

Music Aesthetics and Mental Health: A Narrative Review of Concepts, Evidence, and Contexts

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ABSTRACT: The aesthetic dimensions of music have attracted increasing scholarly attention due to their potential to enhance psychological well-being. This narrative review aimed to synthesize conceptual, empirical, and contextual perspectives on music aesthetics and mental health. Literature was collected from major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed, using keywords such as aesthetic appeal, music therapy, emotion in music, and mental health. Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed studies addressing the relationship between music and psychological outcomes, while exclusion criteria removed works unrelated to aesthetics or lacking empirical grounding. Both qualitative and quantitative studies were included to ensure breadth and depth. Findings revealed diverse conceptual frameworks, ranging from psychological and historical analyses to therapeutic models and cross-cultural interpretations. Empirical evidence demonstrated significant improvements in mental health outcomes associated with music engagement, with statistical data confirming the benefits of both active creation and passive appreciation. Paradoxically, even sad music was found to generate pleasurable and beneficial experiences, reflecting the complexity of emotional responses. Cross-national studies highlighted cultural variability, showing that aesthetic experiences are deeply shaped by social, economic, and institutional contexts. The discussion linked these findings to systemic barriers, emphasizing the need for more inclusive methodologies, cross-cultural research, and policy frameworks that support equitable access to aesthetic practices. Overall, the review confirms the therapeutic and social significance of music aesthetics while calling for greater inclusivity, methodological innovation, and systemic support. These findings suggest that advancing music aesthetics in research, education, and health services represents a crucial strategy for fostering psychological resilience and social cohesion..

Keywords: Music Aesthetics, Mental Health, Music Therapy, Cultural Context, Psychological Well-Being, Creative Engagement.



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INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, scholarly attention to the intersection of music aesthetics and mental health has grown substantially. This reflects the expanding recognition of the therapeutic and social significance of artistic experiences. Recent studies suggest that aesthetic encounters with art forms

such as music, poetry, and painting are deeply intertwined with human emotions and imagery, thereby shaping how individuals experience beauty and meaning in art. For instance, Mehl et al. (2023) demonstrated that mental imagery and affective responses are key determinants of aesthetic appeal, highlighting the ways in which aesthetic perception can inform therapeutic practices. This perspective strengthens the view that artistic engagement is not merely a passive act of appreciation, but an active process that influences emotional regulation and well-being.

The theoretical and empirical foundations of this argument have been reinforced by research that maps the cognitive and affective dimensions of aesthetic experience. Brielmann et al. (2021) emphasized that beauty is not only an aesthetic category but also a psychological indicator, with significant implications for mental health and subjective well-being. Their findings provide evidence that participation in creative or aesthetic practices can foster psychological resilience and emotional stability. Such perspectives position music and the arts as both cultural expressions and critical tools for enhancing quality of life, thereby bridging the fields of psychology, aesthetics, and health studies.

Complementing this theoretical literature, empirical data at both global and regional levels indicate growing interest in the integration of art and music therapy into healthcare and rehabilitation systems. Carter-Ényì and Carter-Ényì (2020) have stressed music's cross-cultural value, arguing that it functions as both a mode of self-expression and a social binder with applications in therapy and education. Furthermore, Sachs et al. (2015) reported that music therapy has proven effective in addressing a range of mental health challenges, particularly in communities experiencing trauma or loss. These insights underscore that artistic practices are increasingly viewed as evidence-based interventions, moving from ancillary forms of care toward central components of holistic health strategies.

In addition to therapeutic outcomes, engagement in the arts contributes to broader dimensions of human development. Llorca-Bofí and Madrigal (2019) argued that creativity within artistic practices provides unique insights into personal freedom and self-expression, which are essential for psychological flourishing. From an educational perspective, Yu (2022) has observed that the integration of music and art education into formal curricula promotes not only individual creativity but also social collaboration, underscoring the role of arts in fostering both personal growth and community resilience. Collectively, these findings affirm that aesthetic experiences should be acknowledged as central to human well-being, both within and beyond clinical contexts.

