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## Music as Influence: How has society been shaped by musical genres throughout history?

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# How has society been shaped by musical genres throughout history? (cody Poulin)

## Introduction

Over the past century, thousands of musical genres have been created and more are being created each and every day. What impact might these genres have on the society in which they are formed, and why are they formed in the first place?

It is important to consider the impact that these genres may have on the society they form in, and to observe whether or not they hold any lasting effect. An example would be to consider whether or not modern day rap music holds any significance compared to the rap revolution of the 90's. One way to observe a genres significance is to learn trace its roots and discover where it originally came from.

The goal of this project was to gain a personal understanding of why genres are formed, and to better understand what societal factors may have influenced their creation.

In order to learn about a variety of genres in a brief time period, research was conducted using expert texts. In addition, a small sample of students at the University of Rhode Island were administered a survey in an effort to discover what students felt about multiple genres, and what may have influenced their preferences in music.

## Methods & Research

### Research

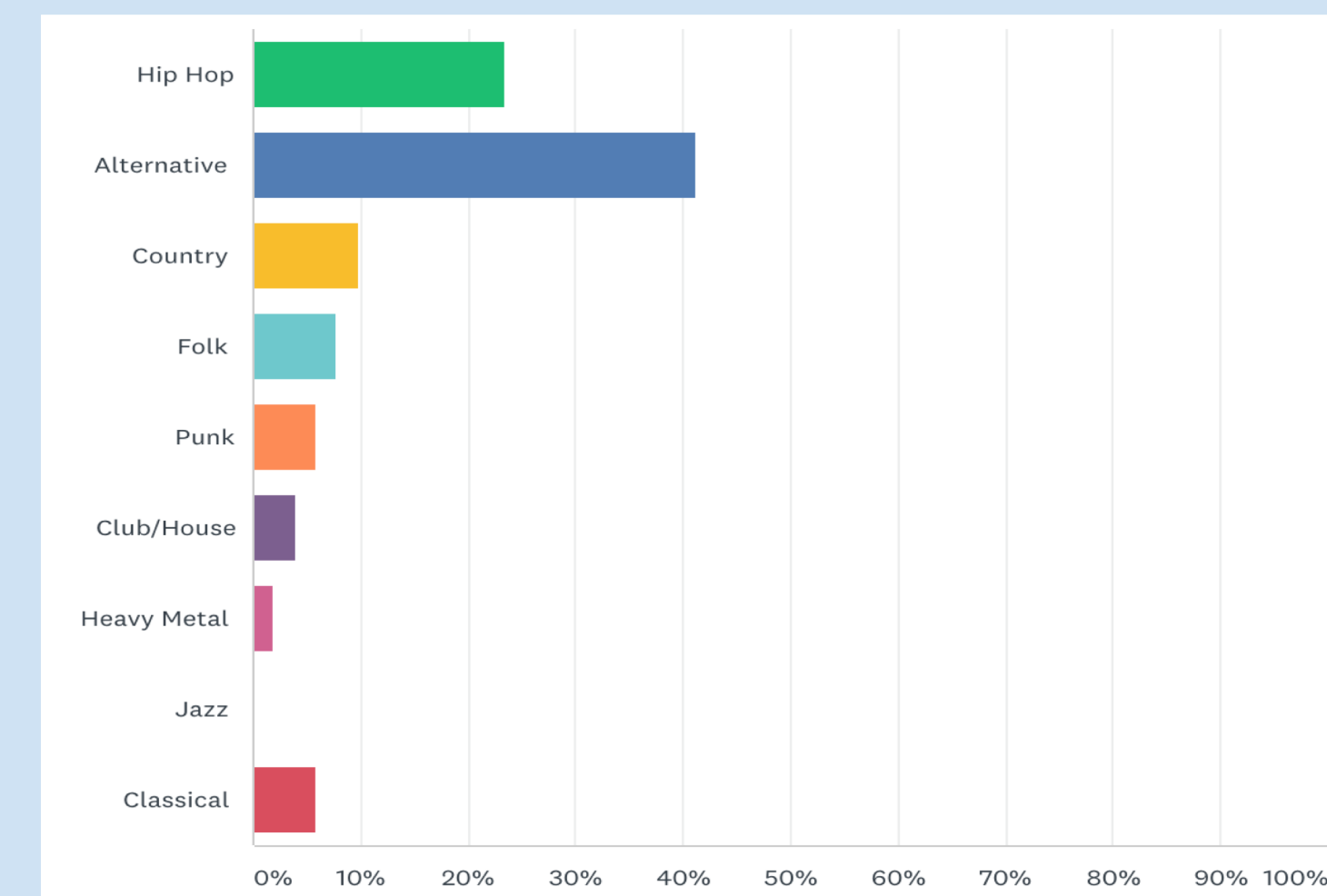
- **Globalization** is a driving force between the exchange of musical ideas and cultures.
- Highly influential factors in the creation of musical genres:
  - **Geographical Location** - a genres location of origin influences not only the style, but the longevity of the genre itself.
  - **Evolution** - Many genres come to life through a desire to create a different sound than what is popular. This evolution of a genres sound often pulls from styles that are already established, leaving a traceable connection between most genres'.
  - **Demand** - Often, genres form alongside the needs of society. For example, many Jazz styles were created to satisfy a culture that wished for music they could dance to. As a result of that demand, a more upbeat swing form and big band Jazz rose to popularity.
  - **Necessity** - Sometimes, genres are formed because it is what society needs. Work-songs were a comforting tool for African American slaves who were forced to do work against their will in the early United States. A similar, but more modern example would be the rise of rap music on the west coast in the 90's, as artist such as Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls attacked police brutality and the unjust treatment of African Americans.
  - **Familial Impact** - We are influenced by those we are close with, such as our parents. We often shape our musical preferences by what we hear at a young age.

