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Trait-Dependent and Trait-Consistent Affect Regulation in Musical Practice

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Abstract

To optimize performance and achieve our goals, it is often necessary to regulate our emotions. Musicians may desire to regulate their own emotions in the pursuit of their musical practice goals. The specific emotions they desire may depend on personality traits, goal orientation, and their interaction. The current study investigates trait-dependent affect regulation in the context of musical practice and mastery goal orientation. Via an online questionnaire, 421 musicians completed TIPI scale and answered questions relating to their mastery practice goals. They also completed an emotion scale indicating how strongly they desired to increase the intensity of different practice-related emotions. Overall, musicians desired to increase positive emotions more than negative ones, $t(420) = 58.13$, $p < .001$. Bayesian mixed effects models indicated that higher Extraversion predicted greater desire to increase Anger, *Est.* = .05, *SE* = .03, *Odds*(Est. > 0) = 43.03, and higher Emotional Stability predicted less desire to increase several pleasant emotions including Happiness, *Est* = -.08, *SE* = .04, *Odds*(Est > 0) < 9999. Mastery orientation further modulated trait-dependent effects in several ways – some effects were amplified, or reversed, and new effects were introduced. Findings support a general hedonic principle underlying musicians' emotions in musical practice. However, findings also complement research that suggests that some musicians may wish to increase unpleasant emotions in musical practice. It is our hope that this and future studies may contribute to a better understanding of individual differences in goal-related emotion regulation behavior in musical practice.

Introduction

In many environments, it is often desirable or even necessary to optimize our performance (Lane et al., 2011). Scenarios such as sports competitions or university exams often demand performance at a high level in order to succeed. Optimizing our performance can often be supported by the regulation of our emotions (Beedie et al., 2000). Managing how we feel can help us to cope with situational demands and in turn allows us to direct our goal-related behavior – to pursue the targets and outcomes that are important for us. In that sense, emotion regulation is a valuable psychological skill (Lane, 2012), and it is important to understand the various factors that contribute to the emotion regulation process.

This research focuses on one particular aspect of the regulation process called the Desired Emotional State (DES). DES refers to the emotions that individual *desires* to feel in a given situation, which differs from their *actual* affect (i.e., the emotions they experience in reality). Literature on DES often assumes that individuals desire positive hedonic emotions (e.g., Augustine et al., 2010). This perspective governs much of the field of emotion regulation. However, if we consider the many different types of goals we pursue throughout our lives, there is considerable variation in terms of their complexity, duration, and outcome. It follows then that there should be variation in how individuals wish to feel when they pursue different goals (Tamir, 2009). This perspective challenges the emphasis on positive emotions. Increasing evidence from many fields, such as sports (Lane et al., 2011), gaming (Tamir et al., 2008), and musical practice (Breaden Madden & Jabusch, 2021) suggests that individuals can be motivated to pursue positive outcomes rather than ex-

perience positive emotions. The implication is that depending on the outcome and whichever emotions are associated with the attainment of that outcome, an individual's DES may consist of positive emotions, negative emotions, or a mix of both.

Emotion researchers often strive for a better understanding of emotion regulation behavior in different applied contexts. Musical practice is one context that is particularly relevant to study as it involves the processing of multisensory information and the development of complex, coordinated psychomotor skills. In this specific study, we adopt an individual differences perspective to examine the emotions desired by musicians within the context of their musical practice. Personality traits are ideal to study in this regard, as they have strong connections to emotion processing (Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014). Much of our understanding in this area concerns traits from the Five Factor model of personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992). However, this field is dominated by a focus on Extraversion and Neuroticism in particular (Larsen & Augustine, 2008). In general, higher Extraversion is positively associated with a greater tendency to experience pleasant affect (Kampfe & Mitte, 2009), and stronger positive emotionality in general, whereas higher Neuroticism relates to a greater experience of unpleasant affect and stronger negative rather than positive emotionality (Rusting & Larsen, 1995). These findings are informative, but it is important to note that they are often based on *actual* rather than *desired* emotions. Given the stability of these findings, however, it is reasonable to expect that personality traits also contribute to the content of one's DES.

