were affecting on these shared experiences. Also, social norms and cultural conventions played an important role in the negotiations.



## Introduction

One of the main reasons people engage with music is to experience emotions (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010). While most of these experiences are related to high arousal, excitement, happiness, and love (Wells & Hakanen, 1991), there are also emotions that are notoriously difficult to characterise, such as music-induced sadness. Emotions induced by sad music are a popular topic in the area of music and emotion research due to their paradoxical nature: when hearing sad music, instead of experiencing negative feelings that the music is portraying, many people seem to enjoy themselves and seek out the kinds of emotional experiences that they tend to avoid in real life (Vuoskoski et al., 2012; Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2012; Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014, Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013; Garrido & Schubert, 2011; 2013; 2015).

This *paradox of tragedy* appears to be a rather mysterious phenomenon, since in the context of music – as well as other forms of fiction and art – sadness and tragedy are often related to highly pleasurable experiences, or pleasure is intertwined with unpleasant or mixed emotions (e.g., Huron, 2011; Smuts, 2009; Trimble, 2012). Furthermore, emotional experiences evoked by sad music are often related to solitude. Besides pleasure, listening to sad-sounding music can, on the one hand, induce feelings of vulnerability and/or evoke painful memories from the past, but on the other hand, provide solace. Thus, often people report that they prefer to listen to sad music when they are alone, or when feeling lonely (Peltola & Eerola, in press; Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014; Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013). Although often listened to in private, there are multiple social

settings in Western culture where music portraying sadness is frequently played, such as religious occasions, and live concerts.

Listeners' emotional experiences relating to sad music are usually investigated via self-report instruments, surveys, and individual interviews. However, since the previous studies have only concentrated on individuals, the *intersubjective* dimension of the musical experience has been neglected. This has occurred despite the wide consensus in affective sciences that emotional experiences are shared with others (e.g., Salovey, 2003). Thus, our current understanding of how music and music-related emotions are experienced not only by individuals, but also *between* individuals, is rather narrow.

I argue that social and intersubjective qualities of engagement with music are an important aspect to consider when studying any music-related phenomena. This is due to the fact that music does not exist in a vacuum. Rather, it is a cultural, communicative act that takes place between the composer, the performer, and the listener(s), and always exists as a sonic, lived-through experience. Indeed, engagement with music – even in terms of the individual – is a complex, intersubjective relation. When listening to music, one can empathise with the performer, the composer, other people who listen to the same music, and even the music itself. According to some theories, the whole evolutionary origin of music could be inherently social; music might have developed as a tool for social bonding and group cohesion (see e.g., Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010).

Although the number of studies focusing on social aspects of music listening is small, the topic is not completely unexplored. There have been empirical attempts to bring the social context into research on music and emotions (e.g., Egermann, Sutherland, Grewe, Nagel, Kopiez, & Altenmüller, 2011; Juslin et al., 2008). Based on these observations, the emotional experiences of listening to music with others are different from those of listening in solitude. Egermann et al. (2011) suggested that the social situation may lead to either increased or decreased arousal during music listening depending on the *social appraisal* (people observe their own and others' reactions) and *social facilitation* (people get distracted by others, for example, because of the fear of being evaluated by them). In their study, they found that listening to music alone was more arousing than listening in a group. On the other hand, music can be effective in encouraging a sense of belonging to a social group (e.g., Hargreaves & North, 1999), and music listening is also used in mediating social action and experiences as it shapes socially shared values and constructions – such as emotions (DeNora, 2000, 2003).

This brings us to my second argument. Contrary to many previous studies that have considered emotions as innate, cognitive processes (e.g., Egermann et al., 2011; Juslin et al., 2008; Juslin, 2013), I argue that emotions do not exist as purely biological entities, or individual experiences, but that they have strong intersubjective and cultural qualities. These aspects need to be included in the investigation, if the emotional reactions to music are to be more comprehensively understood.

The aim of this study is to grasp some of this intersubjectivity of experienced emotions in relation to music listening. Sad music was chosen as the musical context because of its emotional qualities that are often related to solitude. The main research questions of the present study are:

1. How do people discuss their experiences of listening to nominally sad music with others who listen to the same piece of music?
2. How does the presence of others contribute to the descriptions of these experiences?

In order to tap into shared emotional experiences, group discussions about experiences evoked by sad music were facilitated. By focusing on the phenomenology of music listening through a qualitative examination of listeners' accounts, I hoped to be able to provide new insights into the topic of paradoxical sadness, and shed some light on the socio-culturally shared contents of these emotional experiences induced by sad-sounding music.

### **Theoretical framework**

One of the fundamental assumptions in this study is that human consciousness is inherently intersubjective, as it is formed via a dynamic interrelationship between oneself and others (Thompson, 2001). Furthermore, all human experiences take place simultaneously on several levels; every experience involves – at the very least – four such levels: the level of events, the socially

shared level of valuing the experiences, the bodily or material level, and the discursive level of narration (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 1999). Cultural and social aspects have an effect on these experiences. In the case of emotional experiences, there is variation in the degree to which people from different cultures experience negative versus positive emotions, for example (Heine, 2008; Miyamoto & Ma, 2011). One possible explanation for this variation is the *conceptualisation* of these experiences.

