

Deaf participation in music is an under-researched topic in multiple fields. While the scarce research in this area focuses on “medicalized and rehabilitative discourse” (Churchill, 2015, p. 21) and studies deaf participation in music through the lens of a deficit model, this study illustrates the many ways that d/Deaf individuals (the uppercase D refers to those who identify with Deaf culture) experience and practice music making outside of medical contexts. For example, d/Deaf children can engage in musical activities, demonstrate musical knowledge in structure, style, beat, and rhythms, and express their need to communicate through music (Chen-Hafteck & Schraer-Joiner 2011). Research also suggests that music enjoyment and music perception are independent and disparate subjects suggesting that the ability of d/Deaf people to perceive music aurally does not have an impact on whether they like to engage with music (Prevoteau et al., 2018).

This study aims to look at d/Deaf music engagement as not inherently less than hearing music engagement. To achieve this goal, this study defines music engagement using previous findings about how d/Deaf individuals engage with music. Research shows that d/Deaf and hard of hearing individuals may participate in music using non-auditory methods by feeling vibrations, observing the source of the music, observing a visual story along with the music (a musical), dancing, and moving (Yennari, 2010; Florian et al., 2017; Györgyjakob, 2018; Darrow, 2006; Darrow & Gfeller, 1991; Darrow & Schunk, 1996). Therefore, these methods were included when defining music engagement for this study.

To conduct this research, two Deaf individuals were interviewed using a list of questions that was created prior to the interviews and asked clarifying questions based on the responses given. Both participants were suspected to be born with some form of deafness, identify as culturally Deaf, and are from the U.S. The participants were interviewed using Zoom and were

given the choice to have a sign language interpreter present or to have live captioning during the interviews to facilitate conversation. After the interviews concluded the data were transcribed and analyzed using descriptive data analysis.

The results show that both participants engage with music in ways that align with previous findings. Participant A spoke about her process for learning music as well as how dance influenced her relationship with music growing up. When participant A listens to music she focuses on how the vibrations of the beat and the bass feel. She enjoys pop, electronic, and hip hop the most because of their tendency to have strong and predictable beat patterns. If she enjoys a song, she has to spend time listening to the music with captioned lyrics to learn how the lyrics align with the beat. Participant A took dance lessons throughout her childhood which made music accessible to her and nurtured her understanding of music through beats and rhythm. She relied on the vibrations of the beat along with visual cues from her fellow dancers to perform in sync with the music.

Participant B held a different musical background than Participant A. Whereas participant A engaged with music growing up via dance, participant B was exposed to instrumental music at a young age and taught himself how to play instruments. Participant B's mother is a composer who introduced him to music growing up. He taught himself how to play piano, bass guitar, acoustic guitar, and ukulele. These instruments were more accessible as the production of pitch can be accurately accomplished with sight. That is, he can see where to put his fingers to play the notes and then produce the sounds he intends to. Participant B spoke of feeling the vibration of the bass, guitar, and ukulele when playing. Participant B also expressed his preference for rock because the performers often communicate visually with their faces more than other genres of music.

The data gathered from the interviews suggest that these two Deaf individuals greatly enjoy engaging with music despite their deafness. The findings also support the idea that music engagement should be considered broadly and not simply from an aural perspective. It may be valuable to reflect on these examples and how hearing people may use these methods of music engagement to enrich their own musical experiences.

References

- Chen-Hafteck, L., & Schraer-Joiner, L. (2011). The engagement in musical activities of young children with varied hearing abilities. *Music Education Research, 13*(1), 93–106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2011.553279>
- Churchill, W. (2015). Deaf and hard-of-hearing musicians: Crafting a narrative strategy. *Research Studies in Music Education, 37*(1), 21–36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X15589777>
- Darrow, A. A. (2006). The role of music in deaf culture: Deaf students' perception of emotion in music. *Journal of Music Therapy, 43*(1), 2–15. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jmt/43.1.2>
- Darrow, A. A., & Gfeller, K. (1991). A study of public school music programs mainstreaming hearing impaired students. *Journal of Music Therapy, 28*(1), 23-39. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jmt/28.1.23>
- Darrow, A. A., & Schunk, H. A. (1996). Music therapy for learners who are deaf/hard of hearing. In B. Wilson (Ed.), *Models of music therapy: Interventions in school settings: from institution to inclusion* (p. 200-223). Silver Springs, MD: National Association for Music Therapy.
- Florian, H., Mocanu, A., Vlasin, C., Machado, J., Carvalho, V., Soares, F., ... Avram, C. (2017). Deaf people feeling music rhythm by using a sensing and actuating device. *Sensors & Actuators A: Physical, 267*, 431–442. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sna.2017.10.034>
- Györgyjakob, M. (2018). Music belongs to all of us! Even to the deaf!. *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai, Musica, 63*(2), 57–66. <https://doi.org/10.24193/subbmusica.2018.2.06>

Prevoteau, C., Chen, S. Y., & Lalwani, A. K. (2018). Music enjoyment with cochlear implantation. *Auris Nasus Larynx*, 45(5), 895–902.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anl.2017.11.008>

Yennari, M. (2010). Beginnings of song in young deaf children using cochlear implants: The song they move, the song they feel, the song they share. *Music Education Research*, 12(3), 281–297. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2010.505643>