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Music-genre fan stereotypes held by university students: Exploring the role of musicianship

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ABSTRACT

Music plays an incredibly important role in everyday life in terms of identity development and self-expression. It is therefore of high importance to recognise and combat existing music-genre stereotypes in order to prevent potential negative consequences which may arise, such as prejudice. Considering this and the seminal findings of previous research, the present study investigates the extent to which music-genre fan stereotypes are consistent among university students, including the novel exploration of the role of musicianship status. Participants (N = 23) were voluntarily recruited online and completed two questionnaires which gathered information regarding stereotypical beliefs held about fans of six music-genres (pop, classical, rock, jazz, electronica and rap). In particular, psychological personality traits (big five) and social characteristics (social class status) were investigated. Results indicated high inter-judge agreement regarding the stereotypes about music-genre fans, in corroboration with previous research. Novel insights concerning the role of musicianship in impacting stereotypes were also provided, with results indicating significant differences in terms of how jazz music fans are perceived. These interesting findings are discussed in relation to implications and relevant recommendations for future research are provided.

1. INTRODUCTION

Music, identity and the impacts of stereotyping. Within our social world, music plays for approximately 15% of waking hours (Rentfrow, 2012). Because of this, individual music preferences contribute greatly to our identity development and personal self-expression (North & Hargreaves, 1999). This is especially true for young people, such as university students, who utilise music as a tool of self-expression far more than any other age demographic (Lonsdale & North, 2011). For example, students often wear band t-shirts in order to communicate their music preferences (Rentfrow, McDonald & Oldmeadow, 2009), typically due to increased peer socialisation desires (Miranda, 2013), such as wishing to make friends with others sharing similar preferences (Selfhout et al., 2009). This is a process of self-categorisation whereby people sort themselves into particular music-genre social groups, promoting the creation of ingroup and outgroup fan categories (Bakagiannis & Tarrant, 2006). In terms of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), this self-categorisation can result in a tendency to favour one's ingroup (e.g., fans of your favourite music-genre) and promote disapproval of opposing out-groups (e.g., fans of other music-genres). Due to this, negative fan stereotypes according to music-genre categories can arise (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003), motivated by the desire to enhance one's self esteem (North & Hargreaves, 1999).

Stereotypes refer to generalised beliefs which are held about categories of people (Fiske, 1998). This categorisation process occurs via cognitive shortcuts (Turner & Reynolds, 2001), meaning that music-genre fan stereotypes are often implicit, existing unconsciously and automatically (Devine, 1989). Such implicit stereotyping is an important aspect of social functioning which can significantly influence intergroup relations. Particularly, stereotypes can fuel prejudice (unjustified opinions which devalue people due to their perceived social group membership; Allport, 1979). For instance, societal misunderstanding of rock music's lyrical content has long promoted stereotypes about fans of this music-genre (Negut & Sarbescu, 2014). That is, listening to rock music has been associated with causing self-injurious behaviour (e.g., self-harm, suicide) within fans (Martin et al., 1993; Mulder et al., 2007), resulting in prejudiced beliefs about these fans, all because of negative stereotyping. Recognising the prevalence and understanding the content of music-genre fan stereotypes is therefore essential to combat any negative consequences. Given the importance of music within everyday life for young people in terms of identity and self-expression, the present study will investigate the underpinnings and pervasiveness of the accompanying music-genre fan stereotypes which inevitably exist within university settings.