In this study, emotions are considered as *acts of conceptualisation*. This concept refers to processes where thoughts, bodily feelings, and action tendencies are associated with interaction with the world and categorised as a certain emotion without much conscious effort (Barrett, 2006). This conceptualisation is dependent on language, and, as well as being an act of an individual, there is a strong intersubjective quality within the process as the proper lexicon for inner affective states is learned through one's interaction with her surrounding environment (see also Wierzbicka, 1999; Kövecses, 2000). Furthermore, although emotions are biologically constrained, they are situated in social contexts and shaped by social interaction that takes place within a culture (Abu-Lughod & Lutz, 1990; Nussbaum, 2001; Mesquita & Boiger, 2014). Also, cultural knowledge is an important input for the conceptual content, as there are different scripts in different cultures about *how* and *what* emotions should be experienced (e.g. Mesquita & Ellsworth, 2001; Miyamoto & Ma, 2011). It is important to notice that *culture* here does not refer only to certain nationalities or language borders, since there can be many sub-cultures within a culture that may all have different scripts and labels for emotions.

Furthermore, music in this study is understood as dynamic technology of emotion construction (see DeNora, 2010) that provides a resource for emotional states and their achievement. In other words, music is seen as a form of conceptual information for emotions as it provides a *musical context* for the experiences which is socio-culturally constructed and shared. The focus of this study is how emotional experiences evoked by nominally *sad music* come to be in a social setting, and how they are discussed with others.

## **Method**

### *Focus group interview*

In most previous studies, group interview methods have been used to collect qualitative data on a particular situation experienced by a group of individuals. In this study, the motivation for utilising group rather than individual interviews was based on the assumption that dynamic encounters among group members provide greater perspective on the social aspects of music listening. Utilising a focus group interview enabled the informants to focus their attention and awareness on their experiences, and discuss the topic in greater detail compared to individual interviews. The idea of a focus group is that the group processes help people to explore their own points of view (Liamputtong, 2011; Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook, 2007). Thus, the comments made by other group members provide opportunities for comparing one's own experience with that of others, eventually helping to find a mutually shared vocabulary for expressing the lived experience. Focus group interview makes it possible for researchers to observe

this everyday process and, thus, obtain new information about such social aspects.

#### *Participants and their self-selected music examples*

Informants were recruited from a course on methods for studying listening experience in the University of XXX's music department. In addition, an email invitation was distributed to mailing lists of student organisations. Since the recommendations concerning the size of the groups are rather loose – from 4 to 12 participants depending on the aim of the study (Krueger, 1994) – different group compositions were tested. From among the volunteers (nine from the course and three recruited from other departments), the interviewer formed three groups. The first group (G1) consisted of two female (“Satu”<sup>1</sup> and “Miina”) and two male (“Ossi” and “Petteri”) students of musicology. In the second group (G2), there were three female (“Mirka”, “Laura”, and “Jenni”) and two male (“Mikael” and “Sami”) students of musicology. These students were already familiar with each other, since all of them attended to the same course. It was assumed that the informants' musical background might affect the way they shared and discussed their experiences as the vocabulary and the ways of listening of musicology students might be more granular compared to non-music students. Therefore, the third group (G3) consisted of three female students (“Kerttu”, “Anna”, and “Taru”) from departments other than the music department.

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<sup>1</sup> All of the informants' identities were hidden by giving them fake names.

All informants were asked to select a piece of music that they considered to be somehow sad or melancholic and provide it to the interviewer one day before the interview in order to keep the interview session. The rationale behind this was that the informants would hear a piece of music in the interview setting that would evoke emotional experiences, and self-selected music is known to be the most effective to produce emotional responses (cf. Blood & Zatorre, 2001). There were no specified selection criteria for the music; all genres, with or without lyrics, were welcomed. Thus, the variety of music samples was substantial, ranging from classical orchestral music to Scandinavian rock. There were five instrumental tracks and seven tracks featuring vocals (three sung in the informants' native language and four in English)<sup>2</sup>. The informants were asked to listen to their selected piece of music several times beforehand and, on each occasion, to focus on their emotional experience. This was intended to help the informants discuss their emotional experience with others during the interviews.

### *Interviews*

The interviews were carried out in Finnish, as both the informants and the interviewer were native Finnish speakers. All of the interviews took place in a seminar room at the University of XXX. During the interview session, each song provided by the members of the group was played twice. All group members listened to and discussed all music tracks. Each track was played without any prior communication of the content or the person who selected it. There was an open discussion about the informants' experiences after the first and second

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<sup>2</sup> All of the music tracks used in this study are listed in Appendix 1.



listening of each song. The person who had selected the music was only permitted to participate in the discussion after the second listening. This prevented their familiarity with the music from unduly influencing the experiences of others. The informants were instructed to listen, and describe their experiences after each round without any restrictions. The musicology students were told that the purpose of the discussion was to share subjective experience rather than to analyse the music. The informants were asked to articulate the kinds of feelings they experienced while listening to the music.