Aims

The current study has several aims. First, we investigate *Practice-Related DES*: whether there are differences in the emotions desired by musicians to support their musical practice. Second, we examine *Trait-Dependent DES*: whether personality traits predict musicians' desire to regulate the intensity of these emotions. Trait-dependent effects may also be

considered in terms of their trait-consistency/inconsistency. This refers to the directionality of a trait-dependent effect – whether a regulated emotion is consistent/inconsistent with the quality of a personality trait. This is an important consideration, as trait-consistent affect has been associated with better performance. These benefits are particularly evident in scenarios involving the pursuit of long-term or challenging goals (Gendolla, 2000; Leung et al., 2014; Tamir et al., 2005). In musical contexts, many musicians pursue the goal of Mastery (expertise in musical and instrumentals skills). This is a long-term and challenging goal, which requires years of sustained deliberate practice (Ericsson et al., 1993). With this in mind, our final aim is to explore *Mastery-Related DES*: whether Mastery goal orientation interacts with personality traits to shape the content of a musical practice-related DES.

Method

Participants, Procedure, and Materials

Four hundred and twenty-one musicians (Female/Male = 254/167) were recruited from music institutions around the world, including orchestras, conservatoires, and music universities. The majority of participants identified as music students ($n = 301$) as opposed to professionals ($n = 120$). Bowed string, keyboard, and woodwind instrumentalists were most strongly represented in this sample. The median age was 23 years, they began playing music at a median of 7 years, and they had a median of 16 years of experience playing music.

Participants provided informed consent before completing an online questionnaire. The questionnaire covered several topics, including musical expertise, Mastery practice goals, and practice-related emotions. Practice-related emotions consisted of two 7-point Likert scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *a great deal*), and ratings were obtained for 1) how strongly they typically experienced emotions in practice, and 2) how strongly they desired to increase the intensity of these same emotions. Musicians also reported their personality using the TIPI scale (Ten Item

Personality Inventory; Gosling et al., 2003), a short-form measure based on the Five Factor model (Costa & McCrea, 1992). The TIPI assesses Extraversion, Emotional Stability (≈ inverse Neuroticism), Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness.

Analysis Strategy

First, we examined descriptive statistics regarding musicians' practice-related emotions. Next, we deployed Bayesian Mixed Effects models using personality traits as predictors of musicians' desire to increase the intensity of each emotion. The models were fitted with a random effect for a participant, and we used a weakly informative prior (*t*-distribution with a mean of 0, standard deviation of 1, and 3 degrees of freedom; see Gelman et al., 2008) in order to limit assumptions about correlations and variance within our data.

To investigate mean effects and interactions, we report hypothesis tests that evaluate the evidence of an effect to be smaller or larger than zero (Evidence Ratios). We consider ratios > 19 to be significant evidence (*; see Milne & Herff, 2020).

Our findings focus specifically on Extraversion and Emotional Stability. We will report findings related to other personality traits elsewhere. Two models are described here, Model 1 concerns trait-dependent effects (i.e., personality traits as predictors of the desire to increase emotions). Model 2 concerns the interaction between Mastery goal orientation and personality traits, where each predictor in the model is an interaction term between each trait and Mastery orientation.

Results

Practice-Related DES: Table 1 shows the emotions *actually* experienced and *desired* by musicians in their musical practice. They experienced moderate/high levels of pleasant emotions (e.g., Happiness and Calmness) combined with low/moderate levels of some unpleasant emotions (e.g., Downheartedness and Anxiety).

Musicians' DES consisted of very strong desire to increase the intensity of pleasant emotions, combined with very low desire to increase unpleasant emotions. When averaged across all positive and negative emotions, the desire to increase pleasant emotions was significantly stronger than for unpleasant emotions, $t(420) = 58.13$, $p < .001$*.

Table 1. Musicians' actual and desired emotions in musical practice.

	Actual Affect	Desire to Increase
Anger	3 (1, 4)	1 (1, 2)
Anxiety	3 (2, 4)	1 (1, 1)
Calmness	5 (4, 6)	6 (4, 7)
Downheartedness	2 (1, 4)	1 (1, 1)
Energy	5 (4, 6)	6 (5, 7)
Focus	6 (5, 6)	7 (6, 7)
Gloom	3 (2, 4)	1 (1, 1)
Guilt	2 (1, 4)	1 (1, 1)
Happiness	5 (4, 6)	5 (4, 7)
Nervousness	2 (1, 4)	1 (1, 1)
Sluggishness	3 (2, 4)	1 (1, 1)

Note. Values are Median (IQR).
(1 = *not at all*, 7 = *a great deal*)

Model 1) Trait-Dependent DES:

Model 1 showed strong evidence that higher Extraversion predicted greater desire to increase the intensity of Anger, *Est.* = .05, *SE* = .03, *Odds*(Est > 0) = 43.03*, and Focus, *Est.* = .06, *SE* = .03, *Odds*(Est > 0) = 54.34*. These effects can be seen in the top panel of Figure 1, indicated by the increasing slope of the orange (Anger) and light blue (Focus) bands.

