

Influence of music on culture and the individual



Music In our world

Beauty. It is what all of human history and culture is built upon. Beauty and art in its many forms defines any given culture at any specific time in history. This includes fashion, architecture, murals, sculptures, theater, and perhaps one of the most influential art forms that prevails even in today's society, music. Music has gone as far as defining era's across American history. In the twenties, Jazz reigned and Speakeasies and the iconic swing music is how today's world describes and imagines that decade. The 60's often instantly brings to mind the Beatles, the 80's Madonna Madonna, Prince, Bowie, and today the icons are so abundant and well known that it can seem almost overwhelming. It is thus safe to say that music is and has been a huge influence on human culture over the course of history. There are more levels to music's presence in society, however. Music has a major biological influence on the human mind and ultimately has a significant impact on culture and society as a whole.

Music and the music industry is undoubtable very abundant and profitable in today's society. In America alone, average citizens listen to four hours of music per day on average (Huang). The question then becomes, why is music such a popular commodity? The obvious answer is that it's considered entertaining to listen to and watch but why is this? Well, according to Daniel Levitin, a prominent psychologist who studies the neuroscience of music at McGill University in Montreal, there are a few reasons for this. Levitin's studies have shown that music can have a significant effect on the human brain. It triggers a wide range of chemical response in the brain which can

lead to several emotional and even physical responses (Landau). Many of these responses lead to making people feel good.

This may be but the effect of music on people goes even further than that. Levitin and colleagues published “ a meta-analysis of 400 studies in the journal Trends in Cognitive Sciences” that suggest that this responses not only make people feel good, it translates to other “ physiological benefits” (Landau). This meaning that music can have a physical impact on the human body. An example of this can be seen in a study conducted by researchers on patients who were about to undergo surgery. In the study, “ Participants were randomly assigned to either listen to music or take anti-anxiety drugs. Scientists tracked patient’s ratings of their own anxiety, as well as the levels of the stress hormone cortisol” (Landau). The results of the experiment showed that the patients who listened to music had less anxiety and “ lower cortisol than people who took drugs”. Levitin and his colleagues also have strong evidence that shows that music can be linked with the production of “ immunoglobulin A”, an antibody that helps the body fight off infection and disease (Landau). These are just a few pieces of evidence of many that have suggested a beneficial relation between the human body and mind and music. Why this is, scientist aren’t certain but there is no doubt that there is a biological and perhaps even instinctual connection between the human brain and music.

Music’s effect on human goes beyond the individual mind. There is a significant cultural impact that music has on entire populations on people. This is largely due to music’s lasting effect on the collective human mind. Boston College professor William K. Kilpatrick wrote in his book *Why Johnny* <https://assignbuster.com/influence-of-music-on-culture-and-the-individual/>

Can't Tell Right From Wrong that " We tend to learn something more easily and indelibly if it's set to a rhyme or song". He even goes on to explain that advertising agencies are aware of this and this is why they tend to use catchy jingles to promote their business or product. He also says that one of the most successful new phonics programs teaches reading through singing (Duke). Music has a tendency to stick with us which is a big part of why it is so influential on entire culture. It acts as a means for collective sharing of knowledge, concepts, and beliefs that sticks with people better than any other presentation of these things. This means that popular music can impose and broadcast the same messages and ideas to entire groups of people. This makes it a common form of shared knowledge that can link people on several levels.

This allows music to influence entire cultures and has been just for centuries. Kilpatrick states that " the foundational cultural messages of the Greeks were conveyed by sung stories" (Duke). This is because popular the Iliad, the Odyssey, and other works played a " vital role in the formation of Greek youth" Kilpatrick says. He says that " the ability of the Homeric bards to memorize these vast epics was due in large part to the rhythmic meter and repetitive structure of the poems" which allowed them to be such sweeping influential forces in Greek culture. Music continues to be such a large influential force even in today's society. Arguable even more so than in Greek culture because of the evolution of modern technology. Music is a lot more easy to access and is more abundant today due to technology. Music has changed immensely through the years, as has human cultures.

Selwyn Duke suggests that there may even be a correlation between the evolutionary change of music and the evolutionary change between cultures when he states:

There were times and places — in the Europe of the Middle Ages, as an example — where music might remain largely the same for hundreds of years. And it is no coincidence that in medieval times something else also remained quite constant: culture. (Duke)

This suggests that either music is a reflection of culture and changes as it does or culture is a reflection of music and imitates and evolves along with it. There is an indisputable correlation between change in culture and change of music within a given area and so it remains that one of these two ideas must be true. The evidence for music's emotional and lasting impact on the human mind can help explain why this is.

The question then becomes, in what way is music affecting people culturally? One way is that, as a result of music changing so much, generations have become divided. Neither side (with exceptions) finds the contrasting music appealing. They have both lived in an era of completely different music and so they have become divided. Music has become a cultural divide between generations which is why this is. Another component behind this is the fact that, in the past, music was a lot more unifying among any given generation. An article created by The American Academy of Pediatrics explains why this is. They discuss how listening to popular music is considered by society to be a big part of growing up. They go on to say “ Adolescents use music in their process of identity formation, and their music

preference provides them a means to achieve group identity and integration into the youth culture.” (American Academy). This is based on several accounts of research and is readily evident in the evolution of popular music in America.

