

The Emotional, Developmental, Social, and Positive Intersectionalities Between Music and Psychology

-- An Thorough Investigation of the Relationship between Music and the Mind

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Abstract: Music is an expression of human experiences. It tremendously influences the life of an individual, especially for adolescents. This paper tackles the impact of music on adolescents and the intersectionality between music and psychology through a psychological perspective. The discussion of the association between music and psychology for adolescents is divided into four aspects, including emotional, developmental, social, and positive. Along with the growth and development of teenagers, music is a powerful facilitator and medium for mood regulation and personal expression. As music continues to cast a lasting influence on the psyche of adolescents, research on its psychological functions is necessary.

Keywords: Music; Psychology; Adolescents; Emotions; Identity; Social connections; Well-being; Development

1. Introduction

Throughout human history, music, alongside other art forms, has been crucial in shaping our understanding of our world, our lives, and ourselves. Music serves as a powerful facilitator to express individualistic and collective experiences, ranging from interpersonal relationships to life crossroads of personal identity and emotions that escalate to be more outwardly shown through music. In order to obtain a well-rounded understanding of music and its value to humans, one must not ignore its profound correlation with psychology, the idea of “externalizing the internal,” and how music assists one to engage in themselves and their experiences with others^[1].

This paper mainly focuses on adolescents, as an individual's adolescence massively influences their adulthood. At the same time, music is ubiquitous in the lives of younger generations^[2]. It provides insight as to how an individual will approach the world as an adult, due to its ability to carve personality and identity. Music possesses a lasting influence that extends far beyond adolescence.

Emotionally, there is a correlation between music and the adolescent mind that is fundamental in music's ability to regulate mood. Developmentally, music provides adolescents a sense of independence and opportunity to explore their gender and sexual identity. Socially, music is powerful when cultivating a sense of belonging and exposing adolescents to social media. Positively, music can improve the well-being of individuals, supplying them with a sense of achievement, direction, and creative inspiration.

2. Study: Music and Psychology

2.1 Music & Emotional Psychology

Among the four branches of psychology that intersect with music, emotion is the most prominent. Suvi Laiho^[3] developed a model for understanding the psychological components of music, including interpersonal relationships, identity, agency, and emotional field. The emotional field addresses music as indispensable to an adolescent's processing of emotions. Miranda and Claes^[4] also illustrated that among the three proposed reasons why adolescents engage with music, including emotional management, problem-solving, and avoidance through listening to music, emotional management is the most significant. The ways teenagers engage with music exists in various forms, such as listening, performing, or learning. Many studies have explored the different reasons for engaging in musical activities and concluded that mood regulation is among the essential reasons. Music, as an avenue to access emotions, stems from the psychological definition of emotion to be a synchronized response (Eg. cognitive appraisal, subjective feeling, physiological response, expression, action tendency, and regulation) to various changes in the environment^[5]. Music can positively influence an adolescent's emotional sensitivity and ability to empathize. From being a reason for musical engagement to serving as an important psychological response to music, emotion is at the center of the crossroads between psychology and music.

When adolescents utilize music for mood regulation, its aim can be divided into two goals: mood improvement and mood control ^[6]. In other words, one chooses to engage in music due to the desire to access their emotions in order to alter their current state of mind, or to intensify their current feelings. Wells and Hakanen ^[7] found that the most frequent mood-regulatory uses of music were “get me pumped up”, “strengthen my mood”, and “lift my spirits, ” which correlates with the intention of changing from a negative headspace to a more positive one. Adolescents also view music listening as a resource to fulfill their needs, one of the most pressing needs being distraction from distress ^[8]. Due to physical, mental, hormonal, and other changes adolescents experience, they are more prone to mood swings and sensitivity. Turning to music to tackle these complicated and often confusing emotions can be seen as an act of seeking solace ^[9]. Besides using music to change mood, it is not uncommon for an adolescent to reinforce their moods through music as well. Reinforcement of an already delightful mood includes attending dances, singing, playing instruments of one’s choice, and listening to songs that are similar to the mood they are currently in. Adolescents can also vent their negative feelings through aggressive music, searching for comfort by maintaining their negative mood with melancholic music ^[10]. A teenager’s choice to maintain their negative mood with emotional music can be understood as a desire to gain a better understanding of their feelings ^[3].