Previous music-genre fan stereotype research. In a study by Rentfrow and Gosling (2007), a sample of USA university students self-reported music-genre fan stereotypes. Results indicated very high agreement about the psychological traits (big five personality traits, personality qualities and values) and social characteristics (their drug and alcohol preferences) of prototypical (highly characteristic) music-genre fans. In particular, participants agreed that rock and rap music fans were highly extroverted and low in conscientiousness, whereas classical

music fans were seen to be very low in extraversion but highly conscientious. A replication study by Rentfrow, McDonald and Oldmeadow (2009) adopted the same measures and accumulated similar results regarding the psychological traits associated with music-genre fans. In contrast to the drug and alcohol preferences however, the replication study comprised a sample of UK sixth-form students and investigated ethnicity and social class stereotypes associated with prototypical music-genre fans. Results demonstrated high inter-judge agreement surrounding these social characteristics, for example, participants agreed that classical music fans were more likely to be upper class whereas rap fans were more likely to be working class. Overall, Rentfrow and colleagues considered these findings to be geographically robust, concluding that music-genre fan stereotypes are widespread as predicted.

However, there is a necessity for additional research. Both studies considered different and therefore incomparable social characteristics (drug and alcohol preferences vs ethnicity and social class). This means that the stereotypes considered widespread are actually limited to the psychological traits associated with music-genre fans, indicating remaining uncertainty regarding social characteristic stereotypes. In a similar way, the two compared samples comprised two incomparable age groups at different educational stages. These age samples are incomparable as research suggests that stereotypes are heavily influenced by the social context in which they arise (Clark & Kashima, 2007; Lyons & Kashima, 2003; Operario & Fiske, 2001; Turner & Reynolds, 2001). Therefore, it is difficult to confidently generalise the music-genre fan stereotypes reported as geographically robust.

Besides the incomparable nature of the samples, these studies also fail to consider the role of individual differences on music-genre fan stereotyping. This is in spite of plentiful research indicating that individual differences can have a substantial impact on music preferences (Newheiser & Dovidio, 2012). A particular individual difference of interest is musicianship status. This is because music preferences of musicians and non-musicians have been shown to differ, particularly in terms of music-genre (Fung, 1996; Jovančević, Milićević & Zdravić-Mihailović, 2019). Preference is often influenced by a musician's chosen instrument(s), the music that they play and the way in which they practise (Tervaniemi, 2009). Given these differences in music-genre preferences, and the established role of such in music-genre fan stereotyping, it is therefore likely that there will be an association between musicianship status and stereotypes held about prototypical music-genre fans.

The present study. The present study will consider the limitations of previous research and aim to investigate whether music-genre fan stereotypes are consistent among university students. The methodology of previous studies (Rentfrow et al., 2007; 2009) will be adopted in that stereotypes investigated will concern the big five personality traits and the social class status of music-genre fans. Specifically:

Hypothesis I. Participants will agree about the personality traits and social classes associated with prototypical music-genre fans.

Following review of the current literature, it appears that the extent to which musicianship affects stereotypes held about prototypical music-genre fans is yet to be investigated. Therefore, aiming to provide novel insight into the role of individual differences, this study will also investigate whether musicians report different personality and social class stereotypes about music-genre fans in comparison to non-musicians. Due to the novelty of the research, the second hypothesis is exploratory:

Hypothesis II. There will be an association between musicianship status and stereotypes held about prototypical music-genre fans.

2. METHOD

Design. The present study was conducted online and implemented a within-participants design whereby each participant completed two questionnaire scales. Two independent variables were measured, the first being music-genre (pop, classical, rock, jazz, electronica, rap) and the second being self-reported musicianship status. Two dependent variables were measured, the first being psychological personality traits participants associated with prototypical music-genre fans, and the second being the social class status participants associated with prototypical music-genre fans.

Participants. Participants (N = 43) were recruited voluntarily via distribution of an online questionnaire on social media which was designed using Qualtrics. Those who did not complete the experiment in full were removed from the data set. As a result, data analysis was carried out on 23 participants (N non-musicians = 8, N

musicians = 15), all of whom were Durham university students. This sample consisted of 8 males and 15 females, with ages ranging from 18-24 (M = 20, SD = 2.58). An extraneous variable not accounted for was the individual social class of the participants.