The discussion groups were primarily self-organised during the interviews. The interviewer did not participate in the discussion, except when asking clarifying questions or giving the occasional prompt. The interviewer's relatively passive role allowed the discussions to flow freely without restrictions. Every effort was made to avoid the type of interview structure in which the interviewer acts as a moderator and leads the group discussions, since this type of interviewing by asking direct questions is inconsistent with a focus group method requiring a more subtle and indirect approach (Steward & Shamdasani, 2015). Furthermore, as the aim of this type of approach is to understand the participants' meanings and interpretations, they were encouraged to talk to each other instead of answering the moderators' questions (Liamputtong, 2011).

Each interview lasted for approximately two hours. All interviews were video-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

### *Analytic strategy*

The data was analysed using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach (Howitt, 2010; Smith, 1996; 2004). This approach is used whenever a person's lived experiences are studied through their own perspective. IPA is a tool for exploring how individuals make sense of their personal experiences. Hence, it is largely interpretative in that "the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world" (Smith, 2004, p. 40). Although it is inductive, IPA aims to share constructs and concepts with mainstream psychology and, thus, engage in a dialogue with existing research (Smith, 2004; Howitt, 2010). IPA techniques have often been used to investigate personal perceptions and understandings. They are also useful for identifying shared experiences within groups of participants (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999).

### **Analysis**

The analysis followed a typical IPA strategy in which the themes were identified inductively after familiarisation with the data, then ordered in a systematic table of themes based on their importance and occurrence (e.g., Howitt, 2010, pp. 287–289). This resulted in four superordinate themes: (i) describing the emotional experience, (ii) describing the music, (iii) interpreting the music, and (iv) describing autobiographical associations. The last theme was the least important in the discussions, and the autobiographical comments did not trigger further discussion within the groups. Therefore, although these associations might have

been important to the informants, they may have felt reluctant to spend time describing them to the others. Thus, it was seemingly impossible to negotiate the meanings of these singular associations with others. This kind of behaviour is often the danger of a focus group discussion, in which personal information or private experiences may not be discussed (Liamputtong, 2011). The theme has been omitted from the present discussion for the sake of brevity.

#### *Describing the emotional experience*

The first superordinate theme concerned descriptions of emotional aspects of the experience evoked by music listening. It encompassed sub-themes: (i) emotions represented by music (i.e. "*The feeling in music*"), and (ii) emotions induced by music (i.e. "*The feeling in me*").<sup>3</sup> These themes were thoroughly intertwined in informants' descriptions; the aspects of the experience were often inseparable.

(i) "*The feeling in music*" - The fundamental assumption in every interview was that each music track played was an example of nominally sad music. All of the informants knew that they were listening to music that was emotionally meaningful to another group member. Typically, the first issue that was brought up after the music listening was the emotional content represented by the music,

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<sup>3</sup> The third sub-theme, *Physical reactions*, is not reported here, because these reactions were not socially negotiable and did not trigger the discussions on shared meaning-making processes. It can, however, be accessed online as supplementary material (<http://bit.ly/1Q3eKdS>).

with an emphasis on the conceptualisation of the type of sadness. This kind of classification of sadness with different meanings is context-dependent and tends to affect the overall emotional experience (Peltola & Eerola, in press).

Comparisons between different tracks were somewhat unavoidable. With regard to some tracks, it seemed to be relatively easy for the group to negotiate and agree on the types of emotions conveyed by the music. For instance, Kerttu and Anna discussed Taru's track (E12) after the first listening:

"Oh my, that was..." (Kerttu)

"Well, there wasn't any hope there!" (Anna)

"No, there surely wasn't. This was sad for real, and very agonising too [...] It was terrible how...there was so much anxiety and bad feelings [in this song] [...] It was like an emotional trap, a thing you can't escape from... maybe that's the agony there. Maybe it is hopelessness then." (Kerttu)

"And hatred." (Anna)

In these kinds of tracks, the musical cues for negative emotions and the performance were instantly discussed by all group members through descriptions of shared interpretations. There was no need for debate, since everybody in G3 agreed that Taru's track was sad in a scary and agonising way. On the other hand, some tracks caused confusion within the groups. Because the default emotion for the musical expression (sadness) was pre-defined, there was a tendency for informants to negotiate and find solutions for unclear cues. Petteri's choice of music (E4) in G1 clearly did not meet his group members' standards for *sadness*. The group spent a good deal of time and effort negotiating how the music could express sadness or at least some other negative feelings:

“Compared to those previous tracks that were melancholic, this was more like...