Music, as an art form, appeals to adolescents because of emotional expression. Lehtonen ^[1] emphasizes that music serves meta-structure into one place personal meanings, which are formed through the evaluation of experiences and the associated emotion. Through various musical activities, emotional expression is achieved because an individual feels that they’ve found resonance and recognition. However, because music is so powerful in conveying certain experiences and personal meanings, it can also come with the cost of amplifying extreme emotions and thoughts that can be problematic. For instance, experiments were conducted to demonstrate that antisocial songs induce antisocial thoughts and feelings in adolescents because adolescents find connection with the confusion and intense emotions these songs portray ^[11]. As a result, adolescents are likely to engage in problematic behaviors such as indulging in drugs and alcohol because they want to experience the emotions portrayed in those songs. In addition, when turning to melancholic songs in order to express their negative emotions, adolescents are also more likely to internalize their struggles and experience depression ^[12].

Still, music can largely bring positivity and resonate with the happier memories of individuals. Miranda and Claes ^[13] found that African American music (Soul, R&B, Hip-hop, etc) can help fight depression and negative emotions. African-American music often conveys positive lyrics, powerful narratives, and vivid imagery, which explores themes of resilience, self-esteem, coping, and cultural pride ^[14]. The positivity African-American music bring not only illustrates the association of music with emotional expression, but also that music can be employed to cast positive influence on adolescents and lead them to more positive personal life experiences. Subsequently, the versatility of music in engaging with various forms and degrees of emotions demonstrates how greatly music can impact the psyche of an individual.

2.2 Music & Developmental Psychology

Throughout adolescence, music continuously acts as an influence on the growth and development of teenagers. Adolescence, in developmental psychology terms, refers to the transition and the building of plasticity from childhood to adulthood, in which transactions between a predisposed individual and his or her changing social environment are intertwined ^{[15][16][17]}. It is during this period of one’s development that the use and engagement of music are found to increase substantially: on average, adolescents listen to music for up to three hours daily and accumulate more than 10, 000 hours of active music listening throughout adolescence ^{[18][19][20]}. The gradual increase in music listening along with entering adolescence for teenagers pinpoints the correlation that music plays a significant role in the development of a teenager. In order to explore the specific function of music for adolescents, researchers have developed applicable models to explain this phenomenon, one of which is Laiho’s model of interpersonal relationships, identity, agency, and emotional field mentioned earlier in music and emotional psychology. Identity and agency are two principal dimensions that address the relationship between music and adolescent development. In a study using factor analysis regarding the functions of music, Lonsdale and North ^[21] constructed another model that consists of eight dimensions. In the study, identity appears again alongside positive and negative mood management, reminiscing, diversion, arousal, surveillance, and social interaction. Thus, the concept of identity proves to be vital in understanding the association between adolescence and music. Identity can be categorized into two types: identity related to the mental aspects of teenage development, independence, and self-control, and identity related to the physical aspects of teenage development, gender identification, and sexuality.

As individuals enter adolescence, they begin to engage with more music, growing personal preferences for favorite artists, genre of music, lyrics, and other aspects. Because no two people share identical music tastes, distinctive songs, musical styles, bands, and personal musical activities can all be an important part of identity for adolescents ^[3]. Music taste can also provide insight into the inner world of an adolescent, present a sense of “real” self, and construct a feeling of continuity in life ^{[22][23][24][25]}.

