Religion and Music

Music can be both a powerful element of religious worship and a significant purveyor of cultural norms and values. As a result, the relationship between religion and popular forms of music has been strained at times. Does music improve the spiritual lives of its listeners? Or does music corrupt the minds of impressionable adolescents? Are members of some religions more likely to be critical of popular music than others? And what dimensions of individual religiosity influence one’s feelings about the value of music?

This learning module will explore these and other questions about religion and music. Completing the module will help you to learn about how music shapes peoples’ spiritual experiences, as well as how peoples’ ideas about music are shaped by their religious beliefs and practices.

Open your web browser and go to the homepage for the Association of Religion Data Archives (www.theARDA.com).

The Arts and Religion Survey, 1999 asked about several issues related to the arts. In addition, respondents were asked to provide information about their religious beliefs and behaviors.

To begin, find the Arts and Religion Survey in the data archive. For assistance locating data files on the ARDA, click here.

You will then be taken to a page that gives basic information about the Arts and Religion Survey.

1. How many people took this survey? (Hint: People are referred to as “cases.”)

Using the grey “Codebook” tab, find the question named UPLIFT1 (variable #169). Read the question and the next four questions after it (#170 through #173). These questions asked the survey-takers whether they felt uplifted in the past year by seeing or hearing something they thought was beautiful.
2. Comparing questions #172 and #173, were the respondents more likely to feel uplifted by music or art?

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Now, we are going to look at how different types of people think about music differently. Find the question named GRO_MUSI (variable #106). Once you have found the question, look over the answers. Below the answers is a link marked, “Analyze Results.” Find and click on this link.

3. What question is being asked in GRO_MUSI?

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4. Find the table titled “Religion (I-RELIGION)”. For each of the following religious groups, list the percent of survey-takers who reported that music was “very important” for their spiritual growth.

Protestant: __________

Roman Catholic: __________

Jewish: __________

Let’s look at the part music plays in people’s religious or faith-based activities. Go to the Baylor Religion Survey, Wave II (2007) – Instructional Dataset. Click on the codebook, then press Ctrl+F and type “music” in the search bar that appears. This will help you find a question that asks how often the respondent participated in a music-related religious activity (Hint: look for the variable labeled CHOIR). Click on “Analyze Results”.

This next question will require a bit of calculation. We want to see how a person’s religion might be related to whether or not they participated in a faith-based musical activity in the last month.
5. Scroll down to the table titled “Religion (I-RELIGION)”. Instead of looking at how often someone participated in a musical faith-based activity, we are going to collapse the categories into “yes” or “no”. To do that, we will add the percentages for the “One to two times,” “Three to four times,” and “Five or more times” categories to fill out the below table. The first column is filled out for you as an example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participated in musical, faith-based activity?</th>
<th>Evangelical Protestant</th>
<th>Black Protestant</th>
<th>Mainline Protestant</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>83.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.5+6.8+4.2 = 16.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. People in which religion are most likely to have participated in a faith-based musical activity in the last month? Which is the least likely?

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Now, we want to look at a more recent data set. Access the QuickStats on U.S. Congregations by going to ‘Quickstats/Quicklists’ on the main menu bar on www.theARDA.com. Find the topics related to Worship and pick an instrument (either drums, guitar, or organ).

7. Congregations in which region are most likely to use your selected instrument during their worship services?

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8. Congregations in which religious tradition are least likely to use your selected instrument during their worship services?

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9. Is the trend that more or fewer congregations overall are using your selected instrument (or has use of the instrument remained steady)? Why do you think this trend is/is not occurring?

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10. What are some things you have learned about religion and music from this exercise? Have you been surprised by anything you have learned?

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