[*laughing*] kind of energetic...” (Miina)

“What I was thinking was...for me it’s not even in a good-bad axis, but more like...there’s an overall electric feeling in the song.” (Ossi)

“That’s right, if I had to put an emoticon for this music, the neutral smiley would be the only option...” (Satu)

“It’s funny, it’s not exactly...maybe I would categorise it as somehow expressing more negative vibes, but it’s not that obvious... [...] there’s only a hue of melancholy [in this music], but since it’s so energetic, the [sad] feeling is not overflowing.” (Ossi)

“Or at least it doesn’t stay there to ruminate in it.” (Satu)

It was generally easier for the person who chose the music to describe the emotional content than the other group members. This is due to the fact that the person who chose the music often had an established interpretation of it. Petteri had to concede and admit that he understood his group’s confusion.

Nevertheless, he still defended his opinion on the song’s emotional expression:

“I think this is clearly melancholic...okay, I admit that it’s not obviously like ‘hey, let’s swim in the sadness’ type of thing, but for me, it’s very wistful... but at the same time there’s energy. [...] Melancholic, yet hopeful. But not happy for sure.” (Petteri)

In this case, the social situation and the need to negotiate within the group were clearly evident. Although they did not agree with Petteri on the emotional content of the song, the rest of the group still worked together to solve the “puzzle” at hand. This helped them to gain an insight into a fellow group member’s experience. Conversely, the person who selected the music had to accept the critique concerning his conception of sad music and explain his established experience.

(ii) *"The feeling in me"* - Besides recognising emotional expression, music listening induced various emotions in the informants. In the case of self-selected music, they often emphasised that the emotional experience was quite immutable; the feelings induced by the given piece of music were more or less the same every time, regardless of the situation. Even the abnormal interview setting did not bother some participants, who were able to detach themselves from the presence of others by closing their eyes or staring on the floor. In fact, Kerttu even stated that her experience was way more powerful compared to her normal music listening, because the loudspeakers in the seminar room were better than her own. These kinds of pleasurable emotional experiences induced by familiar music are often sought out (cf., Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014; Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013), even if the person cannot quite explain the rationale behind their selection. For some participants, however, the interview situation and the presence of the other group members made it difficult for them to have the desired experience. For instance, Satu and Laura mentioned that the study situation made them listen to their own selections in a more analytical fashion than they would in private. They went on to state that this probably had an effect on their emotional reactions during the interview. Jenni described her reaction to a song that she usually only listens to when she is alone (E7):

"It was very difficult to get in [to the experience]. I was like, 'Why can't I get into this? Why can't I get in?' I felt like telling the others to go away... 'I just want to listen to this from my headphones'... [*laughing*] But then on the second round it was easier." (Jenni)

For her, the social facilitation (see Egermann *et al.*, 2011) seemed to decrease the emotional arousal during the first round of listening, but during the second round she was able to experience the familiar, desired feelings.

Emotions induced by a track that was heard for the first time – as compared to informants' own selected songs – depended on not only the musical preference of the informants, but also their expectations of the genre, the performer, and the inherent rules of musical expression. These kinds of expectations have mostly been studied in the field of literature, with the help of the “*horizon of expectations*” concept (Jauss, 1982; Cook, 2003). This concept illustrates the complex relationship between different kinds of expectations that exists between the text, the writer, and the reader. Similarly, musical expectations have been recognised before (Huron, 2006; Juslin and Västfjäll, 2008; Juslin *et al.*, 2010; Juslin, 2013), and they were constantly present in the informants' accounts, as they reflected on and negotiated their musical and stylistic expectations of different tracks with each other.

In addition to expectations of musical features, the horizon of expectations included those regarding the emotion sadness. Participants implicitly communicated their expectations of the emotional reaction in their accounts, which suggests that they had existing concepts for both sad music and the emotions it is able to induce in them (cf. Peltola & Eerola, *in press*). The participants' expectations were guided by prior knowledge of the emotional content that all the tracks were supposed to express. Anna did not quite seem to

recognise the sadness conveyed by Kerttu's track (E10). Thus, her own emotional reaction to the music was somewhat unexpected:

"The arrangement and the melody actually put me in a good mood...I could have done some jamming. [...] But yeah, I could listen to that when I'm in a good mood...I mean, I didn't get the feeling that it would make me feel low...it's pleasant." (Anna)

Her concept of sad music seemed to be related to felt sadness or being in a negative mood. Since this music "put her in a good mood" rather than meeting her expectations, Anna's emotional reaction was incongruous with expected sadness that was implicitly present in the social setting (interview about sad music). Later, after Kerttu had described her relationship with the song, Anna softened her account by trying to explain herself and negotiate with Kerttu:

"It's funny how, for you, this is immensely sad while I got these happy feelings... But you know, after hearing this song only twice, it's difficult to concentrate on both the music and the lyrics, so maybe it's...and you know, it was in English, and for me, lyrics in my mother tongue are usually more meaningful, so I was like... 'Yeah, okay, yeah, life is sad, okay. Oh man, this song has a good beat!'" (Anna)

Yet again, the awareness of another person's experience made the informant reflect and explain her own experience and negotiate the meaning-making process with the others.