Procedure and materials. The link to the online experiment was advertised on social media. Participants read an information sheet, completed a consent form, and generated an anonymous code which would allow for withdrawal of their data in the future. Participants were provided with a broader aim (investigating whether there are similarities in how music sub-groups are perceived) rather than the true aim. The experiment consisted of two questionnaire scales which gathered information for the two dependent variables (psychological personality traits, social class status). After completing these questionnaires, participants were required to self-report their musicianship status before providing demographic information (age, gender). Finally, the debriefing sheet informed participants that their data would be kept anonymous and reminded of their ability to withdraw their data in future via their anonymous code.

Measures. Big five personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness to experiences) associated with prototypical music-genre fans were recorded using the Ten-Item Personality Inventory scale by Gosling et al. (2003). Measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = disagree strongly, 7 = agree strongly), participants were asked to rate how strongly they agreed with a list of 10 pairs of traits as descriptions for fans of 6 music-genres (pop, classical, rock, jazz, electronica, rap). Each of the personality traits were scored using 2 questionnaire items, 1 of which was reverse scored. Responses to reverse scored items were reverse coded before responses to both were averaged to create a mean score for each personality trait. Cronbach's alpha indicated high reliability among the measures, $\alpha = .74$.

The social class scales were adopted from Rentfrow, McDonald and Oldmeadow (2009). Participants were prompted to rate how likely they believed those from the working, middle and upper classes were to be fans of the 6 music-genres (items). Responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = extremely unlikely, 7 = extremely likely). Participants' responses to the 6 items were averaged to create a mean score. Cronbach's alpha indicated moderate reliability among the measures, $\alpha = .56$.

Musicianship status was recorded using the One-Item OMSI question by Zhang and Schuber (2019). Given the research aim, responses were scored in terms of non-musicians and musicians. Cronbach's alpha indicated good reliability among the measures, $\alpha = .78$.

3. RESULTS

Analytic plan. JASP 0.16.20 was used for data analysis. To examine the first hypothesis, intraclass correlations (ICCs) were calculated for each genre-construct combination to examine inter-judge agreement, and a series of MANOVAs were conducted to establish the personality traits and social class associated with prototypical music-genre fans. To examine the second hypothesis, the impacts of musicianship status upon stereotypes held were investigated using a series of MANOVAs.

Hypothesis I. ICCs for the music-genres and constructs (big five personality traits and social class) are shown in Table 1. These results reveal good support for the hypothesis, such that 11 of the 12 consensus correlations (92%) met or exceeded the benchmarks set by the previous studies. Large consensus coefficients emerged for stereotypes about classical, rock, jazz and rap music (mean ICCs (3, 1) = .63, .45, .49, and .49, respectively). As seen in the penultimate data row, judges exceeded benchmarks set for both big five personality ratings and social class ratings (mean ICCs (3, 1) = .41 and .59, respectively). Judges agreed more about the social class of the music-genre fans (mean ICC (3, 1) = .59) than big five personality traits (mean ICC (3, 1) = .41).

Close inspection of the ICCs indicates some variation in terms of agreement across the genre-construct combinations. For example, although overall high agreement was observed for the jazz stereotype (mean ICC (3, 1) = .49), agreement for social class was substantially higher than agreement for big five traits (ICCs (3, 1) = .72 and .26, respectively). Similar results emerged for the rap stereotype (mean ICC (3, 1) = .49), where agreement was again substantially higher for social class than for agreement for big five traits (ICCs (3, 1) = .64 and .34, respectively), and for the classical stereotype (mean ICC (3, 1) = .63), with agreement substantially higher for social class than agreement for big five traits (ICCs (3, 1) = .75 and .50, respectively).

Table 1. Inter-judge agreement about music-genre stereotypes of prototypical fans

	Present Study			Rentfrow et al. (2009)
Music Stereotype	Big Five	Social Class	Mean	Mean
Pop	**.26**	.10	.18	.25
Classical	**.50**	**.75**	**.63**	.50
Rock	**.45**	**.45**	**.45**	.41
Jazz	**.26**	**.72**	**.49**	.31
Electronica	**.26**	**.30**	.28	.29
Rap	**.34**	**.64**	**.49**	.44
Mean	**.41**	**.59**	**.42**	
Benchmark	.21	.28		

Notes. Coefficients greater than/equal to the benchmarks set by Rentfrow et al. (2009) are in boldface type.