### Survey

- The goal of my survey, titled "musical genres and society", was to collect information that focused around the sociology of music. I wanted to understand how survey participants formed their musical preferences.
- The survey was comprised of 25 males and 25 females. 86% of participants were reportedly 18-24 years old.
- One limitation to my study seemed to be the ethnicity of those who were reporting, as 92% reported as being white or caucasian
- The survey was distributed online, as well as in person on the University of Rhode Island campus in South Kingstown, RI.
- 3 of 10 survey questions were open-ended questions which required higher critical thinking to elicit more thought provoking responses.

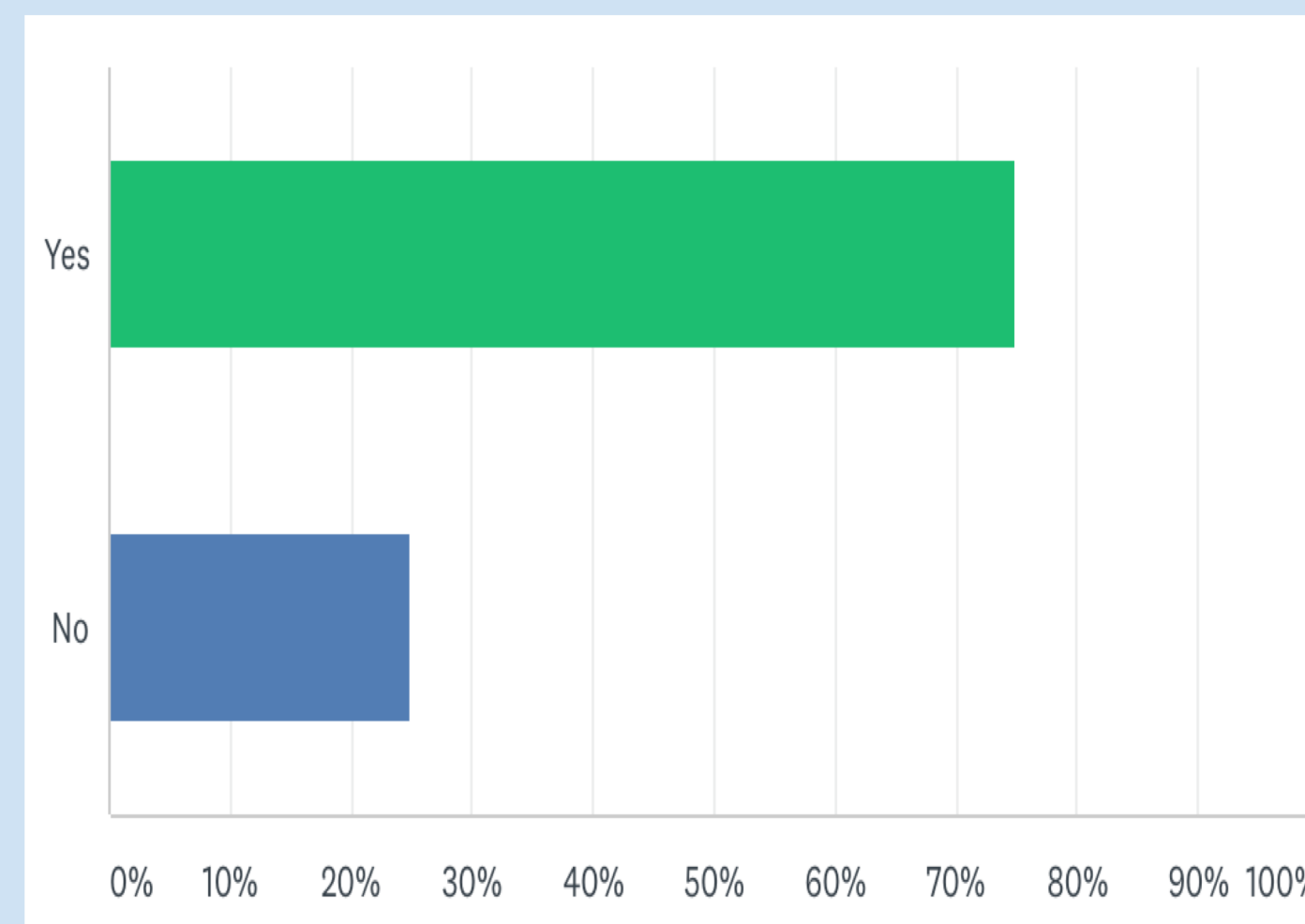
## Results

### What is your favorite genre of music?



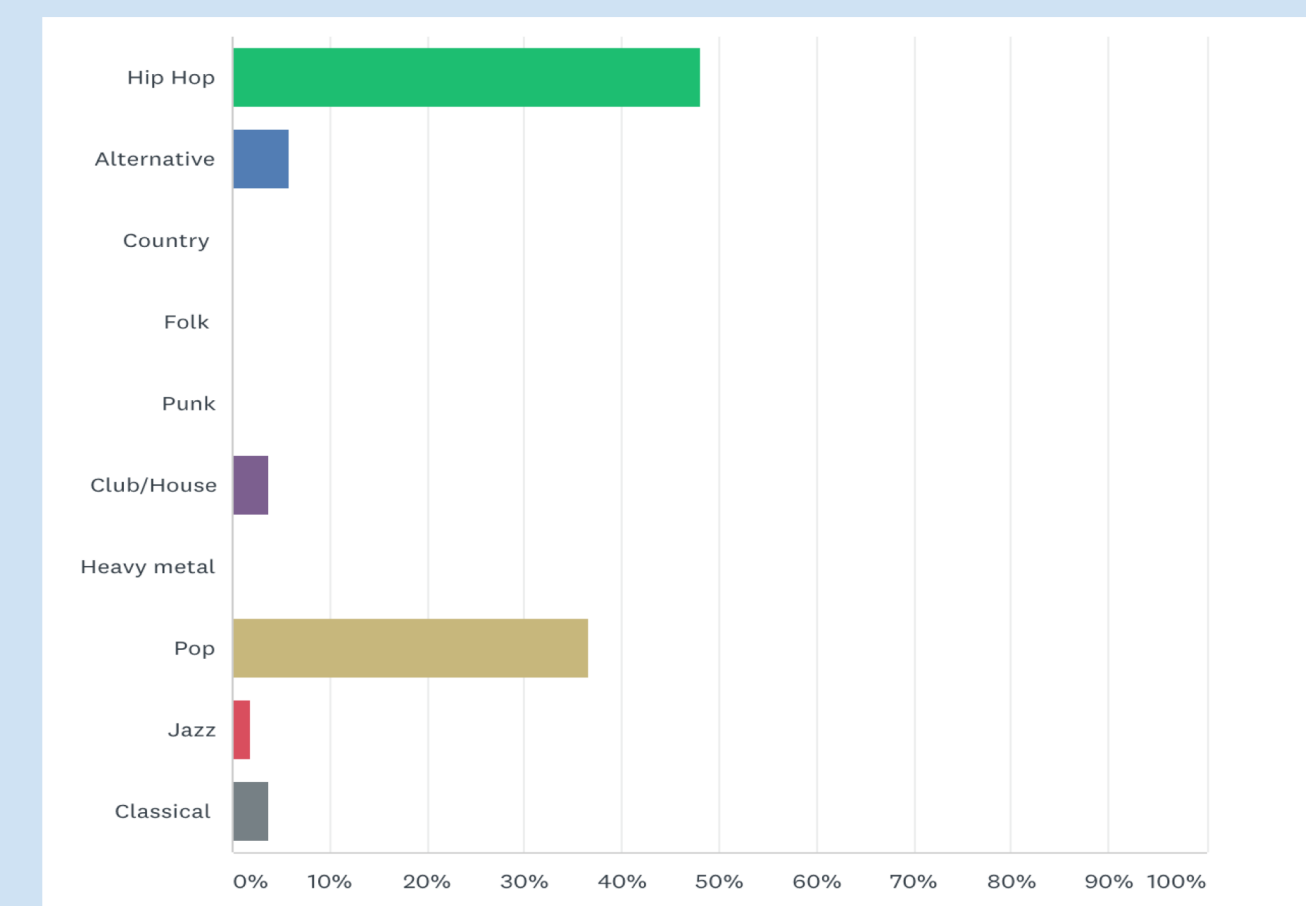
This survey question was to get a feel for which genres survey participants most resonated with. Alternative took the lead, with 41.18% of participants choosing it as their favorite musical genre. Rap followed at 23.53% and country placed third at 9.80%.