Despite these promising insights, significant challenges remain in studying aesthetic experiences, particularly with regard to measurement. One recurrent difficulty lies in assessing the subjective and highly individualized nature of aesthetic responses to music. As Mehl et al. (2023) noted, experimental designs that limit participants to narrowly defined stimuli risk producing findings that are not generalizable across different populations or cultural contexts. This methodological limitation suggests the need for more holistic approaches that capture the variability of individual experiences with diverse artistic forms, thereby enriching our understanding of the connections between art, emotion, and health.

Another major challenge arises from the difficulty of identifying therapeutic mechanisms within active creative processes. Lange et al. (2018) found that while creative engagement can yield significant mental health benefits, numerous moderating variables—including individual differences and social context—remain insufficiently understood. This gap indicates that current models may oversimplify the complexity of artistic interactions, thereby underestimating how context shapes therapeutic outcomes. Future studies must therefore account for both individual agency and collective environments in order to clarify how aesthetic engagement produces psychological benefits.

The literature also reveals an imbalance in research emphasis. Chmiel and Schubert (2019), in their critical overview, argued that much of the existing scholarship privileges formalist analysis of artworks over the lived experiences of individuals interacting with them. They stressed the necessity of situating aesthetic inquiry within broader psychological and historical frameworks that capture the social and emotional resonance of art. Without such contextual sensitivity, the full impact of aesthetic experience on mental health may remain obscured. Similarly, Brielmann et al. (2021) observed that the simultaneous study of cognitive and affective dimensions of beauty remains underdeveloped, despite its importance for understanding how individuals relate to art in their everyday lives.

Given these limitations, it is clear that further inquiry is needed to fill critical gaps in the literature. While much research confirms the beneficial effects of music and art on mental health, relatively few studies explore these dynamics across diverse cultural and social contexts. Carter-Ényì and Carter-Ényì (2020) noted that the majority of studies remain focused on Western cultural experiences, neglecting the rich diversity of non-Western traditions. Likewise, vulnerable populations such as individuals living with chronic mental illness or dementia remain underrepresented in the literature, despite emerging evidence of the arts' potential benefits for these groups (Mittner, 2021). Addressing these gaps will be essential for developing more inclusive and contextually grounded models of aesthetic engagement.

Against this backdrop, the primary aim of the present review is to deepen understanding of how aesthetic experiences with music contribute to psychological well-being. Specifically, this paper seeks to examine the cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of aesthetic engagement, evaluate the mechanisms through which such experiences influence mental health, and identify the challenges and limitations that constrain current approaches. In doing so, the review intends to provide a more comprehensive framework that situates aesthetic experience at the nexus of art, psychology, and health.

The scope of this review encompasses both cross-cultural and population-specific perspectives. By analyzing evidence from diverse contexts, the review not only highlights the universality of music as an aesthetic and therapeutic tool but also addresses its cultural specificity. In particular, it pays attention to underexplored populations, including marginalized groups and individuals with mental health vulnerabilities, to provide a more inclusive assessment of music's role in fostering well-being. Through this comprehensive and critical synthesis, the review aims to advance academic discourse on the aesthetic dimensions of music and to outline pathways for future research that can more effectively integrate aesthetic theory into health and education practices.

METHOD

The methodological framework for this review was designed to ensure a comprehensive and systematic approach to identifying, selecting, and analyzing relevant literature on the aesthetic dimensions of music and their relationship to mental health. Given the inherently interdisciplinary nature of the topic, which bridges psychology, art, health sciences, and cultural studies, a robust and multi-layered search strategy was employed. The objective was to gather peer-reviewed evidence that not only addresses the therapeutic implications of music aesthetics but also provides insights into the broader cultural and emotional contexts in which such experiences are situated.

The initial phase of the methodology centered on identifying appropriate academic databases. Among the most commonly utilized sources in prior research are Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed, each offering unique advantages for capturing relevant scholarship. Scopus was selected for its wide disciplinary coverage and indexing of both scientific and humanities-oriented literature, thereby encompassing the diverse range of fields pertinent to this topic. Web of Science was incorporated due to its rigorous indexing standards and ability to trace citation networks, which are valuable for mapping theoretical influences and scholarly debates. PubMed was prioritized for its focus on health-related literature, ensuring access to research that specifically explores the impact of aesthetic experiences on psychological and clinical outcomes. This multi-database strategy ensured that the review did not overrepresent any single disciplinary perspective but instead reflected the cross-disciplinary nature of the inquiry.