Psychological personality stereotypes associated with prototypical music-genre fans. There was a significant overall main effect of judges' ratings of the personality traits associated with prototypical fans of each music-genre ($F(5, 132) = 6.383$, $p < .001$). Tests of between-subjects differences revealed significant main effects for extraversion scores ($F(5, 132) = 14.991$, $p < .001$), agreeableness scores ($F(5, 132) = 2.326$, $p = .046$), conscientiousness scores ($F(5, 132) = 18.536$, $p < .001$), emotional stability scores ($F(5, 132) = 5.541$, $p < .001$), and openness to experiences scores ($F(5, 132) = 6.592$, $p < .001$). Figure 1 illustrates the different psychological personality traits associated with fans of each music-genre. Analysis of follow up post-hoc tests indicated that classical fans were seen to be significantly higher ($M = 5.76$) in conscientiousness compared to rock ($M = 3.46$), electronica ($M = 3.40$) and rap fans ($M = 3.48$), $p < .001$, as well as jazz fans ($M = 4.75$), $p = .004$. In contrast, jazz fans were seen to be significantly higher ($M = 6.05$) in openness to experiences compared to electronica fans ($M = 5.07$) p = .028, classical fans ($M = 4.71$) p = .005, rap ($M = 4.67$) and pop fans ($M = 4.3$), $p < .001$.

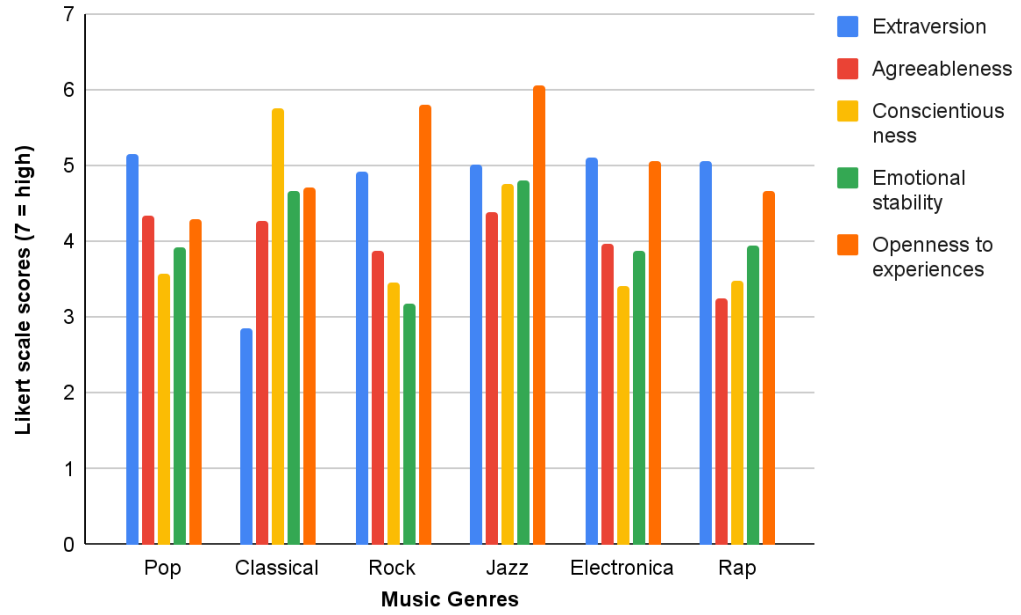

Figure 1. Average big five trait scores associated with prototypical music-genre fans