### Is there a difference between the genres you listen to and the genres your parents listen to?



This survey question was designed in an effort to discover how an individuals musical preferences may be affected by outside sources (such as their parents) when growing older. Results showed that 76.47% stated there was a difference between the genres they listen to and the genres their parents listen to, while 23.53% indicated there was no difference.

### What do you believe is the most relevant genre in society today?



This survey question was meant to explore which genres college students find most relevant. Of all the genres listed, Hip Hop (48.08%) and Pop (36.54%) were reportedly the most popular genres. This was incredibly interesting due to the fact that alternative music held a very low percentage.

### Key Findings

- 84.31% of survey participants reported listening to music everyday, and the remaining 15.69% of people reportedly listened to music 5-6 days a week.
- 70.50% of participants reported that their family had an influence on the way their musical preferences developed, while 29.41% said their family had no affect.
- Interestingly enough, 76.47% reported that their musical preferences differed from that of their parents, and 23.53% said there was no difference.

Questions were asked regarding the individuals familial impact on musical preference to determine whether or not those who were surveyed connect with the genres that were most popular for their parents generation.

### What impact does music have on society?

"Music has a huge impact. It always has. Some songs speak out against social injustices, others empower people. Some music is just for fun and can help brighten a person's day. Songs usually have messages to them and as long as long as people are listening those messages will be heard"

"Music is something different to every individual. I think it's a means of expression and by extension, a means of coping with the harsh realities of adulthood."

"Listening or playing music is a way for people to express their creativity, escape the craziness of the rest of the world. It helps people to focus, and get in good moods. It makes you feel happy, sad, calm...anything really."

"Cultural messages are spread through music. It gives us an idea of who and what we should be."

"The popular music of today is about money and how many people can profit off of it. Society likes music because society tells them to. The music industry makes money, rinse, repeat. As for music that does not rely on getting onto the top 100 charts, I have no idea. I listen to music because I appreciate it not only as an art form, but also as a talent".

"Music is an aide to understanding the human condition. It allows us to connect on an emotional level - effectively bridging the gap between individuals who are ultimately alone in the world"

"There is a lot of cultural impact. Celebrities / artists in the spotlight influence the younger generations more than the music itself"

"Music makes life better. It sounds cliché, but it has a lot of power to change people's opinion on a situation, such as in a commercial or movie. It also helps people who struggle with mental illness and empowers people in different situations."

"I think it's something that we all have in common and something that we can all relate to. It serves many different purposes and it is a source of enjoyment and expression."

The responses generated by this question created a pathway to further research studies. Future researchers could do an entire study on the cultural impact of musical icons or a focused study on how fans of different genres connect with one another in different ways.

## Discussion

The ultimate goal of this project was to learn about the origins and functions of musical genres in society, and to determine what impact those genres had on the society itself. Prior to starting my research, I expected that I would find genres develop alongside society and that new genres emerge as society evolves.

I also expected that if families were an influence in the development of one's genre preference, that would mean the individual listens to the same genres as those who influenced them. This did not seem to be the case, however, 76.47% of those surveyed reported there was a difference in what they listened to as compared to their parents. This could be due to the relationship between contemporary popular genres and genres that were popular for an older generation.

Further research could explore how an individual's family may influence their taste in music, but not fully define it. Perhaps a father's love of hard rock may set up his son with a fundamental understanding of that style, leading him towards genres such as punk or alternative.

Overall, I have come to understand that different genres of music impact society differently, and music will never stop evolving and introducing new genres. When asked if they would like the music of future generations, 73.08% of participants reportedly thought they would, and 26.92% stated they did not believe they would. It will be interesting to see whether or not the predictions of the demographic I surveyed holds true as those who participated in the survey begin raising their own children, who will most likely grow up listening to genres that may be far different than what is popular today. It is also worth considering what popular genres now might mean to society ten years down the line. It will be interesting to see which social situations call for the creation or implementation of specific genres as time moves forward.



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