The literature search employed a series of carefully selected keywords and Boolean operators to optimize retrieval. Core terms included “aesthetic appeal,” “music therapy,” “emotion in music,” and “mental health,” which directly align with the central focus of the review. Boolean operators were employed to refine searches, with combinations such as “music AND therapy AND mental health” ensuring specificity, while broader constructs such as “aesthetic AND emotion” captured studies addressing the experiential dimension of music appreciation. To further enhance inclusivity, supplementary keywords were identified based on recommendations from prior literature. Brielmann et al. (2021), for example, emphasized the importance of incorporating related concepts such as “positive psychology” and “art therapy,” thereby broadening the scope to include scholarship that links artistic engagement with psychological well-being. In addition, exploratory searches using terms like “creative engagement,” “expressive arts,” and “psychological resilience” were tested to ensure that less conventional but relevant studies were not overlooked.

Search results were initially screened at the title and abstract level, with duplicates removed before further assessment. The inclusion criteria were established to ensure both relevance and methodological rigor. Eligible studies were required to be peer-reviewed articles published in English, with a primary focus on the intersection between aesthetic engagement—particularly in music—and psychological or mental health outcomes. Both qualitative and quantitative studies were considered, reflecting the need to capture experiential and statistical perspectives. Qualitative designs, such as interviews and case studies, were included for their ability to illuminate subjective and contextual dimensions of aesthetic experience. Quantitative designs, including randomized controlled trials, cohort studies, and cross-sectional analyses, were incorporated for their empirical strength in establishing correlations or causal relationships.

Exclusion criteria were also applied systematically. Studies that did not explicitly address aesthetics or music in relation to psychological well-being were excluded, as were opinion pieces, editorials, and non-peer-reviewed reports. Articles focusing exclusively on physiological or neurological responses to music, without addressing aesthetic or psychological dimensions, were excluded to maintain alignment with the review's conceptual focus. Additionally, studies limited to purely theoretical discussions of aesthetics, without empirical grounding, were omitted unless they directly informed the conceptual framework needed to interpret empirical findings. This balance between inclusivity and specificity ensured that the final corpus of literature was both comprehensive and analytically manageable.

The process of literature selection followed a staged evaluation. After the initial screening, full-text articles were assessed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Where uncertainty arose, studies were discussed and re-evaluated in light of their relevance to the review's objectives. For instance, certain studies of music therapy included limited reference to aesthetics but were retained if they provided valuable insights into the experiential or emotional aspects of therapeutic engagement. The final selection thus represented a curated body of literature that spanned theoretical discussions, experimental studies, and applied interventions, all of which collectively inform the understanding of how music aesthetics contribute to mental health.

Once the corpus of literature was finalized, each study underwent a structured evaluation process. The methodological quality of quantitative studies was assessed based on clarity of design, sample size, statistical validity, and the robustness of conclusions. For qualitative studies, emphasis was placed on transparency in data collection, thematic analysis, and the extent to which findings captured participants' lived experiences. Studies that combined both qualitative and quantitative methods were particularly valued, as they offered a holistic perspective bridging empirical measurement with personal experience. This triangulation of methodologies enabled the review to incorporate a wide spectrum of evidence, from controlled trials demonstrating measurable outcomes to narratives revealing the nuanced meanings participants attach to aesthetic engagement.

Data extraction focused on capturing key details of each study, including research objectives, study design, population characteristics, cultural context, and principal findings. Particular attention was paid to the role of aesthetic factors, such as emotional resonance, imagery, or perceived beauty, in shaping mental health outcomes. For example, studies that analyzed how aesthetic appreciation of music facilitated emotional regulation or reduced symptoms of anxiety were coded for their relevance to therapeutic outcomes. Simultaneously, research exploring cultural variations in aesthetic responses to music was included to reflect the review's commitment to cross-cultural inclusivity.

