For this project, I wanted to examine how one's perception of lyrical content changes as well as why some people feel their music is superior to that of another age group.

1 .How does one's concern for and perception of lyrical content change with age?

2. Do people of one age group believe their music is better than that of another age group? Why or why not?

I believed that the older age group (Older than 35) would pay more attention to song lyrics as well as judge the content of lyrics more harshly than the younger age group (35 or younger). Because of the attentiveness of the older age group and high standards for music, they would often spend more time listening to the lyrics of a song (in search of lyrics deemed appropriate and positive by society's standards) than the younger age group. The younger age group would spend less time listening to the lyrics and focus more on other aspects of music. When asked about song lyrics, the younger age group would be more accepting of lyrics that are seen as "inappropriate" as they focus more on the feelings associated with the lyrics rather than the true meaning behind the lyrics themselves. However, both age groups would feel more connected to the music of their respective groups as they grew up around the music made during their generation and, therefore, find their music superior to the music of other generations.

To conduct my research, I interviewed people and created a survey on [Surveymonkey.com](http://surveymonkey.com/).

Survey Questions:

1. Age \_\_\_\_

2. When you listen to a song, what about that song is of greater importance to you?

    \* Artist

    \* When it was made

    \* Lyrics

    \* Genre (e.g. Rap, Alternative, R&B, Funk, Pop, Jazz, Classical, etc.)

3. Based on question 2, why is that aspect more important than the others listed?

4. The music you listen to most often was made in:

     \*1950s

     \*1960s

     \*1970s

     \*1980s

     \*1990s

     \*Early 2000s (2000-2010)

     \*2011 to present

     \*2 of the above (Please specify)

5. Based on question 4, what are your general feelings toward music made in other decades?

     \*The music made in other decades is dull.

     \*I do not have much, if any, of a connection to music made in other decades.

     \*The music made in other decades lack originality.

     \*I am quite indifferent about music made in other decades.

Interview Questions:

~Do you believe the music of your generation is superior to that of other generations? Why or why not?

~Why do you find it necessary to pay attention to lyrical content?

~Around when do you think these lyrics were made? (Name a time period)

"We always take my car ‘cause it's never been beat

And we've never missed yet with the girls we meet"

QUESTION TO ASK OLDER INTERVIEWEES

~Do you listen to music that is made by younger artists?

    -How does it compare to the music of older artists?

QUESTION TO ASK YOUNGER INTERVIEWEES

~Do you listen to music that is made by older artists?

     -How does it compare to the music of younger artists?

I interviewed four people: one person of 19 years of age, one person of 16 years of age and two people in their 50s. I chose to interview two people that were not the same age for both the younger and older age groups in order to represent the groups as accurately as possible. However, I wanted there to be a large enough gap between the ages of the older group and the younger group to ensure that the interviewees of the older age group were in a stage in their life that was very different than that of the interviewees in the younger age group.

I surveyed as many people of different ages as possible in attempts to get an accurate representation of both the younger and older age groups. In the end, I gathered the answers from 21 people: one 37-year-old, two 53-year-olds, one 55-year-old, one 58-year-old; three 17-year-olds, one 19-year-old and twelve 16-year-olds.

To question two of my survey: “When you listen to a song, what about that song is of greater importance to you?”

* 0% of the participants answered that the artist is of greater importance than the other listed choices.
* About 20% of the people in the older age group felt that the year in which songs are made is the most important aspect of music.
* Approximately 20% of those in the older age group felt that lyrics were the most important aspect of music.
* 60% of people in the older age group felt that genre was the most important aspect of music.
* About 87% of people in the younger age group felt that lyrics were the most important aspect of music.
* About 13% of survey-takers in the younger age group felt that genre was the most important aspect of music.