Social class stereotypes associated with prototypical music-genre fans. There was a significant overall main effect of judges' ratings of the social class associated with prototypical fans of each music-genre ($F(5, 132) = 11.176$, $p < .001$). Tests of between-subjects differences indicated significant main effects in terms of music-genre popularity for working, middle and upper classes ($F(5, 132) > 10.588$, $p < .001$). Figure 2 illustrates the average social class groups associated with prototypical fans of each music-genre. Analysis of follow up post hoc tests indicated that classical and jazz fans were seen as significantly more likely ($M = 6.17$ and 6.01, respectively) to be upper class than rock ($M = 3.20$), electronica ($M = 3.20$) and rap fans ($M = 2.60$), $p < .001$. In contrast, rap fans were seen as significantly more likely ($M = 5.86$) to be working class than classical ($M = 2.95$) and jazz fans ($M = 3.05$), $p < .001$.

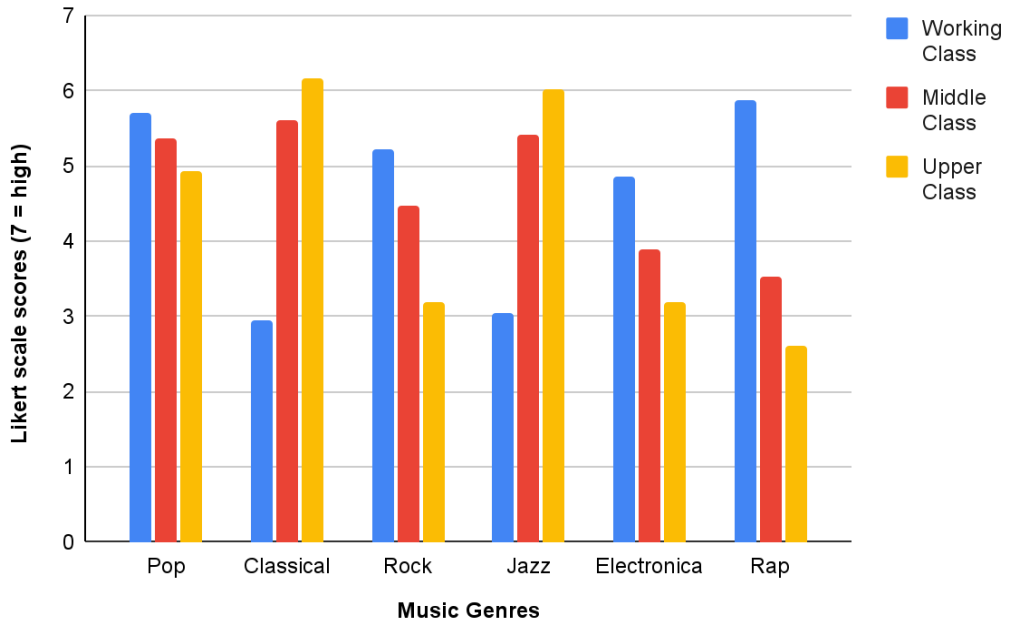

Figure 2. Average social class status associated with prototypical music-genre fans

Hypothesis II. Table 2 illustrates the average social class groups associated with each prototypical music-genre fan reported by musicians and non-musicians. Associations between the social class status ratings and musicianship status were non-significant for pop ($F(1, 21) = 2.623$, $p = .080$), classical ($F(1, 21) = 2.800$, $p = .068$), rock ($F(1, 21) = 1.491$, $p = .249$), electronica ($F(1, 21) = .612$, $p = .616$), and rap music ($F(1, 21) = .590$, $p = .629$). However, the interaction between the social class status ratings and musicianship status for jazz music was significant, $F(1, 21) = 4.893$, $p = .011$. Follow up inspection of independent one-way ANOVAs revealed a significant difference between musicians and non-musicians in terms of upper class status ratings for prototypical jazz fans ($F(1, 21) = 14.328$, $p < .001$), but not in terms of working class ratings ($F(1, 21) = .295$, $p = .593$) or middle class ratings ($F(1, 21) = 1.083$, $p = .310$).