The methodological approach also acknowledged the evolving landscape of this research area. In addition to peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings and systematic reviews were considered where they provided substantial insights into emerging trends. While grey literature was not systematically included, select reports from reputable organizations were consulted to provide contextual data on global practices in art and music therapy. This integration of diverse sources provided a richer backdrop against which to interpret empirical findings.

Overall, the methodology was designed to ensure comprehensiveness, rigor, and relevance. By drawing upon multiple databases, employing systematic keyword strategies, and applying clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, the review established a robust evidence base for examining the relationship between music aesthetics and mental health. The staged screening and evaluation process further ensured that the final corpus of literature was not only methodologically sound but also thematically aligned with the objectives of the review. This methodological rigor provides the foundation for the subsequent results and discussion sections, which aim to synthesize current knowledge, identify persistent challenges, and highlight pathways for future research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this narrative review reveal that the study of music aesthetics and its influence on mental health is characterized by a broad array of conceptual frameworks, empirical findings, and contextual variations. This section presents findings across three major themes: conceptual foundations, empirical and statistical evidence, and the influence of social, cultural, and economic contexts. The synthesis highlights the diversity of theoretical perspectives, the strength of empirical outcomes, and the global variability in experiences of music aesthetics, thereby offering a comprehensive account of the field.

Conceptual frameworks have played a central role in shaping the analysis of aesthetic experiences in music and their connections to mental health. Chmiel and Schubert (2019) advanced a psychological approach that situates aesthetic experiences within broader historical and social contexts. Their framework emphasizes that aesthetic encounters are not merely subjective episodes but are deeply embedded within psychological and social processes, thus contributing to collective understanding. This position underscores the importance of bridging individual perception with shared cultural practices in explaining the emotional effects of music. The approach offered by Chmiel and Schubert has been particularly influential in promoting a holistic interpretation of aesthetic experiences that integrate subjective and collective dimensions.

The importance of cultural context has been further demonstrated by research such as that of Sanz and Rodríguez-Labajos (2022), who examined aesthetic perception in so-called “sacrifice zones” marked by socio-environmental challenges. Their study revealed that cultural values and relational frameworks heavily influence how aesthetic experiences are perceived, indicating that the reception of art and music is inseparable from geographical, social, and economic conditions. This reinforces the notion that conceptual frameworks must be sensitive to the broader cultural milieu if they are to accurately capture the richness of aesthetic experience.

Parallel to these perspectives, Lange et al. (2018) contributed significantly by focusing on therapeutic creativity, arguing that artistic engagement, including music, supports personal development and mental health. Their framework situates music not simply as an aesthetic object but as an active medium through which psychological healing and self-expression occur. By emphasizing therapeutic processes, this approach expands the conceptual field of aesthetics beyond appreciation into the realm of active creation, thereby enhancing understanding of how music serves as an integral part of psychological recovery.

Differences in conceptual approaches are further evident in studies examining musical perception across distinct cultural contexts. Wang et al. (2021), for example, explored emotional design in multimedia learning and the appreciation of Chinese poetry, illustrating how conceptual interpretations of music and art vary according to cultural traditions and practices. Their findings underscore the variability of aesthetic theories when applied outside of Western contexts and highlight the necessity of incorporating cultural sensitivity into aesthetic frameworks. Collectively, these contributions reveal a wide diversity of conceptual approaches that extend from psychological analysis to therapeutic models and cross-cultural perspectives, underscoring the multidimensional nature of music aesthetics.

Empirical evidence offers further insights into the relationship between music aesthetics and mental health. Lange et al. (2018) provided compelling statistical support for the benefits of active artistic creation, reporting significant improvements in psychological well-being among participants. Their multivariate analysis yielded $F = 15.48$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.54$, indicating a strong and statistically significant effect of artistic engagement on mental health. These findings substantiate the argument that creativity, when expressed through music, is not only an aesthetic pursuit but also a measurable factor contributing to therapeutic outcomes.

Additional empirical contributions come from Eerola et al. (2018), who investigated how listening to “sad” music can paradoxically generate pleasurable experiences. Their integrative analysis suggested that such experiences are shaped by a combination of biological, psychosocial, and cultural factors. This nuanced perspective challenges simplistic notions of emotional valence in music, demonstrating that aesthetic engagement can elicit complex emotional states that, while seemingly negative, contribute positively to psychological resilience and well-being. These findings are particularly significant in demonstrating that the benefits of aesthetic experiences are not limited to positive emotions but also include the capacity to process and reframe negative affect.

