The purpose of this project is to assess music’s emotional impact on an individual as well as the social implications of musical preference by means of ingrained stereotypes. Through a series of surveys, a sample of high school students from the High School of Health Sciences (HS²) at Kettle Moraine as well as from the Milwaukee Academy of Science (MAS) all submitted responses regarding their music preferences and perceptions. There were two main parts of the final survey: the first one inquired about preferences and perceptions of music, and the second one assessed their emotional reactions to a series of six song clips. A total of 130 students completed the survey, with kids at MAS doing the survey on pen and paper and kids at HS² doing the survey on google forms. Survey 1 results indicated a strong regard for the genre rap, and a more negative regard towards genres such as rock/metal. It was also found that the vast majority of participants from both schools felt that music influences behavior, leads to stereotyping, and can impact the way someone is treated. In the second survey, results indicated that each song was received differently within HS² and MAS. The results indicate that music does indeed affect a person’s temperament and social reception in the high school demographic, and that music preference varies with a person’s background. This is in line with the original thought that music can influence the way someone acts, carries themselves, and how others perceive them.

Music is something most teenagers experience everyday. Whether in the car, at the grocery store, or in our homes - it works to fill the silences and create for us an escape from reality. But since music is such a consistent presence in daily life, the subliminal effects it may have on people’s mentality and worldview may be underestimated. Music is brown for its ability to bring people together, and even bring people closer to themselves. But how do these two things go hand in hand? The impact music has is undeniably powerful, but to what extent?

Years of scientific study have revealed the dramatic effects music has on one’s mentality. But even though many prior studies have assessed the correlation between personal development and music, few have seemed to connect the effects music has on both personal emotions as well as social perceptions and the means by which musical preference is impacted by social biases. Most studies focus exclusively on one or the other. What our group seeks to explore is the potential correlation these entities share, and if the relationship is of significance. The question that arose was: ‘Do you think music influences the way you or others act? Do you believe that people who listen to more soothing music such as RB or Pop are not as “tough” as people who listen to Rock?’ The listening exercise was administered to the students via a powerpoint slide-set or an online survey that selected 30 second clips of music from 6 different genres. At MAS, the listening exercise was administered via a powerpoint presentation while HS² students participated in the exercise through an online survey. The songs played in the last section include: Humble by Kendrick Lamar, Smells Like Teen Spirit by Nirvana, Can’t Stand The Rain by New Edition, See You Again by Milly Cyrus, Young Folks by Peter Bjorn and John, and The Think’s My Tractor’s Sexy by Kenny Chesney. Students were asked to report on their emotional state before and after listening to the music clip (i.e. happy, content, neutral, distressed, very upset, unchanged).

RESULTS

In Figure 1, we show that Rap and R&B are more popular at MAS, while Rap, Pop and Country are more popular at HS². Figure 2 shows that 75% of the students at both schools agree that people are stereotyped based on the music they listen. As shown in Figure 3, again about three-fourths of the students agree that music makes people act a certain way.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the variety that exists between the two schools and their responses, the majority of all the teenage participants agreed that music influences behavior, contributes to stereotypes and can impact the way someone is treated. This implies that teenagers recognize the role music has on them and their peers. This kind of data shows the amount of influence music has on daily lives, and how it can be a tool for social categorization.

Students from both schools gravitated towards the Rap genre, demonstrating how prolific this genre is amongst adolescents. While Rap was the most popular genre in both schools, HS² had more of a liking towards Pop and Country, whereas MAS had a stronger liking for R&B. Of notable findings, 75% of students from both schools denied that musical genre preference suggests the listener is “tough”, while 75% of students also agreed that people are stereotyped based on the music they listen to.

The data presented here shows evidence that musical preferences differ with a person’s background and/or social environment. Additionally, one’s social environment can influence music preference as there was seen to be affirmation of stereotyping. This is directly in line with the initial hypothesis of the project.