Table 2. The average social class groups associated with prototypical music-genre fans, separated by musicians and non-musicians (7 = high association)

	Working Class		Middle Class		Upper Class	
Music Genre	Non-musicians	Musicians	Non-musicians	Musicians	Non-Musicians	Musicians
Pop	5.30	6.10	4.63	6.13	4.75	5.10
Classical	3.30	2.60	6.00	5.20	6.75	5.60
Rock	4.63	5.80	4.13	4.80	3.00	3.40
Jazz	2.90	3.20	5.63	5.20	6.63	5.40
Electronica	4.80	4.93	3.64	4.13	2.80	3.60
Rap	5.80	5.93	3.13	3.93	2.40	2.80

Table 3 shows the average big five personality traits associated with each prototypical music-genre fan reported by musicians and non-musicians. Associations between big five traits scores and musicianship status were non-significant for pop ($F(1, 21) = 2.612$, $p = .063$), classical ($F(1, 21) = 1.370$, $p = .284$), rock ($F(1, 21) = 1.602$, $p = .213$), jazz ($F(1, 21) = 2.604$, $p = .063$), electronica ($F(1, 21) = 2.180$, $p = .105$), and rap music ($F(1, 21) = 2.031$, $p = .125$).

Table 3. The average big five personality traits associated with prototypical music-genre fans, separated by musicians and non-musicians (7 = high association)

	Pop		Classical		Rock		Jazz		Electronica		Rap	
Big Five Personality Traits	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M
Extraversion	5.50	4.90	2.80	2.90	5.31	4.53	5.00	5.03	5.60	4.60	5.44	4.70
Agreeableness	4.60	4.10	4.70	3.83	4.10	3.63	4.94	3.83	4.00	3.93	3.10	3.40
Conscientiousness	3.44	3.73	6.20	5.33	3.63	3.30	5.40	4.10	3.50	3.30	3.60	3.37
Emotional Stability	4.13	3.73	5.00	4.33	3.14	3.23	5.00	4.60	3.70	4.03	4.10	3.80
Openness to Experiences	4.80	3.80	4.90	4.53	5.80	5.80	6.40	5.70	5.81	4.33	5.31	4.03

4. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to extend previous research into the generalisability of music-genre fan stereotypes, novelly exploring the role of individual differences. It was hypothesised that participants would agree about the psychological personality traits and the social class status of prototypical music-genre fans (Hypothesis I). Results showed good support for this, with participants exceeding previous benchmarks for most genre-construct combinations. The role of musicianship status was also investigated. Given the lack of previous research, it was hypothesised that there would be an association between musicianship status and stereotypes held about prototypical music-genre fans (Hypothesis II). Results indicated that musicianship status was significant when considering the social class status associated with jazz music fans. Possible explanations for these results are offered below, along with acknowledgement of limitations and recommendations for future research.

Hypothesis I. Results demonstrated high inter-judge agreement surrounding music-genre stereotypes, virtually identical to those gathered previously (Rentfrow, McDonald & Oldmeadow, 2009). For example, participants agreed most about the music-genre stereotypes for classical, jazz, rock and rap music fans on average. There was also high similarity in terms of stereotype content. For example, participants similarly viewed classical music fans as highly conscientious whereas rock and rap fans were seen as highly extroverted. Notably, results similarly indicated that music-genre stereotypes comprise more information regarding social than psychological characteristics, as participants agreed more about the social class status of music-genre fans rather than the big five traits. Reports of classism are undeniably common at Durham University (The Durham Tab, 2020; Palatinate, 2021), which therefore may be responsible for the increased prevalence of social class stereotypes among the present study's sample. This aligns with previous research which highlights the influence of social contexts in endorsement of stereotypes (Clark & Kashima, 2007; Lyons & Kashima, 2003; Operario & Fiske, 2001; Turner & Reynolds, 2001).