Additionally, Model 1 showed strong evidence that higher Emotional Stability predicted *less* desire to increase the intensity of Calmness, *Est.* = -.17, *SE* = .09, *Odds*(Est < 0) > 9999*, Energy, *Est.* = -.15, *SE* = .04, *Odds*(Est < 0) > 9999*, and Happiness, *Est.* = -.08, *SE* = .04, *Odds*(Est < 0) > 9999*. These effects can be seen in the bottom panel of Figure 1, indicated by the decreasing slope of the lime-green (Calmness), green (Energy), and red (Happiness) bands.

Model 2) Mastery-Related DES:

Introducing Mastery orientation revealed several changes to the effects identified in Model 1. Table 2 provides a summary of these effects. The first column in this table (*Initial effect)* indicates the effect originally identified in Model 1.
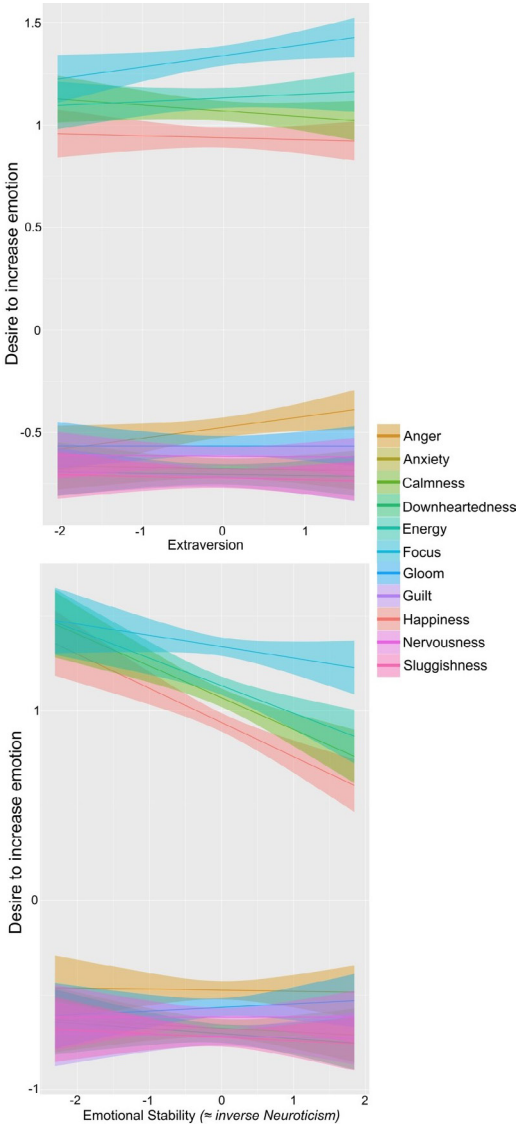

Figure 1. Marginal effects plots of Extraversion and Emotional Stability on the predicted desire to increase emotions.

Note. Line color indicates each emotion. Bands represent 95% Credible Intervals. Negative Y-axis values represent less desire to increase the intensity of an emotion (as opposed to greater desire to decrease).

The second column (*Interaction effect*) indicates how much the initial effect changes, depending on Mastery orientation.

Table 2. Mastery*Trait-Dependent effects.

		Initial effect (Model 1)	**Interaction effect (Model 2)**
Emotion		Extraversion	Mastery*Extraversion
Focus	Estimate Est. Error Odds Ratio	0.06 0.03 54.34*	-0.07 0.03 284.71*
		Emotional Stability	**Mastery* Emotional Stability**
Happiness	Estimate Est. Error Odds Ratio	-0.18 0.04 > 9999*	-0.08 0.04 94.24*
Gloom	Estimate Est. Error Odds Ratio	0.02 0.04 2.29	-0.12 0.04 1999*

Note. All model estimates are standardized to *SD*s. This means that, for example, Model 1 predicts a decrease of 0.18 *SD* in desired Happiness for each 1 *SD* of Emotional Stability above the mean. In addition, if a hypothetical musician were to show Mastery orientation 1 *SD* above the mean, then the model would predict an additional 0.08 *SD* decrease in the desire to increase Happiness (for a total of -0.24 *SD*) per *SD* Emotional Stability above the mean.

