

Karen Schrier Assignment #1: Critiques on the assigned readings.

1) My first major question when reading the Hauser/McDermott article regards their use of "innateness." They explain that "Cross-cultural data suggest that there are indeed innate constraints on music, as evidenced by the universality of particular features of music across cultures with fundamentally different genres or styles." I am curious whether these features of music are indeed, as they say, innate, or whether these features are universally learned across cultures. Applying a cross-cultural approach to musical genres or styles is important in identifying features of music that people find generally "satisfying." But they do not necessarily imply that they are innate to a person. Similarly, applying a cross-species approach may provide the same results—that we are all learning universal features of language or music, but that these are not necessarily innate.

Furthermore, I am also hesitant to judge whether music perception is innate based on whether an animal or human being was not exposed to music, but still is able to perceive particular features of music. There may be other external factors, besides music, that shape our cognition of music and our auditory perception, such as our exposure to natural sounds or the rhythm of speech. For example, we may learn to encode certain types of rhythms or melodies based on our exposure to the way sounds are naturally grouped together in the world.

2) Similarly, when I began to read this article, my first concern was with the confounding factors that could explain why music lessons could increase IQ. I felt like Schellenberg does a good job of pointing out some of the cofounding factors and how these were controlled in various studies. In his own study, I appreciate that he considered whether there is something about having private lessons, regardless of the subject, that could enhance cognitive development. For example, the idea that having an extra lesson outside of school could further help a child in organizing information, which could enhance IQ. Or, rather, the confidence that a child might gain by learning something new could affect the way he or she takes tests, or encourage him or her to think more independently.

In Schellenberg's study, however, he defines I.Q. very narrowly and he does not consider the implications for such a definition. Social or interpersonal abilities seem to increase with the drama lessons, but he does not address emotional intelligence. This is a very narrow, traditional sense of looking at intelligence. He also doesn't try to investigate what it was about music, as opposed to drama, that might have increased on the measures. Was it something in the rigor of the lessons? It is possible that students who are learning to play an instrument—who are working with a tangible object—may feel more personally responsible, more engaged with the lesson, and thus, forced to learn more deeply? It may not be the actual quality of listening to music, but interacting with a physical object that is causing the increases on his intelligence measures.