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***“Where words fail, music speaks”*: The Role of Influential Music in Shaping Young Adults’ Identities and Perspectives**

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“Where words fail, music speaks”: The Role of Influential Music in Shaping Young Adults' Identities and Perspectives

_____**Simanta Nandy and Sumedha Ghosh**

Abstract

Music has long been recognized as a powerful medium that resonates deeply with individuals, particularly among young adults who are in the process of self-discovery and identity formation. This abstract delves into the role of influential music in shaping the lives of young adults, exploring how music serves as a mirror reflecting their emotions, values, and societal awareness. In today's digital age, the accessibility of music across various platforms has amplified its influence on the lives of young adults. Through lyrics, melodies, and rhythms, music provides a means for self-expression, allowing individuals to find resonance with experiences and emotions they encounter.

Moreover, music often conveys messages of social and cultural significance, exposing young adults to diverse perspectives and fostering a sense of empathy and understanding. The impact of influential music extends beyond personal expression. It can become a tool for social change, as artists use their platform to raise awareness about pressing issues such as social justice, mental health, and environmental concerns. Music has the potential to mobilize young adults, encouraging them to engage in activism and advocacy, thereby fostering a sense of responsibility and agency within society.

In conclusion, influential music plays a multifaceted role in the lives of young adults, serving as a vehicle for self-expression, cultural exploration, and social awareness. As this abstract suggests, understanding the nuances of this influence is crucial for educators, parents, and society at large, in order to harness the positive potential of music while navigating its complexities in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

'Music was my refuge. I could crawl into the space between the notes and curl my back to loneliness.'

-----Maya Angelou

Music can have many social and psychological impacts and meanings for people at different periods of their development (Hargreaves, 1986; McPherson, 2006; North & Hargreaves, 2008). It can be a mother's lullaby, an artist's exploration and expression, a performer's dream and profession, a listener's passion and leisure, a social setting's ambiance, and a signifier of ritual. Music is a resource of considerable intellectual, artistic, cultural, technological, and economic breadth and depth. Music, to phrase it simply, is a way of holding on to life, when you sit in a darkened room, it's like the light that enters through the cracks of doors. Young people, especially, devote huge amounts of time and money to music listening (Roberts, Henriksen, & Foehr, 2009).

Time and again, as we walk past people, we hear them humming, we see young adults quoting lyrics of songs in their everyday lives, be it in essays, simple conversations, or even pasting posters of those lyrics in their homes. When asked about the same, they say how these lines help them hold on, how the distant tunes make them a bit less anxious in crowded rooms, and how all that they left unsaid, could be articulated through certain songs, some of which, have helped them grow, have helped them realise that in this crowd of stranger-like acquaintances, they are not alone. The main aim of this paper lies here, why and how music reshapes the thoughts of young adults, turns into a safe place, and holds importance in its entirety from their perspective.

'Without music, life would be a mistake.'

—Friedrich Nietzsche

From an evolutionary perspective, music could be an evolved psychological mechanism in as much as it seems to have been potentially adaptive for increasing our fitness for survival in terms of better mate selection, social cohesion, synchronised group effort, perceptual development, motor skill development, conflict reduction, safe time passing, transgenerational communication of culture, and self-regulation (Huron, 2003; McDermott & Hauser, 2005). From a contemporary perspective, music is mediated by and impacts some of our biological structures and processes (Peretz & Zatorre, 2003). Findings from brain lesion and neuroimaging studies indicate that musical processing is embedded within a complex network of cortical and subcortical pathways (Peretz & Zatorre, 2005). Music activates neurotransmitters involved in pleasure, dopamine (Menon & Levitin, 2005), modulates hormones involved in stress, cortisol (Khalifa, Dalla Bella, Roy, Peretz, & Lupien, 2003), and social bonding, oxytocin (Nilsson, 2009). Research also reveals the analgesic effects of music (Mitchell & MacDonald, 2006).

The psychological effects of music are obviously discussed throughout this article. But emotions are the quintessential example. In fact, the Oxford English Dictionary defines music as 'That one of the fine arts which is concerned with the combination of sounds with a view to beauty of form and the expression of emotion...' (1989, p. 126). Hence, it seems that common sense has explicitly taken for granted that music is mainly an emotional experience.