At this moment, the idea of “authenticity” – whether the values of the song align with the values the teenager holds – comes into play. Adolescents can be very strict about genres they dislike, and styles that do not fit their identity or values. A seventeen-year-old boy who loves

upbeat pop is likely to have a drastically different identity than one who loves aggressive hip-hop and rap. The boy who loves pop may love those songs because he is much more outgoing and feels more connected to light-hearted messages. In contrast, the other boy loves hip-hop because he feels more connected to the heavier themes. If one forces the former to love hip-hop, it may be challenging because the boy is likely to feel that hip-hop is more distant from his personality and values. The musical genres, messages, and overall mood each adolescent prefers are unique, indicating their unique identity and their ways of seeing the world.

Furthermore, along with their exploration of identity, adolescents gain independence and control through musical engagement. As a ubiquitous diversion, accessing music is simple: a musical world can be created anywhere by singing, humming, and tapping^[26]. Through music, teenagers can create a mental space where they can enjoy, find personal meanings, and feel independent because the musical world they created is only shared by themselves. Engaging with music is a conscious act for adolescents. The intrinsic aspect of music is particularly significant because adolescents seem to be motivated in places that are furthest from adult control. During adolescence, a time of drastic changes and confusion, music may be one of the few things over which they have an effective control^[3]. For example, some adolescents love to listen to music at a high volume because it is a reflection of the intense emotions they are experiencing. By leaning into the intensity, volume, and “roughness” of those songs, these individuals feel that the intensity is a part of their identity^[6]. Controlling the volume of their music symbolizes controlling the turmoil of their life, and they find comfort in the way they control their music.

Volume is only one instance of how adolescents sense control over themselves. In general, simply selecting which songs they feel like listening to, which artist they feel like seeing, or simply if they want to listen to music or not is an act of control. The concept of control refers to the word “agency”: the ability to feel that life is manageable^[27]. Therefore, having agency for adolescents is particularly significant as they can feel close to who they are.

Lastly, music opens the door for adolescents to explore their gender and their sexuality. In modern-day music, many songs of pop culture are heavily related to themes of love, which provides insights into gender roles and potential stereotypes about romantic relationships for teenagers. Unfortunately, North and Hargreaves^[28] report studies showing that songs’ lyrics that convey gender stereotypes may encourage gender stereotyping and even sexism during youth. Still, the portrayal of love and sex in modern-day music is an opportunity for teenagers to reflect on the ideas of gender and romance. Furthermore, by comparing their personal experiences to the ones portrayed in different songs, adolescents can explore their opinions on their gender, who they are attracted to, and ultimately, who they are.

2.3 Music & Social Psychology

Music fosters a feeling of belonging and connection among adolescents, serving as a worthwhile avenue for cultivating social identity. For adolescents, belonging and building successful interpersonal relationships is crucial because they are not only discovering their personal identity but also the meaning of their existence in the bigger context of this world. Music happens to be a noteworthy facilitator in helping teenagers find their sense of belonging. When individuals become acquainted, they often use music preferences to manage social impressions and evaluate each other’s similarities^[29]. When teenagers find others whose music taste is similar, they feel more comfortable forming deeper connections with them through discussing music. Music tastes can thereby be utilized as a “badge” about one’s personality by individuals to distinguish people who are similar to them, form meaningful relationships, and discern those who are more distant^[28]. The concept of embracing people who are similar and mildly pushing away people who are divergent refers to the important notion of in-group and out-group in social psychology. As Hargreaves^[30] note in their review, adolescents can use music preferences to enhance their social identity by creating exclusive group norms which distinguish their “in-group” from an “out-group,” demonstrating the influential characteristic of music that facilitates the formation of social circles. In larger social situations, music also provides topics for conversations, fills the silence, and serves as a mood-modifying background for romantic moments like dances, parties, or dating^[3]. Thus, music can be portrayed as a “social lubricant” because it eliminates the distance between two individuals and accelerates the rate relationships in all social settings are formed, similar to an enzyme. Comprehending music as a similarity between themselves and others, adolescents utilize music to discover their sense of belonging and cultivate their social identity.

