The role of shared music preference on social bonding during passive music listening

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Background

- Music plays a crucial role in creating social bonds (Savage et al., 2021).
- Prior research has shown that moving in synchrony with others enhances social connection and prosocial behaviours (Mogan et al., 2017).
- However, the role of music preferences in social bonding has received little attention.
- Shared music preferences often indicate similarity and reinforce social identity. For example, individuals are more likely to bond with others who share their musical tastes (Boer et al., 2011).
- Despite this, limited research has explored whether listening to preferred music with others, without prior knowledge of their preferences, influences social bonding.
- The current study investigates the effect of shared music preference on social bonding in group settings where participants are unaware of each other's preferences

Study Aims

How do shared music preferences influence social bonding in groups who listen to music together?

How does the effect of music preference differ for different genres, such as Pop and K-Pop?

To test this, we recruited undergraduate students in groups of 4 to come into the LIVELab and listen to playlists of a genre (Pop or K-Pop), of which participants were either all Fans or Non-Fans.

We measured mood and social bonding pre- and post-listening, and group cooperation through a public goods game post-listening. We also measured their movements with motion capture.

Methods

Design:
A 2x2 crossed design with independent variable of preference (Fans vs Non-Fans) of two different genres (Pop or K-Pop).

- Participants: Groups of four were either all Fans or Non-Fans of either Pop or K-Pop (Pop Fans N=6, Pop Non-Fans N=6, K-Pop Fans N=6, K-Pop Non-Fans N=6, N total = 96).
- Participants were seated in a circle (Figure 1 & Figure 2) and listened to a Pop or K-Pop playlist on silent disco headphones (Table 1).
- Motion capture of head movements, video, and audio were all recorded during music listening.

Measures:
Participants completed the following measures:
- Likability of other group members [pre- and post-listening]
- Cooperation through a public goods game (Figure 3) [post-listening]
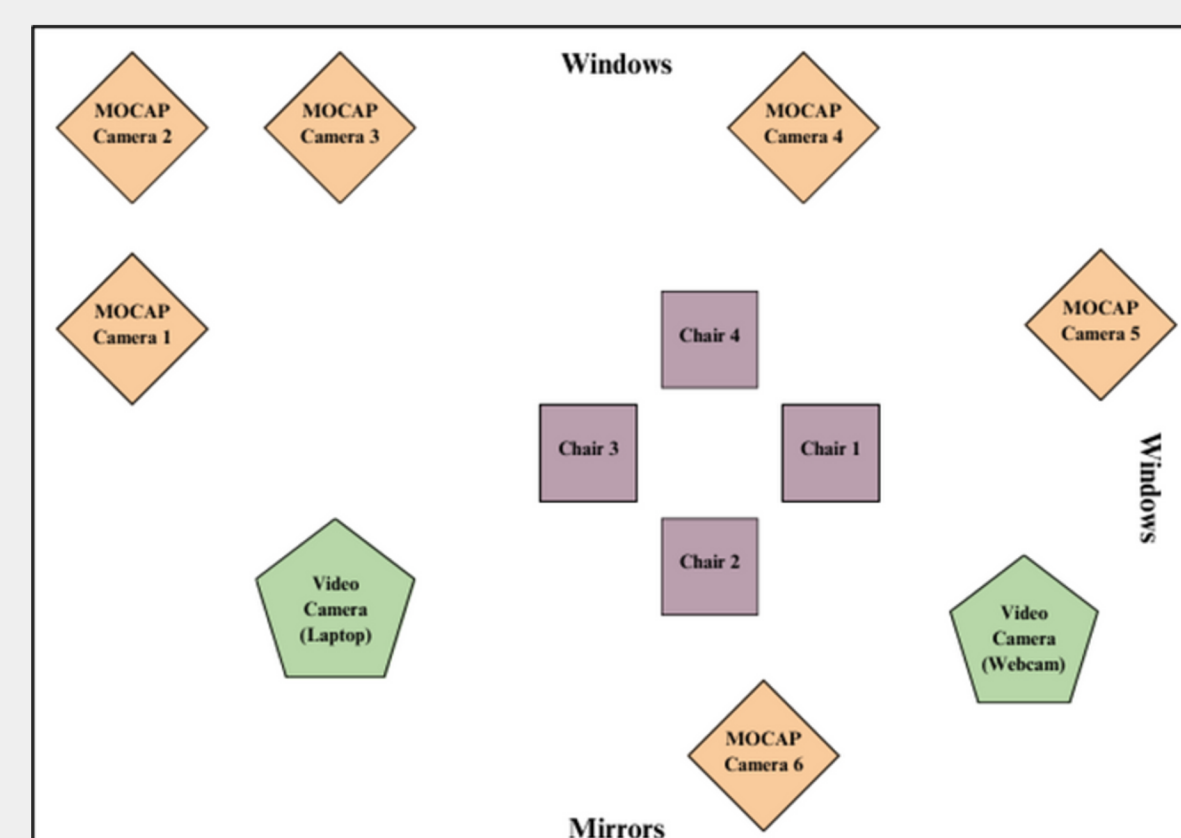- Synchrony via cross-correlation (CC) of each group's head movements during music listening