The psychology of music and emotions helps to better understand emotions as synchronised responses (cognitive appraisal, subjective feeling, physiological response, expression, action tendency, and regulation) to changes in the environment (Juslin, Liljeström, Västfjäll, Barradas,

& Silva, 2008). This area of research also contributes to our understanding of how musical emotions interact with key psychological phenomena (e.g. cognitions, aesthetics, motivation, performance, creativity, personality, social behaviours, health, and cross-cultural similarities and differences; Juslin & Sloboda, 2010). Experimental methods developed by the psychology of music offer sound methodological and ethical strategies to induce and manipulate strong emotions in laboratory settings (Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008). Correlational studies use experience sampling methods to shed light on how music can elicit complex patterns of positive and negative emotions during the unfolding of our daily lives (Juslin et al., 2008). Worthy of note, this field of studies is advancing our knowledge about the mechanisms explaining how music induces emotions (e.g. brain stem reflexes, evaluative conditioning, emotional contagion, visual imagery, episodic memory, and musical expectancy; Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008). Furthermore, a promising research direction is that music can serve the adaptive purpose of emotion regulation (Chamorro-Premuzic, Gomà-i-Freixanet, Furnham, & Muro, 2009). Considering the affect theory in music, one can talk about the physical responses brought about by songs as well as the emotional atmosphere hence created. We often see, how, in horror films, the use of eerie music adds much more to the content than is achieved by only the visual impact. One can also consider the use of affect theory in media, and even in communicating with certain autistic masses who connect and react more to the music that pulls them than to the everyday way of communication. The affect theory thus serves as a more specific approach if one decides to draw a parallel between the psychological and emotional aspects of influential music in young adults.

Individuals with autism often show interest in, and a positive response to, listening, playing, and producing music (Kern & Aldridge, 2006; Starr & Zenker, 1998; Wigram & Gold, 2006). Music offers structure and predictability which those with ASD often prefer (Allen, Hill, & Heaton,

2009; Attwood, 2007). Allen and colleagues (2009) found that those with ASD reported benefiting from music in many ways, including helping to change their mood, reducing feelings of depression, having a therapeutic healing effect, and providing feelings of belonging and social connectedness. These responses to music are similar to those reported by typically developing populations and show that music can greatly impact those with ASD. Their findings also demonstrate that those with ASD have considerable insight into music as well as its effects on them (Ashleigh Hillier, Gena Greher, Nataliya Poto, and Margaret Dougherty, 2011).

In closing, developmental psychology would probably benefit from capitalising on the huge amounts of music that adolescents already listen to every day. More research on the role of music in positive adolescent development is not only about how adolescents could use music to optimise their development but mostly about how adolescents have been maintaining resilience and thriving by creatively using music as an everyday resource.

The potential influence of music on adolescents' risky behaviours (e.g. substance use, risky sexuality, self-harm) is also receiving a lot of attention. Popular songs can convey great amounts of messages about drugs; and adolescents' exposure to such lyrics is associated with their actual substance use (Primack, Douglas, & Kraemer, 2009). The influence of musical subcultures on adolescents' substance use also seems to be partially mediated by their socialisation with substance-using peers (Mulder, ter Bogt, Raaijmakers, Gabhainn, Monshouwer, & Vollebergh, 2009). Nonetheless, Miranda, Gaudreau, Morizot, and Fallu (2012) used a sociometric design (peer nomination) to show that fantasising while listening to music may act as a protective factor against the influence of peer substance use on individual substance use in adolescence.

In terms of risky sexuality, a two-year follow-up study found that adolescents' exposure to music with degrading sexual lyrics predicted early sexual activities and intercourse (Martino et al., 2006). Another 12-month longitudinal study showed that greater exposure to 'gangsta' rap music predicted risky sexual behaviours among African American female adolescents living in lower socio-economic-status neighbourhoods (Wingood et al., 2003). Rap music is often known for having questionable lyrical content including references to misogyny, violence, and alcohol (Herd, 2014; Kubrin, 2005; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009). Such lyrics must be taken into account while talking about the influence of rap music on young adults. However, keeping this in mind, several music therapists have time and again, used rap music for the treatment of their clients, based on their affinity towards the same. Even though certain such studies end with most of the clients having a neutral response to such music, there are still quite a few recommendations and new ways that might be used so as to increase the exposure to such music for the betterment of several clients, as many clients were found to find rap music extremely comforting.

The role of influential music in shaping the lives of young adults has been a subject of significant research interest, as it offers insights into the profound impact that music can have on individuals' emotions, values, and societal awareness. This exploration delves into the intricate ways in which music functions as a powerful mirror, reflecting and sometimes even amplifying the experiences and perspectives of young adults.