Model 2 provided strong evidence that Mastery goal orientation affected trait-dependent effects in several ways, as follows:

1) *Changing the direction of existing effects:* Model 1 showed that higher Extraversion predicted greater desire to increase Focus. However, when Mastery is at a high level, this effect is attenuated and possibly even reversed, indicating less desire to increase Focus. This is indicated by the negative coefficient of the Mastery*Extraversion coefficient (*Est.* = -0.07),

compared to the positive coefficient of Extraversion when Mastery orientation is kept at its mean (*Est.* = 0.06).

2) *Amplifying the size of effects:* Model 1 showed that higher Emotional Stability predicted less desire to increase Happiness (*Est.* = -0.18). When Mastery is at a high level, this effect is increased (*Est.* = -0.08 per 1 *SD* Mastery above the mean), indicating even less desire to increase the intensity of this emotion.

3) *Identifying new effects:* Model 1 provided no evidence that Emotional Stability predicted the desire to increase the intensity of Gloom (*Est.* = 0.02, *Odds ratio* < 19). However, when Mastery is at a high level, there is strong evidence for a new effect, where there is less desire to increase the intensity of this emotion, indicated by the negative coefficient of this effect (*Est.* = -0.12).

Discussion

In this study, we investigated which emotions musicians desired in order to support their musical practice, whether their personality traits predicted their desire to increase the intensity of these emotions, and how Mastery orientation shapes the predictive value of personality traits for these emotions. With respect to the aims outlined in the introduction, we provide the following brief summary:

1) *Practice-Related DES:* Musicians indicated strong desire to increase the intensity of pleasant emotions in their practice, combined with little or no desire to increase unpleasant emotions.

2) *Trait-Dependent DES:* There is strong evidence connecting Extraversion and Emotional Stability to the desire to increase the intensity of different combinations of both positive and negative emotions.

3) *Mastery-Related DES:* Mastery orientation modulated trait-dependent effects by either amplifying existing effects, or mitigating and reversing the strength of these effects, or by introducing new effects entirely.

The results of this study represent new findings concerning musical practice-related emotion states. Some aspects of our findings were expected – namely, a DES that features greater desire for pleasant over unpleasant affect. We expected this finding because it is rare for an individual to want to experience more negative rather than positive affect (Tsai et al., 2007). Although a musician's *actual* emotions in musical practice may consist of a combination of both positive and negative emotions, *desired* emotions tend to be positive. That is to say, although musicians do not necessarily experience positive affect all the time during musical practice, they generally want to.

Extraversion and desired emotions: Extraversion is a trait associated with greater interest in social interactions and a tendency to experience positive emotionality (Kämpfe & Mitte, 2009). One could reasonably hypothesize that individuals with higher Extraversion may then desire greater levels of positive rather than negative emotions. Our results do not support this premise, however. Instead, higher Extraversion predicted greater desire to increase anger. Although anger can sometimes be maladaptive (e.g., if it leads to aggressive behavior), it also has energizing and motivational properties (Ellsworth & Smith, 1988). One possible explanation for this finding then, is that the high-energy characteristics of anger may be in some way motivating and, therefore potentially useful to more extraverted musicians as a tool to support their musical practice.

Emotional Stability and desired emotions: Individuals who are more emotionally stable (i.e., less neurotic) are more resilient to stress and experience less unpleasant affect (Costa & McCrae, 1989). With this in mind, musicians who are more emotionally stable may desire less unpleasant affect in their musical practice. However, our results did not indicate that lower Emotional Stability predicted greater desire to increase unpleasant emotions, instead predicting *less* desire to increase pleasant emotions. One possible explanation for this finding is that Emotional Stability is a trait rooted in avoid-

ance/inhibitory behaviours (Miles & Hempel, 2003). These tendencies may drive emotion regulation strategies that aim to sustain or reduce emotions more so than driving strategies aimed at intensifying an emotional state. Alternatively, the musicians in our sample may simply be emotionally stable enough that their experienced emotions do not represent a barrier to them and do not feel a need to change them.

