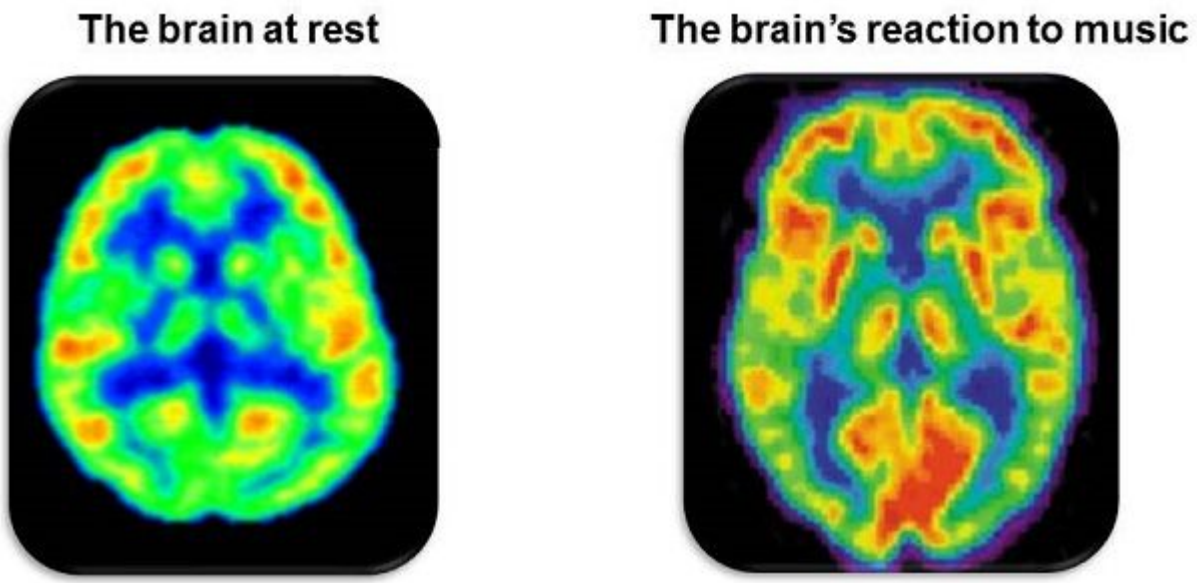
TRENDING

Are You One of Them? – Deeply Empathic People Process Music differently

By bestfolkmedicine · 14/08/2021 · 3 min read



According to a study published in the Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience, people who are emphatic or able to feel others' sadness or happiness deeply also tend to process music differently in their brains than those who're less emphatic.

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The head of the study, Zachary Wallmark, who's also an assistant professor at the Southern Methodist University says that high-empathy and low-empathy individuals share a lot of things in common when it comes to listening to music.

These are the involvement in the brain areas associated with emotion, auditory, and sensory-motor processing.

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But there's something that differentiates those who're more emphatic from the less emphatic ones and it has to do with music.

Highly Emphatic People Process Music Uniquely

The researchers found that those who're deeply emphatic enjoy listening to music more than others because they connect with it on a deep level. They use more of their brain's social wiring than those who have a lower level of empathy.

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Their brain areas used for rewards, social awareness, and social emotions regulation are activated more when they listen to music. Wallmark notes that this may be a sign that the music is perceived as a social entity, as a human presence.

The research did previously found that around 20 percent of the population is highly emphatic. The latest study that was conducted by researchers from UCLA and SMU was the first one that pointed out a neural cause of the music-empathy connection.

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How Was the Discovery Made?

For the purposes of the study, the researchers played unfamiliar and familiar music to 20 students at UCLA who were scanned in an MRI while listening to the music.

These scans were necessary to identify which parts of the brains were responding to the music the most and also to compare the results between the students who were assessed to be highly emphatic and the ones who had lower levels of empathy.

The participants were also required to answer and submit a questionnaire that was used to determine their empathy level. The results concluded that the familiar music activated the participants' pleasure centers in the brain more often in the emphatic students.

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This brain area or our reward center brings about positive emotions.

Similarly, those who're highly emphatic had more activity in the prefrontal cortex which controls aspects like social attitude and our view on other people's actions and intentions.

The finding led the researchers to believe that listening to music is similar to a human encounter in emphatic people.

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According to senior author Marco Iacoboni, a UCLA neuroscientist, this study shows on one side the power of empathy in the modulation of our perception of music, a phenomenon similar to the original roots of empathy, i.e., feeling into a piece of art and on the other hand, it reveals music's power to trigger our complex social processes in the brain that also happen when we're interacting with each other.

Sources:

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