Music has a unique ability to resonate with the emotional landscapes of young adults, providing a platform for them to express and process their feelings. Lyrics, melodies, and rhythms often resonate with their personal struggles, joys, and uncertainties, allowing them to find solace and connection through shared experiences. Whether it's a heartbreak ballad that mirrors their own

relationship tribulations or an anthemic track that bolsters their self-confidence, music becomes a safe haven for navigating the complex emotions of youth.

Furthermore, music serves as a vehicle for young adults to explore and solidify their values. Lyrics can convey messages of empowerment, social justice, love, and resilience, aligning with the values and beliefs that they hold dear. Artists who advocate for important causes through their music can inspire young listeners to engage with and take action on societal issues, fostering a sense of purpose and a commitment to positive change. In this way, music not only mirrors their values but also guides them towards greater social awareness and responsibility.

Societal awareness is another pivotal aspect influenced by influential music. Through thought-provoking lyrics and poignant compositions, music has the power to challenge prevailing norms and shed light on critical societal topics. Artists who address issues such as inequality, discrimination, mental health, and environmental concerns create a space for young adults to engage in conversations they might not otherwise have been exposed to. As music echoes the pulse of contemporary society, it encourages young listeners to reflect on their roles within the larger context and fosters a more inclusive and empathetic worldview.

The messages embedded within music often reflect the values, beliefs, and experiences of the artists and the communities they represent. Genres such as hip-hop, folk, punk, and reggae have historically functioned as platforms for marginalized voices to express their narratives, highlighting struggles for justice, equality, and human rights. Lyrics and melodies are imbued with stories of triumph over adversity, calls for social change, and reflections on the complexities of life. This exposure to diverse perspectives can spark curiosity in young adults, motivating them to delve deeper into the cultural and historical contexts behind the music. The Imphal

Talkies and the Howlers, a band from Manipur, India, has Ronidkumar Chingangbam, its founder, singer, and songwriter, who writes songs in Meiteilon and English, uses these songs to bash the draconian law, and certain institutions that have tried to erase the native culture and force the Manipuri identity in its place. The songs have such lyrics that appeal to young adults and often shape their identities and urge them to speak up against what clearly is wrong. Young listeners thus may participate in activism, attend related events, and use music as a rallying point for social change.

Music has long served as a powerful medium for conveying messages of social and cultural significance, particularly among young adults. With its ability to transcend linguistic and geographic boundaries, music becomes a conduit through which diverse perspectives are shared and understood. This process of exposure to varying viewpoints fosters empathy and a deeper understanding of different cultures and societal issues. As young adults engage with music, they are not merely passive listeners but active participants in a dialogue that transcends language barriers, fostering a sense of connection to global issues.

Moreover, the emotional resonance of music enhances its capacity to evoke empathy. The melodies, harmonies, and rhythms woven into songs create an immersive experience that taps into a listener's emotions. Whether through poignant lyrics or evocative instrumental compositions, music has the power to evoke feelings of joy, sorrow, nostalgia, and introspection. This emotional connection further bridges the gap between cultures and generations, enabling young adults to connect with experiences and emotions they might not have encountered otherwise. A wide range of emotions have been studied and described in terms of physiological responses, accompanying cognitions and associated environmental events. However, the feeling,

which is the experiential component, has often been neglected (Ramaprasad, 2013). Feeling, termed as “affect” is the most complex component and cannot be understood by analyzing emotions into parts. This experiential aspect has been central to the Indian approach to understanding human nature. “Affect” as a feature and function of the “person” and the nature of one who experiences it has been the focus of the Indian tradition of understanding human nature. The concept of *rasa* or aesthetic relish or aesthetic mood is central to this approach to understanding effective experiences as dealt with in the *Natyashastra* of Bharathamuni (commentary by Abhinavagupta, 11 century). Sage Bharata conceptualized the *rasa* theory in the context of drama and theatre, which was later, extended to all poetry and other performing art forms. In this ancient Indian text of dramatics, all three components, i.e., physiological/behavioural, cognitive, and feelings are dealt with in detail. Systematic efforts to understand emotions in music are quite recent (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010). Music psychology mostly came to explore more ‘basic’ perceptual and cognitive processes involved in music listening (Deutsch, 1999). In reviving Leonard B. Meyer’s (1956) classic theory about musical expectations, Sloboda (1991) showed that ‘cognition’ and ‘emotion’ might not be far apart as one would think. Indeed, emotional responses to music require cognition (broadly defined) (Dr. Durgesh K. Upadhyay, 2014)