According to this data, teenagers and young adults tend to spend more time listening to and judging the lyrics of a song than other qualities of a song, contrary to my hypothesis. In addition, older adults focus more on the genre of a song rather than the lyrics. This trend may be because of the rather large difference in age between those in the younger age group and the older age group. Although lyrics are of some concern to people when listening to music, those in the older age group grew up in a time when people of different racial and cultural backgrounds often followed the unspoken rules of music that dictated to which type of music one may or may not listen. People of one race or cultural background would typically listen to one specific genre of music. For example, the typical African American growing up in the 60s and 70s would mostly listen to R&B, Soul, Rap or Hip Hop. Times may have changed, but people tend to keep the preferences that had been a large part of their lives for so long as they have become habitual, and for some, a part of a musical culture. Of course, there are people that would not follow this rule, or **deviate** from a **social norm** as miniscule as listening to different types of music. This explains why 20% of those in the older group would not find genre the most important aspect of music.

Those in the younger age group were born and raised in a time when people did not follow the rigid rules that were once accepted long ago as the norm. As those in the younger age group live in a different age, they grew up in a time when it is more acceptable to venture out into other genres even if one race or culture continues to listen more to one genre than others. Because of this new norm, one tends to pay more attention to the lyrical content of a song as opposed to the genre, artist or the year in which it was made. However, like the people in the older age group, there are some people in the younger age group that have preferences that differ from most, which explain why some pay more attention to a song’s genre than lyrics.

In response to my question of: “Based on question 2, why is that aspect more important than the others listed?”

* 100% of the participants in the older age group believed that the aspect of music they chose in question two was of greater importance than the other listed choices because it expressed the message of the song.
* 56% of the participants in the younger age group felt that their choice to question two was the most important because that aspect conveys a message to its listeners.
* 44% of the participants in the younger age group felt that their choice to question two was the most important because it allowed listeners to express their emotions and feelings or set the mood for an activity.

Examining the data for question three, it is apparent that people in the older age group spend a lot of time focusing on the overall message a song is sending to its listeners more than anything else, as hypothesized. More than half of the people in the younger age group focus on the messages songs portray rather than the mood it creates, yet a significant amount of people in this age group focus on the latter. As older, more mature and attentive individuals, those in the older age group are expected to focus on what is important- the positive message of a song. This **more** affects how adults, specifically those in the older group, perceive music. The message of a song, however it is obtained, is of greater importance than the mood it sets.

The younger age group, on the other hand, is expected to be less mature and pay less attention to the meaning of song and more to how it makes them feel. This explains why almost half of the survey-takers in the younger age group felt that the aspect they picked as most important helped communicate the listener’s feelings, emotions and mood. A possible reason for more than half of the younger age group [unexpectedly] feeling that the message of the song was most important is the influence of the older age groups. This influence from the older group to pay attention to the meaning of songs is a form of **outer control** as the goal is to keep the age group from accepting the negative messages of certain songs.

To my question of “The music you listen to most often was made in...”

* 80% of the people in the older age group mostly listened to music made the 60s, 70s, and 80s.
* 20 % of the people in the older age group mostly listened to music made in the late 2000s.
* About 69% of the people in the younger age groups mostly listened to music made in the 1990s as well as the early and late 2000s
* About 31% of the people in the younger age group mostly listened to music in the1960s, 1970s and 1980s.
* None of the participants mostly listened to music made in the 1950s.

With this data, it is clear that most of the people in the older age group tend to listen to music of both their childhoods and lives as young adults. The same trend is apparent with those of the younger age group; however, there is a group within the younger age group that listens to music from decades before their birth. The older age and younger age groups tend to listen to music of their own generations as their primary **peer groups** consist of other people their age. The younger age group may identify with the artists of their generation that go through or have recently gone through what they have. Similarly, the older age group identifies with artists of their generation. However, the younger age group is also surrounded by the music of the older age group as the older age group may be parents to those in the younger age group. As parents, they have a large impact on what their children listen to. This explains why there is this **subculture** of teenagers and young adults that listen to music from decades before they were even born. Comparatively, some adults that stay connected to the world of the younger age group (whether to be a more involved parent or an attempt to keep up with the times) and are influenced by them as well; this explains why 20% of the older age group listens to music made in recent years.