As music aids adolescents in building connections and their feeling of belonging, adolescents are active participants during the process of using music to connect with others. For them, engaging with music is a conscious choice. In many situations, music festivals best establish the intersection between music and social psychology that individuals actively participate in engaging with music. Music festivals offer musical engagement opportunities that are more active than in other settings, for the majority of attendees of music festivals buy tickets, work out transportation plans, and other independent matters all based on intrinsic motivation to see the artist or band they personally enjoy^[31]. For participants, the thrill of physical proximity to the performer and social interaction with other attendees is vital, illustrating the “actively participating” aspect of engaging with music^{[32][33][34]}. As a result of their active participation, young people are able to utilize music’s impact on the social aspects of their life to develop meaningful associations with others and socialize based on their personal experiences and preferences. In addition, when adolescents are by themselves, they fantasize while listening to music, in which they imagine social scripts and rehearse social

skills while using music as the soundtrack ^[35]. For instance, a teenager may imagine themselves winning a game with their teammates while listening to songs often played when their team trains. Another teenager may imagine themselves talking to someone they like as they listen to a romantic song. Rehearsing social settings and turning to music for support again demonstrates the active nature of music, as adolescents employ it when anticipating potential situations where they are required to connect with others. Thus, while music assists connection-building and belonging-seeking for adolescents, adolescents also actively choose music instead of allowing music to passively impact their social relationships.

Music exposes adolescents to social media, which prompts them to assess their self-image. Nowadays, music is heavily related to culture and business, which includes placing pop stars under the spotlight and magnifying their behaviors and overall lifestyle. Kistler and collaborators ^[36] found that adolescents evaluate their physical attractiveness and self-worth by comparing themselves with music media characters. As they compare themselves with these famous characters, they search for their social identity, evaluating whether they have reached the standard these celebrities have set and fit in with society. Through social learning, or modeling, adolescents also passionately imitate the ways in which celebrities act, dress, interact with others, and more ^[37]. In a way, music can represent the complications of adulthood that extend further beyond, influencing the development of adolescents. However, it can be problematic that many depictions of music media personas are overly idealistic; idealism can potentially cause the lowering of self-esteem and self-worth for adolescents because they believe they are not perfect or attractive enough for their society. In essence, music's exposure of media to adolescents can massively influence the ways adolescents evaluate their place and value among other people and within the bigger society.

2.4 Music and Positive Psychology

Music supplies adolescents with a sense of fulfillment, which boosts their self-efficacy and overall well-being. For many adolescents, music is an important passion for them to pursue. Many teenagers play an instrument, sing, dance, and are involved in some type of performing group in their school; they treat learning music and improving musical skills as a significant part of their lives. Musical hobbies give adolescents experiences of accomplishing something meaningful, and strengthen their belief in their hobbies ^[3]. When an individual fully delves into music, they devote an astonishing amount of hours to improving and practicing, which requires courage and possesses stress. Passionate teenagers will commit to giving their best effort in the project they are involved in because they view their it as something meaningful and deserving of their time. When a complicated musical task is finished, many adolescents will feel that their hard work has paid off. Then, they attain a sense of accomplishment because their love for music is exhibited. As adolescents continue to motivate themselves to explore their form of musical practice, they also develop a progressively boosting self-confidence as their devotion to music generates payoff. Therefore, it is the passion for music and music itself that gave rise to those who played instruments an increase in self-esteem and sense of identity, and many other teenagers who love other forms of music ^[38]. As a culminating result of their love, their hard work, and their ultimate sense of achievement, many adolescents who enjoy music are happier and more fulfilled in their confusing and bustling lives.