#### *Describing the music*

The second superordinate theme concerned descriptions of the music that was heard. When participants were asked to describe their (emotional) experience of



music listening, they often ended up describing the musical features instead of the emotions they experienced. This could suggest that people find it difficult to distinguish what they hear and how it makes them feel. In terms of a lived experience, perception and feeling are more or less intermingled (Peltola & Saresma, 2014). The theme encompassed two sub-themes: (i) musical features, and (ii) the visual imagery evoked by the music.

*(i) Musical features* – Describing musical features include the structural aspects of music (such as how the music was arranged, the role of different instruments, which phrases were repeated, and how the lyrics and music fitted together) and the sound of the music. These aspects were typically the second issue discussed, after the emotional label of the music. One might think that, since two of the groups comprised musicology students (many of whom could play some instrument to at least a semi-professional level), informants' musical background would explain this analytical listening style. However, even G3 spent a great deal of time discussing structure and other musical features. The informants in G3 were not musically trained and only listened to music for leisure. The main difference between the musicology students and the non-music students was that the latter lacked the professional vocabulary used to describe musical features. Also, musicology students often referred to their own music making in the cases of instruments they were familiar with playing. However, the group members in G3 referred to singing or dancing, which – in addition to listening – seemed to them to be familiar ways of engaging with music.

Typically, structural aspects were related to informants' musical expectations – how and why the expectations were confirmed or violated (Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008) – but also with aesthetic judgement and appraisal. The relationship between lyrics and music was frequently discussed within this theme. If there seemed to be any conflicts, the lyrics were brought up. Ossi described his experience of the lyrics and music within his own track:

“The lyrics...They are actually quite contradictory, if I may say so. I mean, there are some fine metaphors there [...] but then again, there are those clumsy metaphors too, so I really don't know how to take this as a whole song...” (Ossi)

Ossi discussed his own song in a very critical manner, and even understated both its emotional expression and personal meaning to him. This critical attitude towards one's own track indicates a degree of self-consciousness and social vulnerability to exposing an emotionally meaningful piece of music to others. Based on their body language and other nonverbal communication, such as blushing and nervously laughing, discussing their self-selected music seemed to be rather awkward for some participants. This awkwardness may pertain to personal differences and the ways that people are accustomed to talking about their emotions in general. However, there were variations in how different groups put effort into creating a comfortable atmosphere for the discussions and reducing social awkwardness by lifting more serious moments with humorous comments, or showing support for another's interpretation and experience of their selected piece of music. In G1, where both of the male informants were occasionally giving highly critical comments on the music tracks, the overall awkwardness of the situation seemed to be higher compared to other groups.

Especially in G3, all group members kept negotiating and coordinating their expressive behaviour in order to create mutual positivity, by using both verbal and nonverbal cues, such as smiling, seeking eye contact, and leaning towards the person to whom they were addressing their comments (e.g., Tickle-Degnen & Rosenthal, 1990; Grahe & Bernieri, 1999). Thus, the composition of a social group and the dynamics within it may greatly affect how comfortable people feel about sharing their experiences (Stewart et al., 2007).

Descriptions of what the music sounded like were strongly intertwined with descriptions of musical structures. These descriptions were often linked to visual imagery, as the sounds were described using metaphors of concrete objects. Some tracks evoked similar metaphors within the group members. This suggests that people share metaphorical modes of thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and use metaphors to help explain experiences of abstract phenomena – such as music – to others (Larson, 2012; Peltola & Saresma, 2014). Ossi and Petteri negotiated the sound of music in Satu's track (E1) by using shared metaphors:

“It sounded like these tiny drop-like sounds were dripped on top of the ensemble.”

(Ossi)

“The sound was kind of misty and sad...like one was watching through a window that is soaked wet from rain.” (Petteri)

“Yeah, I was thinking that the sound was a bit... unreal...what you were trying to describe, like watching through a misty glass [...] There definitely was something foggy in the sound.” (Ossi)

With respect to vocal music, the singers' voices were often discussed in a very detailed manner. In some cases, it seemed that the emotional content of the song

depended heavily on the singer's expression. G2 negotiated the role of the singer's voice in Jenni's track (E7):

"I thought the sound of the piano was a bit misty...cloudy-like, but it was the sound of the singer that encapsulated the emotion...that wobbly kind of voice..." (Mikael)

"I felt like he was...almost crying there in the beginning..." (Mirka)

"Yeah, I too got this association with crying...on the other hand, it made me think that the singer is not that strong but fragile...because the voice was trembling...like it's not a strong voice but very frail...But then again, maybe his voice was just like that, I mean...maybe it had nothing to do with his emotional state..." (Sami)

"I thought it sounded real...like his voice just is like that...but yeah, maybe that could be used as a rhetorical device in a song like this." (Laura)

"I think the humaneness there is the thing...when you hear his voice, you get this feeling that you never know when he's going to burst into tears for real..." (Jenni)

The singer in this track had the type of voice that communicated sadness and fragility to some listeners without much contextual information. During the second round of music listening, the informants endeavoured to focus more on the lyrics. Nevertheless, it was still mainly the sound of the singing voice that held their attention. They seemed to grasp the emotional meaning of the song by recognising a "universal 'affect programs' for vocal expression of emotions" (Juslin, 2013, p. 4; see also Scherer, 1995; Scherer et al., 2002). This is also known as *iconic coding* of perceived emotion in music (Juslin, 2001; 2013). In addition, a singer's voice could convey other kinds of meanings related to the type of sadness that the informants conceptualised as being personal and genuine. These descriptions were very much linked with music interpretation and cultural connotations.