In an era characterized by increasing globalization, music's role in fostering empathy and understanding among young adults is more vital than ever. It provides a space where cultural and social boundaries can be crossed, where dialogue can flourish, and where bridges can be built between disparate communities. The transformative potential of music lies not only in its ability to entertain but also in its capacity to serve as a catalyst for personal growth and societal change. As young adults engage with music that conveys messages of social and cultural significance,

they are not only embracing a rich tapestry of human experience but also contributing to the cultivation of a more compassionate and interconnected world.

Music has long been recognized as a powerful tool for social change and mobilization, particularly among young adults. The intertwining of music and activism has historically played a significant role in shaping societal attitudes, sparking movements, and encouraging civic engagement. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in how music can galvanize young adults, inspiring them to participate in activism and advocacy, thus nurturing a heightened sense of responsibility and agency within society.

One of the key mechanisms through which music mobilizes young adults is its ability to evoke emotions and resonate with personal experiences. Lyrics, melodies, and rhythms have an innate ability to tap into the emotional core of individuals, creating a connection that transcends cultural, linguistic, and geographical boundaries. This emotional resonance can serve as a catalyst for inspiring empathy and solidarity, leading young adults to identify with social and political issues that might otherwise seem distant or abstract.

Moreover, music provides a platform for artists to express dissenting opinions and shed light on injustices. Musicians have often used their art to address pressing societal concerns, from civil rights to climate change. Through their work, they can challenge prevailing norms, question authority, and amplify marginalized voices. This capacity to voice alternative perspectives and critique the status quo resonates strongly with young adults who are increasingly seeking avenues to express their own discontent and catalyze change.

The communal nature of music consumption further contributes to its mobilizing potential. Concerts, festivals, and online communities create spaces for like-minded individuals to gather, exchange ideas, and collectively reflect on social issues. These shared experiences foster a sense of belonging and camaraderie, reinforcing the notion that individual actions can contribute to larger collective efforts. The sense of unity and collective purpose that emerges from such gatherings can ignite young adults' motivation to channel their enthusiasm and energy into concrete activism and advocacy initiatives.

In conclusion, the mobilizing power of music among young adults is a potent force for encouraging activism and advocacy. Its ability to evoke emotions, provide a platform for dissent, foster communal experiences, and educate individuals makes it a multifaceted tool for inspiring a sense of responsibility and agency within society. As the world continues to grapple with pressing challenges, harnessing the potential of music to galvanize young adults can contribute to a more engaged, empathetic, and socially conscious generation that actively contributes to shaping a just and equitable future.

Music, a universal and deeply emotive medium, has a profound impact on individuals across various age groups and backgrounds. Researchers have extensively explored the intricate relationship between music and cognitive development, emotional expression, and social bonding. Consequently, educators are presented with a unique opportunity to leverage music as a potent tool for enhancing learning experiences. By incorporating carefully curated musical elements into educational curricula, teachers can potentially facilitate improved memory retention, heightened attention spans, and increased engagement among students.

Furthermore, music's influence extends beyond individual development and encompasses broader societal dynamics. Music has historically served as a powerful vehicle for conveying social and cultural messages, sparking movements, and uniting communities. The digital age has amplified music's potential for mobilization, making it a potent tool for advocacy and change. Educators and parents can harness this potential by encouraging students to critically analyze the socio-political messages embedded in music, fostering a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and promoting empathy.

In conclusion, the exploration of the role of influential music in shaping the lives of young adults unveils a dynamic relationship between music and personal development. By serving as a mirror for emotions, values, and societal awareness, music provides a means for young adults to navigate the complex journey of self-discovery and social engagement. This research underscores the transformative potential of music in empowering and guiding the next generation as they navigate the challenges and opportunities of the modern world. Unraveling the intricate impact of music within our ever-evolving digital landscape requires a comprehensive understanding of its nuances. Educators, parents, and society at large stand to benefit from this understanding as they seek to harness the positive potential of music while navigating its complexities. By integrating music into education, guiding responsible musical consumption, and fostering critical analysis, stakeholders can empower individuals to embrace music's transformative power while fostering responsible engagement with the art form. As technology continues to reshape how we experience and interact with music, the significance of this nuanced comprehension becomes even more imperative.

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