



# Impact of Music on High School Students' Emotions and Perceptions within Southeastern Wisconsin



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## ABSTRACT

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 (HS<sup>2</sup>) 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 HS<sup>2</sup> 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 HS<sup>2</sup> 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.

## BACKGROUND

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 known 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 how does music impact one's emotional and social attitudes, and does the level of impact vary between people of different social backgrounds?

This research project is interested in evaluating music's emotional impact on an individual, as well as the social implications of musical preference by means of ingrained stereotypes. Initially, it was hypothesized that music has beneficial effects on one's temperament, but personal music preference is influenced by social backgrounds. To explore the emotional and social aspects of music, the team conducting this research project took a psychosocial approach. To gather such data, a series of surveys were sent out to highschool students at the Milwaukee Academy of Science as well as the Highschool of Health Sciences.

## METHODS

A survey was administered to a total of 130 students: 52 students from the High School of Health Sciences (HS<sup>2</sup>) and 78 students from the Milwaukee Academy of Sciences (MAS). Surveys at the Milwaukee Academy of Sciences were administered on pen and paper while the surveys administered at HS<sup>2</sup> were performed via google forms.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections: the first focused on student demographics, the second included genre-specific questions, the third included stereotype-related questions, and the last section included a listening exercise. Genre-specific questions included questions such as: "What is your favorite genre? What do you think is the most popular genre amongst your peers at your school?" Stereotype-related questions included questions such as: "Do you think music influences the way you or others act? Do you think people treat others differently based on the music they listen to? 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 Rap or 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 HS<sup>2</sup> 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 Miley Cyrus, Young Folks by Peter Bjorn and John, and She Thinks 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 HS<sup>2</sup>. 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.

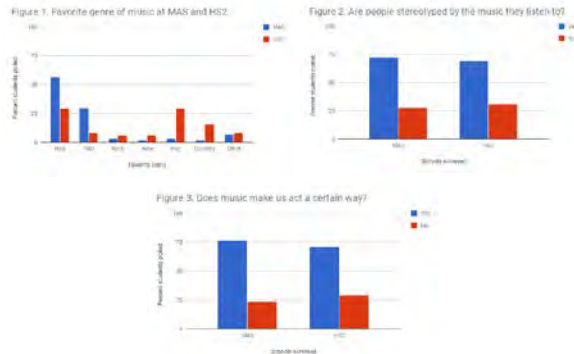
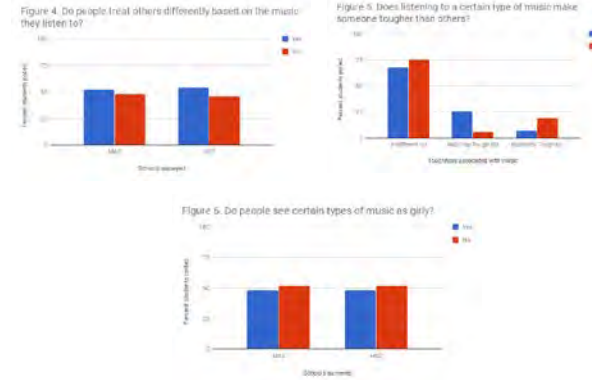


Figure 4 shows that both schools believe people don't treat others differently based on the music they listen to. It is seen in Figure 5 that 75% of survey participants think music does not determine if someone is tougher than others. Figure 6 shows that students have mixed opinions regarding certain types of music making someone "girly".



## 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 impact 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, HS<sup>2</sup> 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.