(ii) *Visual imagery evoked by music* - Experiencing emotions induced by music, or at least explaining the experience to others, often depends on a person's imagination. This is considered to be an important aspect of experiencing emotions in general (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 65). In addition to describing their experiences through metaphors of concrete objects, informants provided detailed descriptions of the visual imagery evoked by music. This was especially common for the five instrumental pieces. Some tracks with vocal performances, however, also evoked visual imagery. Some informants were more disposed to experience visual imagery than others. However, each person's described imagery was shared or at least recognised by another group member, potentially due to the cultural factors that dictate how music and visual imagery are combined in different media (Tagg & Clarida, 2003). This contextual information about socially shared music culture, visual culture, and emotional expression are used in conceptualising the experience (cf. Barrett, 2006).

After the initial music listening, some descriptions of visual imagery tended to leave lasting impressions on the other group members. As such, the first description of visual imagery affected participants' lived experiences during the second round. For instance, after hearing Mikael's track (E9), Laura first described a detailed scene set in an airport. However, upon hearing Mirka and Sami discuss their shared visual imagery, Laura's experience changed:

"I saw myself in an airport waiting for my flight. I'm starting a new life and leaving everything I know behind [...] I'm sitting there in a cafeteria, waiting...kind of looking around and trying to memorise how I feel at this moment...trying to understand what is happening to me, that I'm turning a new page in my life..." (Laura)

" [...] I was thinking about summer rain...Like, I'm sitting somewhere indoors; feeling secure...holding a teacup...it's rainy but it's nice..." (Mirka)

"Yeah, I had pretty similar imagery to Mirka. The atmosphere was a bit melancholic, exactly like...sitting indoors and having this...not quite sad but a nicely melancholic feeling." (Sami)

*[after the second listening]*

"This time, I could only think about the rainy summer day with the teacup and low weather that you two were describing." (Laura)

Her altered visual imagery is a prime example of the fluctuating nature of a lived experience. It keeps changing and is affected by contextual and extramusical information (Vuoskoski & Eerola, 2013), such as an interpretation provided by others.

#### *Interpreting the music*

The third superordinate theme overlapped considerably with the previous one. The third superordinate theme concerned the informants' interpretations of the meanings of certain musical features or the musical genre. As they described the musical structure, they also explicated cultural meanings inherent in the music. These interpretations were often linked to visual imagery evoked by the music. The theme encompassed two sub-themes of descriptions: (i) cultural connotation(s) for the overall style or genre of the music and (ii) cultural connotation(s) for some musical feature or structure.

(i) *Cultural connotation(s) for the style/genre* - Different musical genres convey different musical cues for similar emotional expression, such as sadness, (e.g. Saari & Eerola, 2015), and there are sociocultural meanings maintained and conveyed via these musical conventions. Since all the music tracks represented more or less different musical genres, the focus of the discussions varied considerably in accordance with the style of the music. The groups negotiated the cultural meanings of different musical genres. They did so by comparing the tracks and conceptualising the type of sadness that was represented by each style. Petteri and Ossi described the differences in cultural meanings between Miina's (E3) and Ossi's (E2) tracks:

"I was thinking that the sadness in this track [E3] was kind of sophisticated...I don't know if it was the violin or what, but...I can't help comparing it to the previous song [E2] that was more like...umm...dirty and...it must be because the instruments were so different, I mean, there were drums and electric guitar... so it was more like..." (Petteri)

"Manly sadness." (Ossi)

"Yeah, it was manly. Sadness of men. [*laughing*] So compared to that, this was sophisticated...Like wearing silk gloves while playing...playing a violin and secretly weeping at the same time" (Petteri)

This negotiation reveals cultural connotations and attitudes towards different styles of music. For these informants, a symphonic orchestral piece with a solo violin sounded sophisticated, while a progressive rock song with drums and electric guitar carried connotations of dirtiness and manliness. "Sadness of men" was represented by this type of music, as opposed to the femininity implied by classical music and violin. Of course, it is possible that the male vocals in E2 affected the interpretation of the whole song. However, the gendered nature of

music discourses has been recognised before. There are musical conventions for constructing masculinity and femininity in Western music (McClary, 2002). Furthermore, cultural attitudes towards musical genres often convey aspects of gender that are learned in childhood (Green, 2002).