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

Table 1.

Figure 3.

Results

- Fans enjoyed the playlists more than the Non-Fans for both genres (Figure 7).
- Fans help each other more than Non-Fans in the public goods game for Pop only (Figure 5).
- Fans showed higher head synchrony compared to Non-Fans for Pop only (Figure 6).
- Pop Fans showed the highest average similarity ratings compared to other groups (Figure 4).
- Pop Fans liked each other more than Non-Fans even before music-listening (Figure 8A).
- When collapsed across genres, Fans liked each other more than Non-Fans liked each other after music-listening (Figure 8C).

Figure 4.

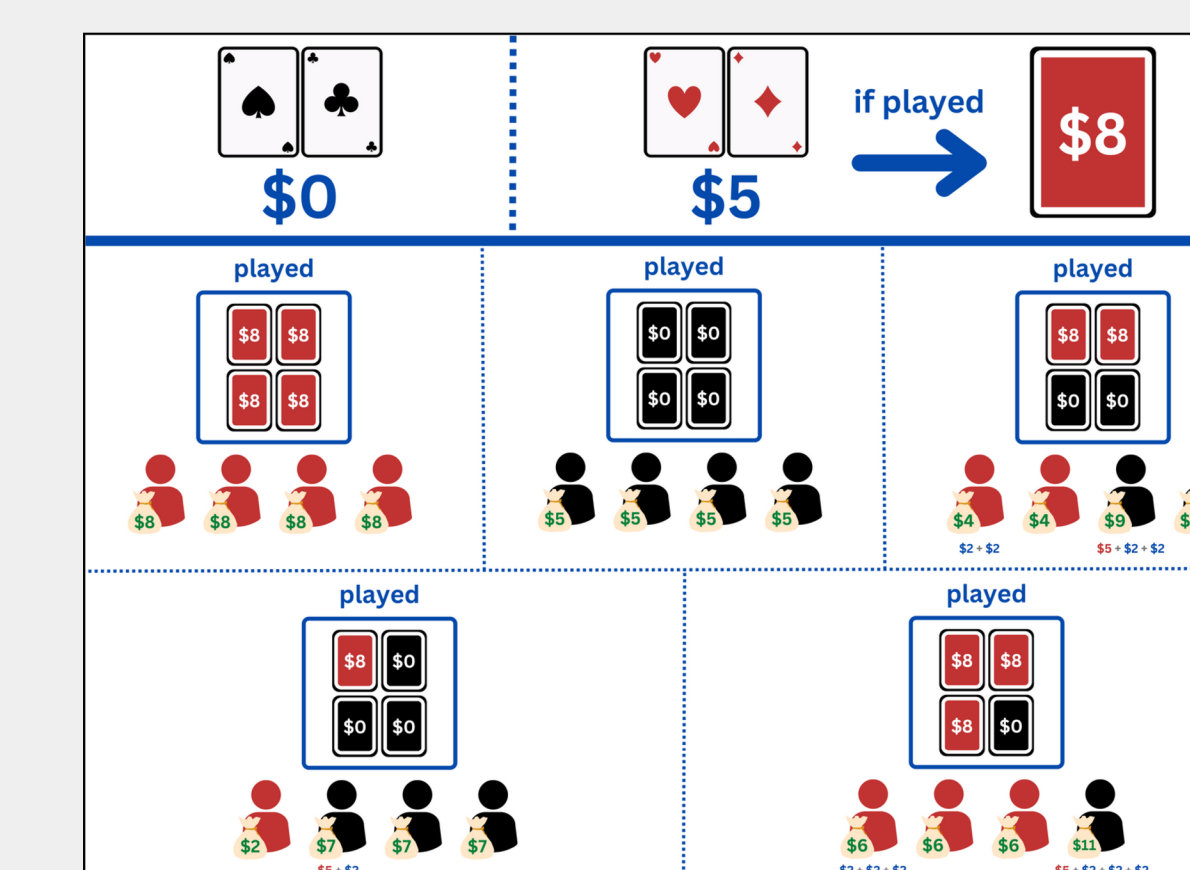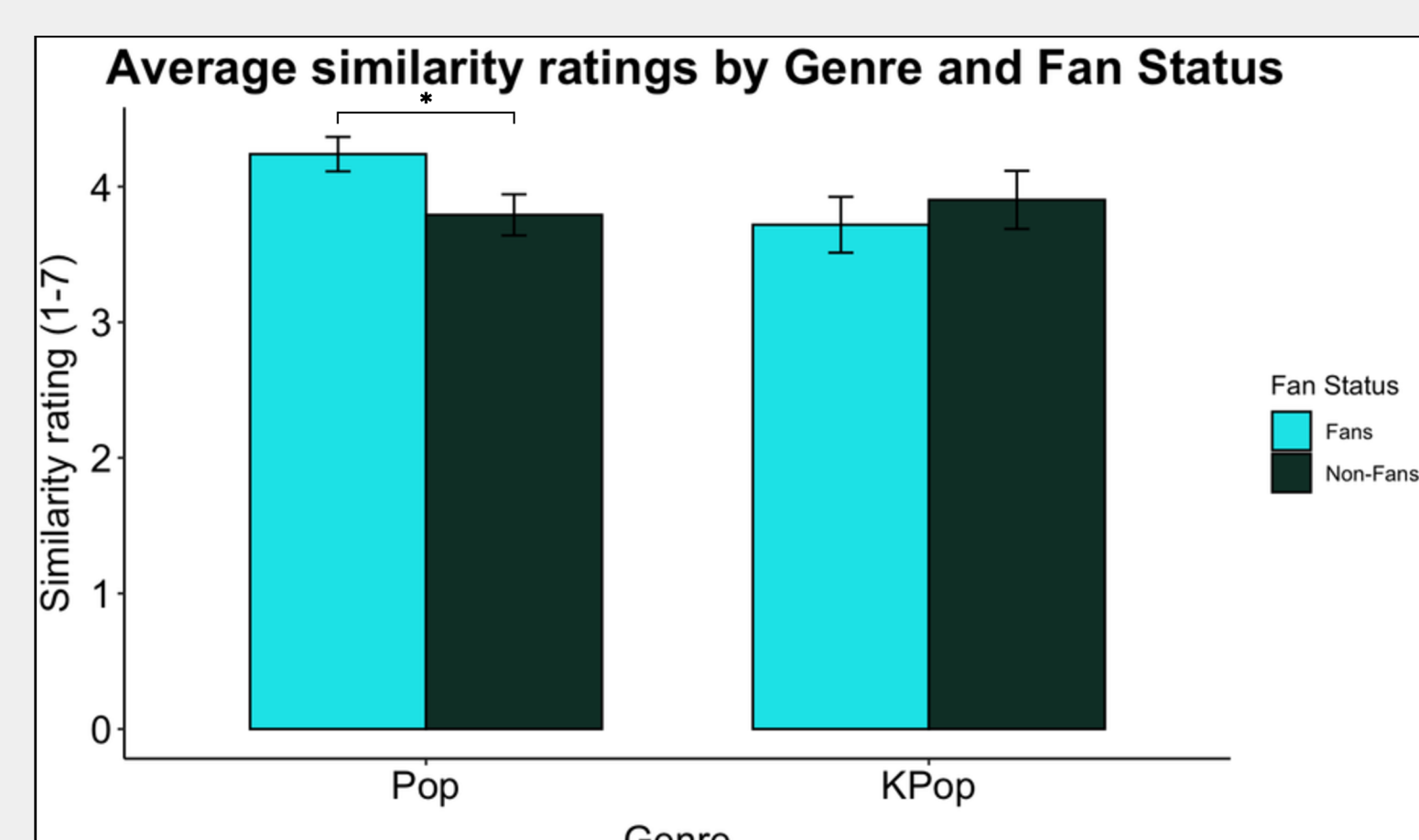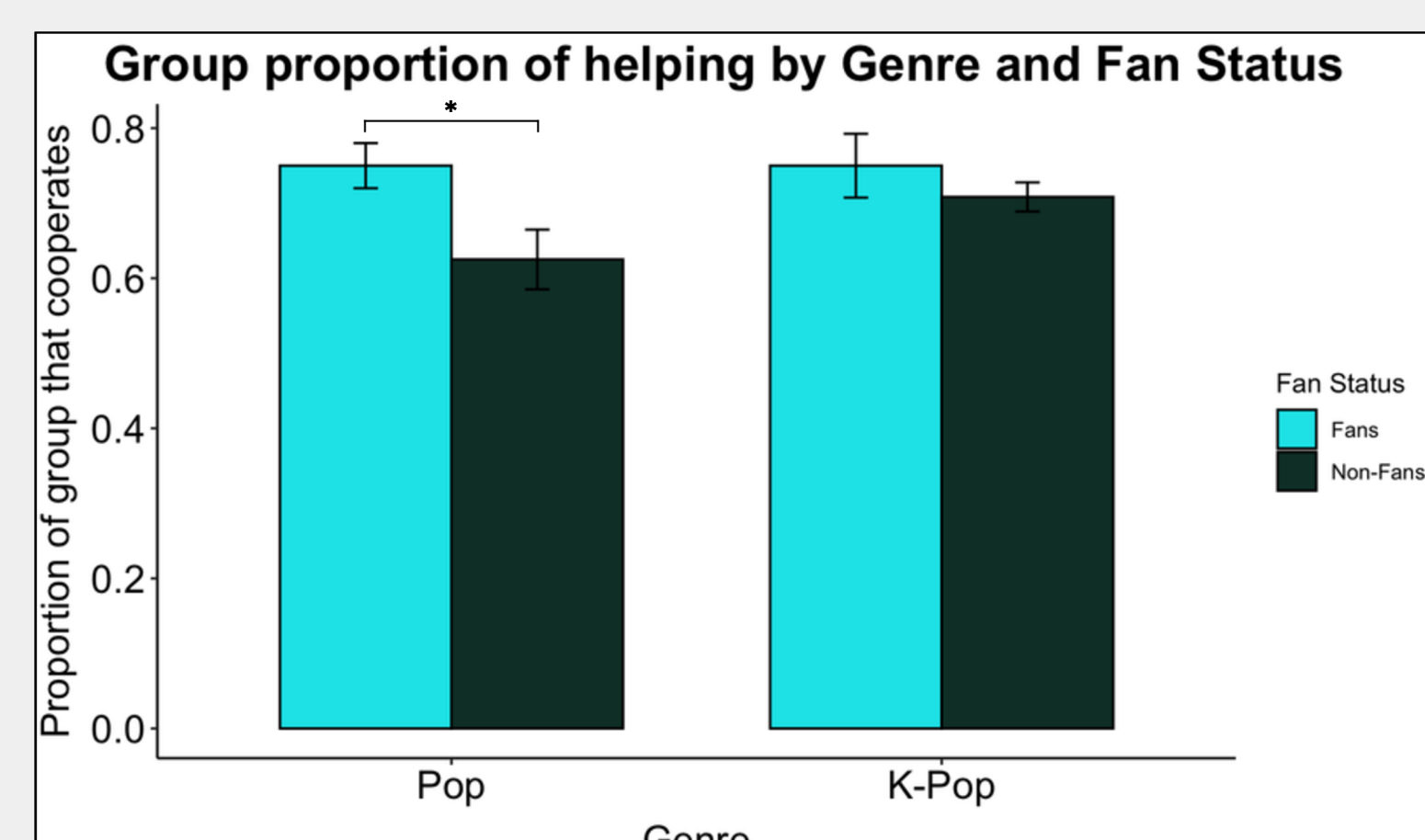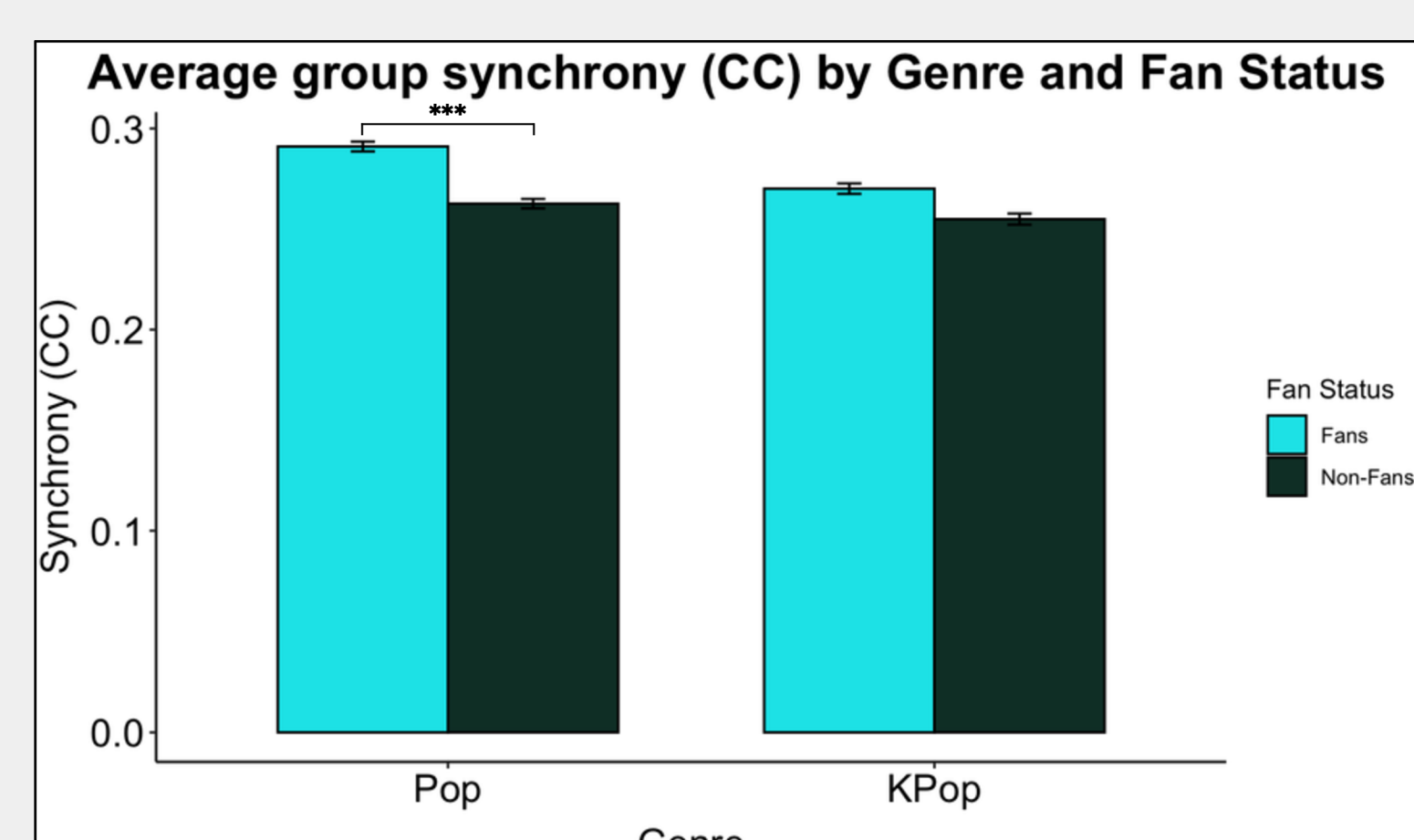
Figure 5.