To my question of: “Based on question 4, what are your general feelings toward music made in other decades?”

* 60% of the participants in the older age group claimed that music made in other decades either lacked originality or had little to no connection to them.
* 20% of the participants in the older age group felt indifferent about music made in other decades.
* About 56% of the participants in the younger age group felt indifferent about the music made in other decades.
* 44% of the participants in the younger age group believed that music made in the other decades either lacked originality or had little to no connection to them.
* None of the participants felt that the music made in other decades was dull.

According to this gathered information, a majority of the people in the older age group had little to no connection to music made in other decades or felt that the music made in other decades lacked originality while the majority of the younger age group was indifferent about the music made in other decades. This data suggests that the older age group had different **values** and expectations for music than the values and expectations of the people in the younger age group. The idea of what constitutes as “good” music differs from generation to generation. Those in the older age group may place more of an importance on the quality of sound (i.e. instrumentals, style and form, as suggested in the data presented in a previous question). As time changes, beliefs on what is desirable or undesirable change as well. Because of changes in music as years pass, people from both age groups lack a connection to or have a distaste for music made in other decades.

The indifference seen by both age groups may be due to the lack of willingness for both groups to truly venture out and explore the music in other decades. Perhaps this trend is more popular in the younger age groups as the music of other decades is not wildly different from that of the music made in the 1990s and 2000s but does not have the same appeal as music of other decades seems dated.

For my interview question of: “Do you believe the music of your generation is superior to that of other generations? Why or why not?”

* The 16-year-old answered that her music is not superior to that of other generations for music is an art; therefore, music of one generation may never dominate the music of another.
* The 19-year-old answered that the music of his generation is not superior to that of another as the word superior sends the wrong message.
* The 55-year-old answered that the music of her generation is superior to that of other generations for the music of other generations is “not real music”. She feels that the teenagers and young adults of this generation will not want to listen to their own music 30 years from now as their lyrics and sound lack originality and “soul”.
* The 53-year-old answered that his music is superior to that of other generations as he feels his music is more educational, sensual and meaningful than today’s music.

The responses of all four interviewees support my hypothesis. As older adults, the 50-year-olds feel that it is their **role** to be more critical of the music of other generations, particularly the younger generations. In addition, as more seasoned adults, they have had the opportunity to immerse themselves into the music of their generation. They are also less likely to conform to the music tastes of the newer generations as their opinions and thoughts are not as malleable as those of younger generations that may find themselves listening to the music of the older generations.

To my interview question of: “Why do you find it necessary to pay attention to lyrical content?”

* The 55-year-old replied that she has two daughters and needs to -as a parent- be aware of the music that floods the ears of her children. They have to listen to what she has deemed appropriate and not want to listen to music that is inappropriate.
* The 53-year-old replied that he needs to know that the music to which both he and his children listen has a positive message that encourages good behavior.
* The 19-year-old replied that the words make the content.
* The 16-year-old replied that the lyrics give the song meaning, and portray the attitude and tone of the artist as well as the mood of the song. Lyrics are also responsible for how one relates to the song.

As expected, the two interviewees in their 50s believe that lyrical content is important in conveying the message of a song. The lyrics help send messages other older adults and other **authority figures** would like the younger age group to learn. As a way to **socialize** the younger age group into well-behaved, and helpful people that may positively contribute to society. Those in the older age group that encourage their children and/or others of the younger age group take part in **primal socialization**. Eventually, the younger age group begins to listen to songs with lyrics that are seen as appropriate.

According to 16-year-old, lyrics help convey not only the meaning (a meaning that is most likely a positive one), but help one relate to the artist himself. For her and many other young people, lyrics do a lot for the listener. They may discourage **deviant** behavior (as many in the older age group hope) or encourage it as it articulates the feelings of the listener.