Music with obvious cultural connotations evoked identical associations within group members. Laura's selection (E6) was a rather typical funeral march, which is often used in public funerals for heads of states. Although the informants did not recognise the song, they instantly agreed on the type of sadness and cultural meanings inherent in the piece by completing each other's sentences:

"I immediately got this feeling of funerals, for some...yeah, it sounded like a march."

(Mikael)

"Yeah, a real procession of mourners." (Jenni)

"Something very solemn and ceremonial...monumental, kind of like national mourning. Somehow I was thinking about the Soviet Union. [*laughing*] I relate it to war or some big loss..." (Mirka)

"I was thinking about...maybe military funerals...or like people have been killed in a tragic way..." (Sami)

"There's honour in this...the great leader and how we've lost him and..." (Jenni)

"Or...like, a whole nation..." (Mirka)

In addition to agreeing on the cultural context of the music, the group agreed on the quality of emotion expressed. They did so by comparing this track to the previous ones that they thought sounded more private:

"Well, it sounded somehow formal...I mean, it wasn't like wallowing in a personal sadness, but...there were more people involved...like, grieving together..." (Mirka)

"Yeah, I totally agree, this was more like collective sadness than personal." (Mikael)



Again, the cultural and contextual knowledge seemed to affect how the informants conceptualised the emotional qualities of their experiences (Barrett, 2006).

*(ii) Cultural connotations for the musical feature/structure* - With regard to certain musical features and structural aspects, the meanings of established cultural connotations were persistently interpreted by the informants. The most frequently mentioned sign of sadness was, unsurprisingly, a minor mode. In addition to this, other expressive cues were often explicated in interpretations. When interpreting Satu's track (E1) as sad, Petteri described many cultural connotations:

"First of all, it was in a minor mode, so naturally this made it somewhat wistful...The melody sounded melancholic. And, yeah, it was slow and, because it went to three, it made me think about...like there was this gloomy waltz going on. At some point, there were these high notes that were distinct from the register of the main melody...I thought they were representing dreams that were out of reach...I thought that the misty main melody was like a protagonist talking by himself [...] But then again, as it ended with a major chord, it made me think that his situation is not as hopeless as it seems...like, there's something good there in the middle of all the sadness and misery."

Minor mode, slow tempo, and misty timbre of the melody are nearly textbook examples of expressive musical cues for sadness in Western culture (Eerola, Friberg, & Bresin, 2013). Additionally, the concept of the main melodic line representing the thoughts or emotions of a protagonist or narrator is redolent of Western music traditions (Robinson, 1997, p. 13). Ending the piece with a Picardy third is a common musical device for conveying hope or happiness

(Hatten, 1994, p. 54). Miina interpreted the Picardy third ending in a very similar way, stating that it made her think that “something happy is happening, or like, a flower is blooming in springtime”. Satu, on the other hand, explained that the Picardy third reminded her of a grey sky growing brighter. All in all, the whole group agreed that the musical features of the track created an atmosphere of “soft”, “warm”, and “comfortable” sadness.

The idea of a protagonist revealing their inner thoughts and feelings was discussed in reference to many other tracks. For instance, in Taru’s track (E12), the conflict between the laid-back quality of the music and the morbid, softly sung lyrics was thought to symbolise psychotic jealousy. In this regard, the whistling carried an important meaning. This was interpreted as a cue for easygoingness. In the context of the jealous lyrics, however, the whistling sounded scary to all of the group members:

“The creepy whistling there in the beginning...you know that nothing good is coming out of this situation.” (Kerttu)

“Yeah, the whistling is one of my favourite things in this, because it makes this so twisted...it forces you to listen to it.” (Taru)

“Yeah, maybe if you think that he’s a bit paranoid...that the thing is in his head, then maybe that pervert whistling just perfectly fits there. Like, he’s a bit loony.” (Anna)

“I’ve been thinking that the whistling could be just his imagination, or maybe the other one [in the relationship] is carelessly whistling. And even then it could be just in his head, like he’s imagining her meeting somebody else and just being very nonchalant while going there to betray him.” (Taru)

The informants, being women, seemed to put themselves into the position of “the other” rather than empathising with the male singer. Their interpretation of the imaginary situation felt threatening and, hence, did not acknowledge a legitimate expression of broken heartedness. It is possible that the gender balance of the group had some impact on this agreed meaning. If there were male informants in the group, then maybe there would have been more negotiation or even debate on the matter.

### **Overview and discussion**

The present study investigated how people describe their experiences of listening to nominally sad music in a group interview situation. Emphasis was placed on the intersubjective aspects of music listening and their contribution to listening experiences. This revealed several socially shared meaning-making processes, as the informants negotiated the meanings of both musical expression and emotional content. Instead of presenting sadness as a fixed emotion concept, they distinguished various kinds of sadness with different meanings (e.g. private versus public sadness, masculine versus feminine sadness, and comfortable versus frightening/hopeless sadness). Shared experiences were affected by expectations of the musical style, structure, and performance, as well as expectations of the emotional content of music. Additionally, social norms and cultural conventions played important roles in the negotiations. On the one hand, lived experience is characterised by a fluctuating nature. The lived experience keeps changing and is shaped by contextual and extramusical information (e.g. other peoples’ interpretations of the same piece of music). On the other hand,

emotional experiences related to self-selected sad music seemed to be well established. These emotional experiences are familiar and often sought after, even though the presence of others can make it difficult to experience the desired emotional reaction to music. Nevertheless, informants' accounts revealed their capability to have rich emotional experiences in a research setting.