Besides attainment, music can provide adolescents with a sense of purpose in their lives. For teenagers, boredom is a common phenomenon. Indeed, the tight schedules teenagers face every day can be particularly challenging, but their bustling life also comes with a sacrifice that they are constantly overwhelmed by the amount of new information and opinions they receive. When the overwhelming influence from the external environment crashes with a stable identity yet to be formed, adolescents can be bored not because they have nothing to do, but because they have so much to choose from that they cannot find something truly meaningful they want to commit to. At this moment, music can serve as a perfect antidote for boredom because it can be a hobby or even a passion. Thus, enjoyment of music refreshes and revitalizes, helps to fight boredom, and gives energy to face the challenges of everyday life as teenagers find that music is their new sense of direction ^[39]. Whether it's as minimalistic as listening to music for relaxation or as tremendous as determining to putting together a band, adolescents can use music as a purpose, something they find themselves intrinsically motivated to enjoy. Consequently, various musical experiences can produce a sense of well-being, stability, wholeness, and purpose in life ^[3].

Music fosters creativity and encourages adolescents to value originality, which increases their self-esteem. Adolescents have been maintaining resilience and thriving by using music as an everyday source, and creativity can present in many different forms ^[14]. From borrowing a simple idea from a song they listened to in their school assignment all the way to engaging in songwriting and music production, it is not rare for adolescents to engage in some type of music-related creative work in their everyday lives. Despite its different forms, musical creativity at its core facilitates adolescents to healthily express their thoughts and feelings in an abstract, profound form. In addition, creativity is particularly valuable because no two creations can be called identical; each creation is original and unique, pertaining to the creator and the creator only. As a result, adolescents will discover a clearer sense of self-worth as they feel their thoughts and emotions are communicated and validated through something that represents themselves. In the end, their self-esteem increases, and their creativity and inspiration augments.

Music is a principal facet of positive psychology because it provides adolescents with a sense of achievement, purpose, and uniqueness. These sensations culminate in the positivity and happiness they feel, helping them to recognize a growth in their overall well-being.

3. Intersections Between Multiple Branches

Many psychological implications of music can be categorized across multiple branches of psychology. For instance, while adolescents form social groups using music, they are, in fact, using their personal identity to form these social groups. Musical activities help an individual to experience and understand their relations in all complexity. In addition to this intersection between social and developmental psychology, emotional and developmental psychology intertwine as the desire of an adolescent to obtain self-control over their life is often based on their desire to obtain regulation over their emotions. For teenagers, it is easy to switch between and decide which artist or which mood of music they would like to engage with at a given moment: advanced technology and convenient streaming platforms make this accessible. Adolescents' ability to make independent musical choices in order to maximize their listening experience symbolizes a moment of self-control in their process of growing their identity. However, different genres of music are largely associated with different emotions conveyed in a song. Adolescents often switch between songs and genres because they want their musical experience to reflect the state of mind and the emotion they are experiencing, which supports the notion that mood regulation is about employing different musical styles for different emotional needs [8]. As a result, having control over music is an authentic reflection of the need for emotions, which illustrates the connection between emotional and developmental psychology that music glues together. Finally, emotional and positive psychology are interwoven as music is often used as a diversion and conveyance of positive mood. While enjoying music, individuals achieve the purpose of emotional regulation and a better state of well-being simultaneously as their positive emotions influence their overall sense of contentment. Thus, the uplifting spirit of music facilitates individuals to immerse in that uplifting mood, benefiting their well-being in the long run as they continue to listen to music.

4. Conclusion

Music is an integral part of an individual's life; it is a facilitator, an active role, and a lasting influence on the emotional, developmental, social, and positive facets of one's psyche. Music is tightly related to the emotions of an adolescent as they are utilized as a medium for mood regulation and emotional expression. Music also profoundly impacts the growth and development of a teenager. Since music can be a common experience between two adolescents, they can connect with each other, find each other as support, and confide in bothersome feelings and thoughts. As their relationships grow while they delve deeper into their common musical activity, they are able to enjoy the delightful sense of a meaningful and authentic connection stemming from a common passion, eventually positively impacting their well-being and self-esteem.

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