Figure 6.

Figure 7.

Figure 8.

Discussion

The influence of music preference on social bonding is different depending on genre

For Pop, the preference alone is a strong indicator of similarity and affiliation, while for K-Pop, listening together appears necessary to establish the bond.

Pop Fans liked each other more at baseline than Pop Non-Fans, even without knowing each other's preferences, suggesting a shared social identity or common stereotype that connects people who like Pop music. This pre-existing connection may prime positive social evaluations, whereas Non-Fans may lack this immediate sense of shared identity, resulting in lower baseline liking.

In contrast, K-Pop Fans did not show this effect at baseline, but bonded more after music-listening, indicating that shared experiences may play a more critical role in forming connections among K-Pop Fans.

The increased synchrony among Pop Fans vs. Pop Non-Fans suggests that shared positive preferences promote synchrony. However, this effect was absent in the K-Pop groups.

Overall, this study suggests that for Pop, music preference acts as a social signal that primes positive evaluations, while for K-Pop, the shared listening experience is more crucial for triggering social bonding.
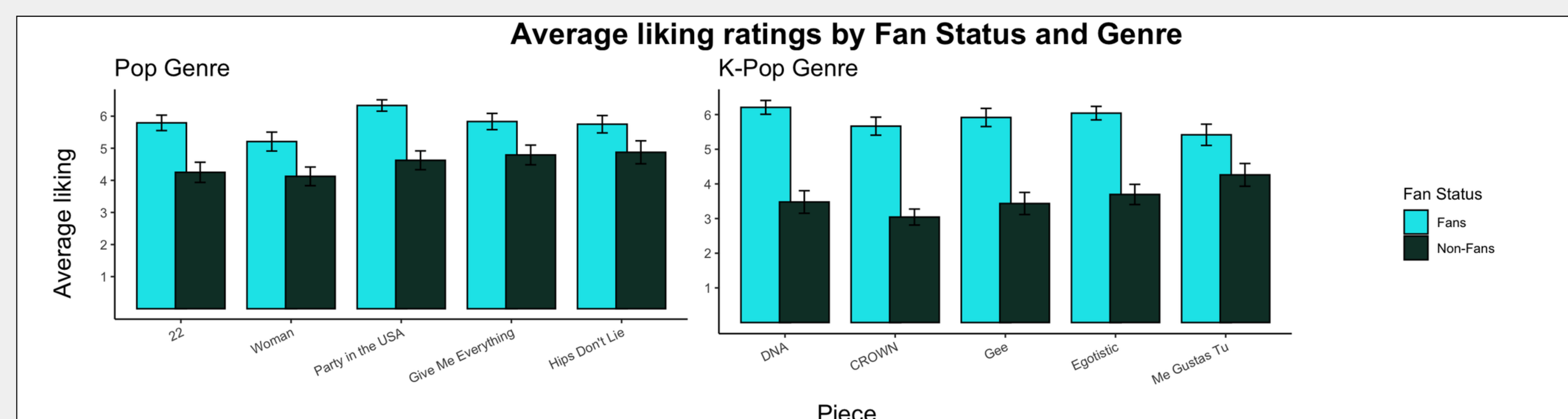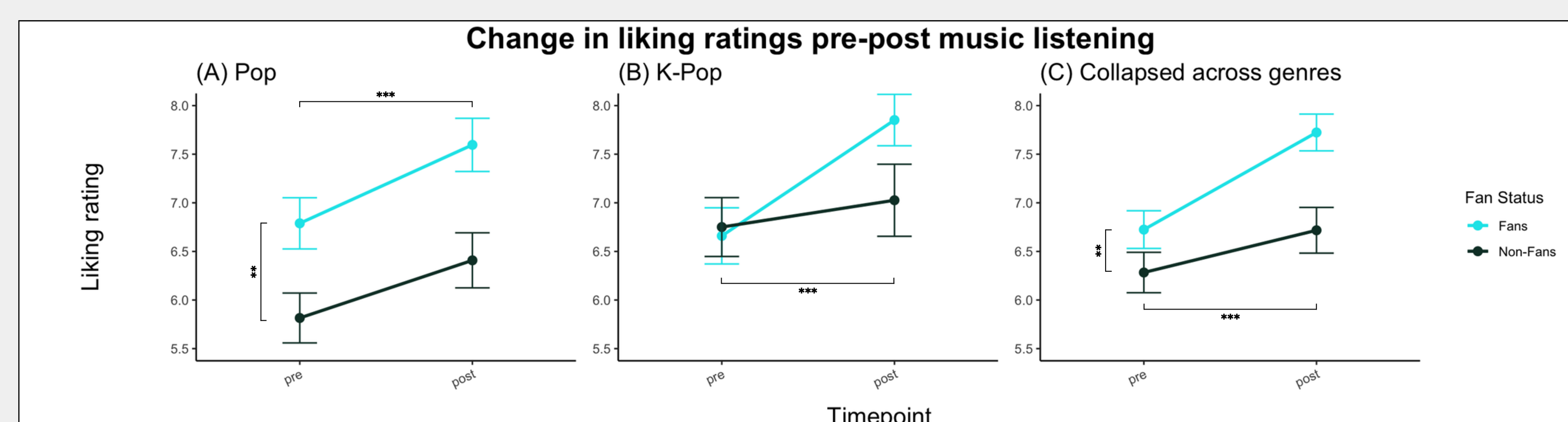
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