Besides describing their emotional experiences, all of the groups spent a great deal of time on describing, discussing, and interpreting the music. This could suggest that it might indeed be difficult to distinguish what is being heard from how it actually feels. Thus, in the case of lived experience, the distinction between felt and perceived emotions (e.g., Gabrielsson, 2002; Evans & Schubert, 2008) may be rather fuzzy. Furthermore, although the musical background of the informants in G3 was different from the others, there were no obvious differences (apart from lacking as granular a vocabulary for musical features as the musicology students, and previous experiences of playing an instrument) in their way of discussing their experiences. They did put slightly more effort into creating a positive and co-operative situation, especially compared to G1, where the critical attitude and self-consciousness of the informants seemed to create more personal awkwardness in sharing experiences. This might be due to the fact that the informants in G3 did not know each other beforehand, and thus felt the need to strive together for a socially satisfying result and improved group cohesion (cf., Forsyth, 2010). Also, since G3 was an all female group, it is possible that the gender of the informants had an effect on their interaction, as women tend to have better perception of social and nonverbal cues compared to men (e.g., Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992).

The research reported here provides an original perspective on the phenomenology of both sad music listening and *shared* experiences of music listening. The primary aim of this study was to observe how the emotional experiences evoked by music listening were shared and discussed within a group of people who listened to the same music simultaneously. The use of self-selected music tracks provided a wide variety of different music types and gave informants a chance to investigate and reflect on the lived experience. This occurred both prospectively and retrospectively, as is often the case in IPA research.

Some limitations of the study need to be recognised. Focus group interviews are often criticised for only offering a shallow understanding of an issue, as personal experiences are often not being discussed (Liamputtong, 2011). This was also the case in the present study. The research setting seemed to prevent the informants from sharing autobiographical associations, which have previously been observed to be highly important for emotions induced by self-selected sad music (e.g., Eerola, Peltola, & Vuoskoski, in press; Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014; Van den Tol & Edwards, 2013). However, as the aim of this study was to shed light on the socially shared meaning-making processes, the choice of method was considered justified. Nevertheless, limiting the number of informants in the beginning might have been fruitful, as there would have been more time for the groups to reflect on their experiences. For instance, although bigger groups are often used in focus group studies (Kruger, 1994), the group of five seemed to be too large. This is due to the fact that the group members grew tired while listening to five different music tracks twice. On the other hand, in the group of

three, the dynamics were not quite balanced. Within this trio, it was common for two of the group members to start discussions with one another while the third person was occasionally left out. Additionally, the interviews and most of the analysis were conducted in the informants' and the researcher's native language. As the selected quotes were not translated into English until the writing stage of the project, meanings may have been lost in translation.

In conclusion, this study of joint music listening and shared lived experiences shed some light on how musical and emotional experiences are formed in everyday life. The negotiation of meanings within a social group is an important aspect of music listening. This is a means of conceptualising music and any associated emotions. Additionally, negotiation of meanings allows one to share listening experiences, understand others' experiences, develop new interpretations of music, and feel socially connected with others. These outcomes occur through agreement with others' interpretations, persuasion of others to agree with one's own interpretation, or collective construction of a new interpretation.

The negotiations observed in this study were based on a prior assumption of the musical expression of sadness. This undoubtedly guided and restricted the discussions. In future, it would be interesting to investigate whether or not other forms of musical expression lead to similar negotiations within groups. This could help elucidate whether or not there is something distinctive about the way people share their experiences of sad music. Furthermore, other music-related situations (e.g. playing together or attending a concert) are built on these kinds

of social negotiations. Such negotiations should be emphasised in future research, with a view to improving our understanding of the intersubjective nature of music.

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## Appendix 1

List of music tracks. Playlist available online at: <http://bit.ly/1STlnP2>

Code	Artist/composer	Name of the song
E1	Vangelis	La petite fille de la mer
E2	Sammal	Kylmää usvaa
E3	John Williams	Main theme from the film "Schindler's list"
E4	Guthrie Govan	Waves
E5	Nick Drake	I Was Made to Love Magic
E6	Traditional folk song	Narvan marssi (March of Narva)
E7	Anthony and the Johnsons	Hope there's somebody
E8	Arvo Pärt	Tabula rasa, 1: Ludus
E9	Jose Gonzalez	Crosses
E10	The Klezmatics	An Undoing World
E11	Apulanta	Odotus
E12	Minä ja Ville Ahonen	Kerro minulle rakkaani