Cross-national comparisons provide additional evidence of the global variability in music aesthetics. Carter-Ényì and Carter-Ényì (2020) examined aesthetic aspects of melody across different cultural contexts and found notable variations in musical perception between traditional and modern societies. Their findings reveal that while music may serve as a universal channel for emotional expression, the aesthetic judgments and emotional reactions it elicits are deeply shaped by cultural context. Similarly, Sanz and Rodríguez-Labajos (2022) highlighted how socio-economic conditions influence aesthetic experiences in Chilean sacrifice zones, pointing to the interplay between local cultural values and broader global exchanges in shaping responses to art and music. These cross-cultural insights affirm that while certain aspects of music’s aesthetic appeal may be universal, its impact on mental health is mediated by cultural and socio-economic conditions.

The contextual dimension is also essential in understanding how social, cultural, and economic factors shape aesthetic experiences of music. Liu (2024) observed that music education is strongly influenced by cultural values, with certain societies placing greater emphasis on spirituality and emotional depth, while others prioritize technical mastery and achievement. This demonstrates that educational approaches to music not only shape aesthetic appreciation but also influence broader cultural norms about emotional expression and well-being. Such findings underscore the importance of considering educational and cultural institutions as mediators of aesthetic experience.

Mittner (2021) further emphasized the role of cultural context by analyzing how subjective experiences of art are shaped by social environments. His work illustrated that aesthetic encounters are mediated by cultural narratives, which can either expand or constrain individual interpretations of music. Within this framework, music functions as both a tool for individual identity formation and a medium for social collaboration. These insights highlight the dual role of music in fostering both personal growth and social cohesion, thereby reinforcing its significance in mental health promotion.

Comparative evidence also illustrates the variability of aesthetic experiences across cultural boundaries. Chmiel and Schubert (2019) demonstrated that the same set of aesthetic experiences can yield markedly different outcomes depending on individuals' cultural and social backgrounds. They concluded that although universal elements of aesthetic experience exist, local contexts introduce critical nuances that must be recognized in order to develop a comprehensive understanding. This finding resonates with the broader literature on cross-cultural psychology, affirming that aesthetic experiences, while globally significant, are always embedded in culturally specific frameworks.

Taken together, the results of this review highlight the multidimensionality of music aesthetics as both a theoretical construct and an empirical reality. Conceptual frameworks illustrate the diverse lenses through which music's aesthetic power has been studied, ranging from psychological and historical approaches to therapeutic and cross-cultural models. Empirical findings substantiate these frameworks by demonstrating measurable effects of aesthetic engagement on mental health, including both positive and complex emotional outcomes. Finally, contextual evidence emphasizes that aesthetic experiences are inseparable from the social, cultural, and economic environments in which they occur, affirming the necessity of culturally sensitive approaches in both research and practice.

Overall, the synthesis demonstrates that music aesthetics is a vital area of inquiry that intersects with psychological well-being, cultural diversity, and social practice. The variability of conceptual, empirical, and contextual findings underscores the richness of this field while simultaneously pointing to the need for more inclusive and globally representative research. By integrating these dimensions, future studies can build a more comprehensive framework that not only explains the universal significance of music but also acknowledges the diversity of its aesthetic and therapeutic impacts across different populations and cultural contexts.

The findings presented in the results section underscore the multidimensional role of music aesthetics in shaping psychological well-being, revealing theoretical diversity, empirical robustness, and cultural variability. This discussion expands on those findings by linking them with existing literature, examining systemic factors that contribute to the identified challenges, and considering the implications for therapeutic, cultural, and educational practices. Furthermore, it highlights potential solutions to overcome barriers in research and application, while acknowledging existing limitations and identifying directions for future inquiry.