Mastery orientation and DES: Mindsets that support high-performance activities are often associated with (and sometimes assumed to be dependent on) strong positive emotions (Lane, 2012). In contrast, our findings suggest that when musicians show a high mastery orientation, there is (in some cases) less desire to increase positive emotions – for example, Happiness as it relates to Emotional Stability. Of course, less desire to increase Happiness does not correspond to a desire to decrease it, nor does it equate to a desire to increase different and/or negative emotions. In that sense, our current results complement the findings of Breaden Madden and Jabusch (2021). They showed that some musicians with strong mastery orientation sought out an emotional state that did not exclusively feature strong positive emotions. Instead, these musicians reported seeking a state that combined positive and negative emotions together. Less desire to increase a positive emotion may be a regulatory decision brought to light due to greater experience with the challenges of Mastery-related musical training. For the case of Mastery-oriented musicians, an emotional state that does not solely emphasise pleasant or unpleasant emotions may actually be preferable to other states (Mukherjee et al., 2012).

Musicians' Desire for Trait-Consistent Affect: For an individual that is highly extraverted, emotions that are positive and high-energy are theoretically trait-consistent. Likewise, for an individual that is very emotionally stable, trait-consistent emotions should also be pleasant in tone (Costa & McCrae, 1989; Tamir, 2005). At a descriptive level, our findings do not suggest that musicians desire trait-consistent emotions

in their musical practice, at least with respect to the 2 traits examined here. However, what constitutes trait-consistency is often limited to broad descriptions concerning 'positive vs. negative' affect (e.g., Leung et al., 2014). This level of description is reminiscent of the assumptions often made concerning individuals' desire to experience positive, hedonic emotions. In contrast to these assumptions, our findings indicated no blanket effect of personality traits on musicians' desire to regulate their emotions in musical practice. In other words, an individual trait did not predict a musicians' desire to increase *all* positive or *all* negative emotions. Rather, our findings show that each trait aligned with a specific subset of both positive and negative emotions. This is a rather credible picture, suggestive of an emotional cherry-picking process which is more subtle and complex than a singular 'feel good and avoid feeling bad' principle. The subtle alignment of traits to specific subsets of emotions highlights how our understanding of trait-consistent affect in emotion regulation may benefit from assessment at the level of discrete emotions rather than in terms of the overall broad hedonic potential of emotion(s).

Some of the emotions we assessed here (e.g., Anxiety and Nervousness) were strongly undesired by musicians in their practice (see Table 1). These same emotions were seemingly unrelated to Extraversion and Emotional Stability within this sample of musicians. Anxiety in particular – as it relates to Performance Anxiety (Kenny, 2012) and as an emotion in itself, is well understood to be detrimental to the wellbeing and performance of musicians. Spahn et al. (2004) reported elevated anxiety among music students compared to students in other disciplines. From a health and well-being perspective, our findings are therefore encouraging and suggest that the experience of these unpleasant emotions may not be a risk factor for musicians with a certain personality disposition.

Overall, our results support a general global hedonic principle concerning musicians' practice-related emotions. In that sense, it is important to clarify that any instances where a

musician prefers to increase the intensity of an unpleasant emotion in musical practice should not necessarily be seen as a desire to be unhappy or for musical practice to be an unpleasant experience. Rather, selecting unpleasant affect (however uncommon it may be) is presumably done so in the hopes of producing success at a later stage. Particularly when pursing a challenging goal such as Mastery, this itself should create a positive experience (Tamir, 2009) – presumably and especially if anger is experienced in conjunction with other, positive emotions (Breaden Madden & Jabusch, 2021).

Limitations and Directions for Development. Our results offer several directions to explore in the future. As this study did not include any measure of practice-outcome, research could focus on the impact of different DESs on practice outcomes, and how effectively different strategies may elicit a specific desired emotional state. Future research could also focus on experience-related emotion regulation behaviour. As a musician gains more experience over time, they have more opportunities to meet and resolve challenges in their practice and regulate their emotions within a practice environment. It may therefore be informative to understand how the content of a DES changes over time, and how musicians utilize different emotion regulation strategies in order to support specific outcomes at different stages of their musical lives.

Conclusion

In this study, we investigated the relationship between musicians' personality traits, Mastery goal orientation, and the emotions they desired in order to support their practice. The findings of this study suggest a broad hedonic principle underlying the emotions experienced and desired by musicians in their practice. When considered alongside personality traits, findings suggest that a musical practice-related DES involves a very selective emotional cherry picking, which is much more detailed and subtle than a singular hedonic principle. We believe

that the ongoing investigation of individual differences and their relationship to goal-related emotion regulation is a matter of great importance as it has consequences for how successful our goal pursuits are. This in turn has implications for our well-being, happiness and professional accomplishments.

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