However, there are also some differences to note. For example, results indicated inter-judge disagreement in terms of the social class stereotypes of pop music fans. This may be due to the increased popularity of pop music generating varying stereotypes, in comparison to less popular genres which demonstrated high agreement (e.g., classical music). Despite this singular instance of disagreement, inter-judge stereotype agreement of the present study was stronger than previous studies as intraclass correlations exceeded benchmarks set by Rentfrow and colleagues (2009) for all remaining genre-construct combinations. This may be due to the online nature of the present study guaranteeing complete anonymity for the participants, perhaps promoting more truthful responses than the face-to-face answers provided by participants in the previous study. Nevertheless, the results enhance confidence in the consistency of music-genre fan stereotypes as predicted by Rentfrow and colleagues (2009), and therefore provide evidence for the role of music preferences in our identity and self-expression.

Hypothesis II. Musicianship status was non-significant for the vast majority of genre-construct combinations, indicating equally high agreement among musicians and non-musicians. Not only does this confirm the established predictions of the current literature whereby music-genre stereotypes are geographically robust (Rentfrow et al. 2007; 2009), but it also provides novel insight into the role of individual differences in music-genre fan stereotyping. However, when considering social class stereotypes, non-musicians viewed jazz music fans as significantly more likely to be upper class than musicians did. This could be due to differences in contact frequency with prototypical jazz music fans. Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis explains that increased contact with out-groups (e.g., jazz music fans) decreases stereotypes and subsequent prejudice against members of the group. A recent study by Potter (2020) found jazz music to be among the least commonly listened to by university students. Therefore, the lower stereotype scores demonstrated by musicians may be due to possible increased contact with jazz music fans, whether it be directly (e.g., meeting jazz music fans within their music groups, playing jazz music) or indirectly (simply learning about out-group members, e.g., in lectures; Wright et al., 1997). This adheres to the findings of Tervaniemi (2009) who highlighted the impact of practising music and chosen instruments on overall musical preferences. In sum, differences in music-genre fan stereotypes among musicians and non-musicians are likely influenced by social contexts, meaning future research with a different sample may accumulate different results.

Limitations and future directions. Despite Cronbach's alpha indicating highly reliable measures and therefore good quality methodology, the present study's examination of music-genre stereotypes was restricted to measuring only a singular psychological personality characteristic (big five traits) and one social characteristic (social class status) of music-genre fans. In a similar way, the number of music-genres investigated was low, perhaps not wholly representative of all music-genre fan categories. Although essential given the present study's aims to confirm previous research findings (Rentfrow et al., 2007; 2009), this limits understanding of other

stereotypical beliefs which may be held about music-genre fans within universities. Accordingly, future research should extend beyond these measures and investigate unexplored characteristics (e.g., sexuality) and include an extended number of music-genres (e.g., K-pop, grime music) in order to provide a more comprehensive, temporally relevant understanding of fan stereotypes.

Moreover, the present study is limited in terms of sampling. Due to time restrictions, the sample was made up of a small sample size and thus is low powered. This small sample comprised unequal groups which under-represent non-musicians, which may have hindered results gathered for hypothesis II. Future research should aim to gather a larger, more balanced sample to confirm the promising findings of the present study.

Additionally, extraneous variables not accounted for include participants' social class status and their personal favourite music-genre. From a social identity theory perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), it would be interesting to examine whether participants provided more favourable responses to the measures of big five traits and social class status of their own in-group.

Conclusions and implications. The present research took a novel approach to examining the consistency of music-genre fan stereotypes within universities. Results indicate high inter-judge agreement about music-genre stereotypes, especially where social characteristics are concerned, providing good supplementary support for previous research in the field (Rentfrow et al., 2007; 2009). Investigating unexplored characteristics associated with an extended number of music-genres is therefore recommended to develop a more thorough understanding of music-genre fan stereotypes. Additionally, findings suggested that the role of musicianship during music-genre stereotyping may be dependent on, and therefore vary by, social contexts. Accordingly, accounting for extraneous variables which may impact stereotypes held is recommended, and gathering a larger, more balanced sample would likely prove beneficial.

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