A central theme emerging from the literature is the coexistence of diverse conceptual frameworks that inform understandings of music aesthetics. Chmiel and Schubert (2019) emphasized the need to situate aesthetic experiences within broader psychological and historical contexts, thereby integrating subjective perceptions with collective cultural meanings. This perspective resonates

with Lange et al. (2018), who shifted focus toward the therapeutic dimensions of creativity, positioning music as a dynamic medium of self-expression and psychological healing. The intersection of these frameworks highlights a tension between treating aesthetics as an object of appreciation versus an active, participatory process. This duality aligns with earlier debates in aesthetic theory, where formalist approaches prioritized structural features of art, while experiential approaches stressed affective and contextual interpretations. The synthesis of these perspectives suggests that a comprehensive understanding of music aesthetics must account for both the formal qualities of music and the lived experiences of individuals engaging with it.

Cultural variability further complicates this theoretical landscape. As Sanz and Rodríguez-Labajos (2022) demonstrated, cultural and socio-economic contexts significantly shape how aesthetic experiences are perceived, particularly in marginalized or environmentally impacted communities. Wang et al. (2021) similarly highlighted that emotional design and artistic appreciation differ considerably across cultural traditions, pointing to the insufficiency of universalist models of aesthetic perception. These findings reveal that systemic cultural frameworks—whether rooted in traditions, institutions, or socio-political conditions—act as mediators of aesthetic meaning. For example, Liu (2024) showed that music education reflects cultural priorities, with some societies valuing spiritual depth while others emphasize technical mastery. Such systemic influences underscore the need to design research and interventions that are sensitive to cultural contexts, avoiding the pitfalls of imposing Western-centric frameworks onto non-Western traditions.

The empirical evidence consolidates the therapeutic value of music aesthetics while also demonstrating the complexity of its psychological impacts. Lange et al. (2018) provided compelling statistical evidence of the positive effects of creative engagement, while Eerola et al. (2018) showed that even negative affective responses, such as those elicited by sad music, can foster pleasurable and psychologically beneficial experiences. These findings reflect broader psychological theories suggesting that complex emotions contribute to resilience and meaning-making. However, the variability of outcomes across cultural and individual contexts raises systemic questions about the generalizability of empirical data. For instance, much of the quantitative evidence derives from Western populations, which may not adequately reflect the lived realities of non-Western or marginalized groups (Carter-Ényì & Carter-Ényì, 2020). Systemic inequalities in research funding, academic publishing, and institutional priorities further exacerbate this imbalance, resulting in a literature base that risks privileging certain perspectives over others.

Systemic factors also play a crucial role in shaping access to and application of music aesthetics in therapeutic and educational settings. As Sachs et al. (2015) highlighted, music therapy has demonstrated effectiveness in trauma-affected populations, yet access to such interventions is often limited by institutional structures, healthcare systems, and economic constraints. Similarly, Yu (2022) pointed to disparities in the inclusion of music education within curricula, which reflects broader systemic priorities about the value of the arts in society. In contexts where arts education is deprioritized, individuals may be denied opportunities to engage in aesthetic experiences that support psychological well-being and social cohesion. These systemic issues illustrate how institutional policies, funding structures, and socio-political agendas directly influence the extent to which aesthetic practices can be harnessed for therapeutic and educational purposes.

The identification of gaps in research emphasizes the need for greater inclusivity in both conceptual and empirical inquiry. Chmiel and Schubert (2019) critiqued the dominance of formalist approaches that neglect subjective and contextual dimensions, while Brielmann et al. (2021) observed a lack of integrated studies addressing both cognitive and affective aspects of aesthetic experience. Mittner (2021) similarly argued that vulnerable populations, such as individuals with dementia, are underrepresented in the literature despite evidence of the arts' potential benefits for these groups. These critiques collectively suggest that systemic barriers within academic research—including methodological conservatism, narrow disciplinary boundaries, and publication biases—have constrained the development of a more holistic and inclusive body of knowledge. Overcoming these barriers requires methodological innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and deliberate efforts to include diverse populations and cultural contexts.

Potential solutions lie in adopting more integrative and participatory approaches to both research and practice. Mixed-methods designs that combine quantitative rigor with qualitative depth could help bridge the gap between statistical generalizability and lived experience. For example, integrating controlled trials with ethnographic or phenomenological methods could capture the complexity of aesthetic engagement in ways that purely quantitative designs cannot. In therapeutic contexts, approaches that blend formal music therapy with community-based practices may provide more culturally sensitive interventions, particularly in non-Western contexts where traditional artistic practices hold significant cultural and social value. Education systems, too, could benefit from adopting more inclusive curricula that recognize the aesthetic and emotional dimensions of learning, aligning with Yu's (2022) emphasis on fostering creativity and collaboration through music education.