For the last century, music in America has changed by increments of a decade. Each one unique in style, genre, and composition. This is because of the large influence and sense of importance that young people place in music. As the American Academy of Pediatrics states, young people use music to form a collective identity. Music influences and molds them as a whole and it is the base of their collective identity. This makes young people the most influential in determining what ultimately becomes popular. Young people don't stay young forever so as their youth fades, the next generation takes over and music preference changes along with the youth. This is why music changes in periods of decades in America. This also explains why generations seem to be divided by music preference. People favor the forms of music of their era, the same music of which they built their collective identity upon.

Opinions were more unified in earlier generations because the pool of popular music was a lot smaller. Music back then was a “cultural stabilizer” because of its small abundance of popular artists and sounds (Duke). In today's world, however these stabilizers are non-existent. Duke explains that this is because of social media and other platforms that give people “the ability to transmit ideas worldwide at a button's touch” and thus leads to a society “prone to continual arbitrary change” (Duke). This has led to a less universal musical identity of today's youth and has led to rapid changes

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and branching of popular music forms and tastes. Many would say that the large array of popular music and music as a whole is beautiful and exposes people to a bigger catalog of the artform and it this is the case but Duke and the American Academy of Pediatrics argue that there is also a negative aspect to this.

Duke states that this large difference in popular music forms means that “unlike an adult, who has become a relatively stable being more resistant to flights of fancy, it is like a child, prone to instability, undisciplined change (and hope?), and irrational emotionalism”. He argues that it has created a sense of instability among today’s youth. This goes back to researchers understanding of the importance of music as being a base of cultural identity of young people. People at that age tend to function better with a sense of stability, especially when it comes to stabilizing one’s self identity. It unifies a culture. Today’s youth has been divided and it’s collective identity defined and misunderstood by older generations (as expected) but it it broken up in several subcategories that can often be related back to popular music divergences.

Older generations have rather negative definitions of the popular music and tastes of today’s youth. Duke address this repulsion of older generations to today’s music when he states:

First we must overcome the old-fuddy-duddy phenomenon whereby we say “These kids today...” while reflexively viewing the ways and entertainment of our own generation as the gold standard. We have to ask ourselves: If our “day’s” music were part of a cultural-devolution process, would we know it?

Or like a frog spawned in a polluted pond, would we mistake its toxicity for normalcy?

Duke not only addresses the typical response of older generations to glorify the music of their time and look down upon all other eras of music, he also refers to today's popular music as being apart of a "cultural-devolution" and to a "polluted pond". This may seem harsh but there is good reason for his comments. Music has gotten increasingly more explicit. If you look at music 200-300 years ago, it was symphonic and beautiful, containing no lyrics or explicit content, but an exhilarating sound of orchestral instruments. In 1999, the National Institute on Media did an analysis of the top ten most popular CD's and found that "42% percent of the songs on these CDs contained very explicit sexual content" and these figures have gone up since then (American Academy).

There is no denying that music has become more explicit in its references to drugs, violence, and sexual content. Knowing this, the most important thing to look at is the impact this is having on the minds of people and the culture of today's youth. From earlier evidence, it is apparent that music has an affect on the human brain as well as create an emotional. It also enhances people's ability to retain words. Knowledge and ideas. So what happens when young people retain these more explicit ideas present in today's popular music? Many people have argued that kids just use music as a form of entertainment and pay little to no attention to the lyrics themselves. They focus more on the beat and catchiness of the rhythm. Research has shown though that this is not the case. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics ' it has been found that the more importance adolescents give to a

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certain type of music, the more attention they will pay to the lyrics". This meaning that people are paying attention to popular songs more so than any others and are retaining the messages that come along with them.

Regardless of how explicit they are.

What affects can the retention of these explicit messages have on young minds? According to a study done on the effect of lyrics on young people, those who listened to songs with sexually violent lyrics " showed significantly more negative stereotyped attitudes toward women than those in a group instead exposed to classical music" (American Academy). Also, in another study performed by Fischer and Greitemeyer, " men who listened to misogynistic lyrics showed increased aggressive responses toward women as well as a more negative perception of them" (American Academy). This evidence suggests that the explicit and negative messages within the lyrics of popular music can have a negative impact on the minds of those that listen to it. Given the historical and current evidence of the influential impact that music can have on entire cultures and bodies of people, this conclusion makes complete sense. Even children can tell if a song is sad or happy from a very young age (American Academy). The human body has instintual universal reactions to music. The fact that the human mind makes such emotional connections and responses to music leads one to understand how it is music and its lyrics can have on people.

Music is an art. It is beautiful and can be sculpted and crafted to form endless possibilities. But music is more than that. It is an artform of great complexity that affects people on countless levels. It has a more direct and universal emotional response and impact than any painting or sculpture ever

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could. Research has shown people that this is the case. Music has a direct emotional and even physical impact on people. So much so that it can allow for the creation of entire cultures and has done just that for centuries of human history. Like any artform, music also has its negative and darker sides. It's influential ability upon cultures is awe-inspiring and should be praised but it must also be recognised that it can also be destructive and detrimental if abused or used to spread the wrong messages. Music is the beauty at the base of our culture like it has been for countless cultures, one can only hope the future will fight to preserve her beauty.

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