In response to my interview question of: “Around when do you think these lyrics were made? (Name a time period)

‘We always take my car ‘cause it's never been beat

And we've never missed yet with the girls we meet’”

* 75% of the interviewees believed that these words were written as lyrics in the late 70’s and early 80s’.
* 25% of the interviewees believed that these lyrics were written in the late 90’s or Early 2000s

These lyrics were written in the 1950s and sung in a popular song by the Beach Boys. The point of this question was to see whether any of the interviewees could accurately guess when these lyrics were written.

From these responses, it is clear that these interviewees chose a time period that they thought would produce a song with lyrics that sounded new enough to be relevant to a particular genre of a certain decade but old enough that they could not be from a song heard every day on the radio. Both age groups seem to have a similar view of song lyric content, unsupportive of my hypothesis. This connects back to the idea that the older generations have a large impact on the way the people of the younger age group listen to music and view lyrics.

To the questions: “Do you listen to music that is made by younger artists?

    -How does it compare to the music of older artists?

 ~Do you listen to music that is made by older artists?

      -How does it compare to the music of younger artists?”

* The 55-year-old answered that she very seldom listens to music of younger artists. She only listens to those young artists she considers talented. Other young artists are not comparable to older artists as they lack talent.
* The 53-year-old answered that he does listen to the music of younger artists. They have a sound similar to that of the older artists.
* The 16-year-old answered that she does listen to the music of older artists. The only differences are found within the lyrics and beats as the former are more up to date.
* The 19-year-old answered that he does listen to music from older artists for they have deeper meaning than the lyrics of today’s music.

From these answers I believe that the people of the older age group may find the music of the younger age group inferior to the music of their generation, but they do feel that the music of today’s generation has the potential to be as great. When younger artists mimic the sound and styles of older artists, the older generations find more of a connection to the music of younger generations. This strong preference for music that is from their generation or music that is similar to their music may be attributed to nostalgia. However, this preference may be due to their sense of loyalty to the music of their time, a concept that was a value of great prevalence in the culture created by their society.

The younger generations are more likely to have an interest in the music of older artists as they are influenced by the authority figures (primarily in the older age group) in their lives. With these influences and the lack of pressure to remain loyal to music of only their generation, the younger age group can identify the differences in the music of younger and older artists that the older generations hear in music.

**Outside Sources**

 On a sociology website, an article named “Sociology Studies: Music as a Culture” relates to my sociology project in that is discusses how music attracts varying groups of people. For example, a genre such as rap was a category of music that was popular amongst Blacks but now, even though many African Americans continue to listen to this genre, is popular amongst other groups of people. This also supports the idea that many older age groups picked genre as the most important aspect of a song as they grew up during the time when different groups stood firmly by genres that were targeted toward a particular group. In today’s society, the younger generations are exposed to various types of music which leads them to focus on other parts of a song- lyrics.

In addition, music is an outlet for people to express themselves, as discussed in this article. One such example was rock music in the 1970s and its ability to attract a group looking to rebel against the social norms and standards set- particularly teenagers. Although this is again about genre, it also supports the concept of the subculture that has emerged in society. With the data obtained by survey questions 4 and 5, one may believe that a similar act of rebellion and attempt to be unique is responsible for the 31% of survey-takers in the younger age group that listens to music made decades before their birth. By listening to music different from the typical music of their generation, they create a new group of their own.

Moreover, this rebellious group, although into the music of the older generations, gives the older generations a reason to want to monitor the lyrics and messages songs send. Feeling the pressure as either parents or authority figures, older generations find it necessary to keep the younger generations from listening to music that promote deviant behavior. They may believe that these negative messages come from music made by artists in the younger age group which may also explain the reason the older generations find their music superior to the music made today in addition to the idea that today’s music lack originality. The connection that they lack to the music of younger generations may be the message, a message that usually encourages one to have fun, be promiscuous and do whatever he/she pleases- a violation to society’s morals.

**Works Cited**

~ http://www.onlinesociologydegree.net/resources/sociology-studies-music-as-a-culture/