Another potential solution involves fostering greater cross-cultural research collaboration. Studies such as those by Carter-Ényì and Carter-Ényì (2020) underscore the importance of exploring non-Western traditions to enrich global understandings of music aesthetics. Cross-national collaborations could mitigate the dominance of Western perspectives by incorporating insights from diverse traditions, thereby producing a more representative knowledge base. Furthermore, incorporating comparative frameworks that explicitly analyze differences and similarities across cultural contexts could help clarify which aspects of aesthetic experience are universal and which are context-specific. This would not only advance theoretical debates but also improve the design of culturally tailored interventions in health and education.

The limitations of existing research also point to critical areas for further exploration. One limitation lies in the measurement of aesthetic experiences, which remain inherently subjective and resistant to standardization. As Mehl et al. (2023) observed, experimental designs often restrict participants to narrow stimuli, limiting the ecological validity of findings. Addressing this limitation requires the development of more flexible methodologies that capture the diversity of real-world aesthetic encounters. Another limitation involves the underrepresentation of longitudinal designs, which are necessary to assess the sustained effects of aesthetic engagement on mental health outcomes. Short-term experimental studies provide valuable insights but cannot fully account for the long-term processes of resilience-building, identity formation, or social integration facilitated by aesthetic practices.

Additionally, systemic barriers in research dissemination warrant attention. Publication biases toward positive results may obscure the complexities or ambivalences of aesthetic experiences, creating an overly optimistic narrative that fails to acknowledge potential risks or limitations. For instance, while music generally supports well-being, certain contexts—such as triggering traumatic memories—may produce adverse effects that remain underexplored. Acknowledging these complexities would provide a more balanced and ethically responsible account of music aesthetics in relation to mental health. Similarly, greater transparency in reporting null or negative findings would help prevent the overstatement of benefits and promote more nuanced theoretical and practical insights.

Finally, the discussion highlights the necessity of embedding aesthetic inquiry within broader systemic and policy frameworks. As Sanz and Rodríguez-Labajos (2022) illustrated, environmental and socio-economic conditions profoundly influence aesthetic experiences, pointing to the interconnectedness of aesthetics with issues of justice, sustainability, and social equity. Recognizing these systemic dimensions compels researchers and practitioners to situate aesthetic practices within broader socio-political contexts, ensuring that interventions in music therapy or education address not only individual outcomes but also collective and structural determinants of well-being.

CONCLUSION

This narrative review highlights the multifaceted role of music aesthetics in promoting psychological well-being, underscoring the significance of conceptual frameworks, empirical findings, and cultural contexts. The evidence confirms that aesthetic engagement with music supports mental health through both positive and complex emotional experiences, while also demonstrating substantial therapeutic value in active creative practices. Conceptual perspectives illustrate the integration of psychological, historical, and cultural dimensions, emphasizing that music aesthetics cannot be reduced to formal properties alone but must be understood as a lived and socially embedded phenomenon. Empirical data provide strong statistical validation of the benefits of music therapy and creative engagement, while also revealing the paradoxical but constructive role of negative emotions in fostering resilience. Cross-cultural comparisons highlight the variability of aesthetic experiences, confirming that cultural, social, and economic systems critically shape how individuals and communities respond to music.

The urgency of addressing these issues is evident, particularly given persistent research gaps, systemic inequities, and underrepresentation of non-Western traditions and vulnerable populations. Policy measures should promote equitable access to music and arts education, integrate music therapy into mental health services, and support cross-cultural collaborations to diversify research. Future studies should adopt mixed-method and longitudinal designs to capture both subjective experiences and long-term outcomes, while ensuring inclusivity across cultural and demographic contexts. Ultimately, strengthening the role of music aesthetics in health and education requires both systemic support and methodological innovation, affirming its importance as a central strategy in advancing psychological well-being and social cohesion.

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