Theories of Culture, Identity, and Ethnomusicology: A Synthesis of Popular Music, Cultural, and Communication Studies

by

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1. Introduction:

Throughout my life, I have been a passionate music collector and dedicated music enthusiast. The voices of Matt Costa, Denison Witmer and Chris Martin sing through my headphones and accompany my thoughts as they appear as words on my computer screen. Currently on my desktop, I can choose from thousands of songs on my open Pandora webpage, Spotify application, and iTunes library. As the rain pounds outside the windows, I work inside with guitars, violins, and harmonicas as friends. Symphonies see me through my daily duties, songs create stimulation, and music composes order in my life. So integral is music to my life that I begin to feel anxious when my iPod battery is low or if I forget my headphones on the way to the gym. A well-chosen song can bring peace, inspire thought, or boost my motivation for a tough project. Outside of my routinized schedule, music is not just a tool, but also the ultimate expression of creativity and art. I thrive on the thrill of improvised live music, experimental recordings, the release of a highly anticipated album, or the joys of discovering a new favorite band or artist. To me, music is a passion, a science, an art and a story that is told in millions of different ways.

My daily interaction with music and its impact on my emotional state has inspired much thought about the psychology of music. My exigency for writing this paper grew from my observations of how music governs my own life and how music is a central part of my identity and relationships with others. Many of my close friends have commented that for me, music is a hobby, a continuous search, a stress reliever and a benefit to my emotional and spiritual health. They noted that it is a way that I can relate to people and serve as a common interest in many of my friendships and relationships.

Before I began researching, I considered music to be primarily personal and infrequently shared. I understood musical preference to be a private concept, much like religion or political affiliation. While music is something that is shared by others, I believed that it can be manipulated to serve individual purposes and one's opinions on it are, for the most part, kept to oneself. My personal relationship with music provides me with much emotional fulfillment and always enhances my internal mood. The first chapter of this project will focus solely on that. After researching, I discovered many commonalities between my orientation and other people's orientations to music. I found that identity is largely related to musical preference and that emotional regulation is perhaps the most common use of music. Both of these, personal identity and emotional regulation, describe music's more personal function, and are unique to each individual. However, I learned that music can also function to unify strangers, form subcultures, and become a strong force of social solidarity. This brought me to the concept of culture and the ways that music can be a medium of communication between people and between people groups.

Like almost all other listeners, I appreciate music for its ability to maintain and regulate my emotions. I will discuss this function in detail in the first chapter of my project. Music also provides much insight into how I view the world. The second chapter of this project will focus solely on that. Because it is part of who I am, music has a cultural influence in my life. In addition, a significant part of my relationships with others include music and my everyday activities are not often done without music. Beyond the ways that music constructs one's self-perception, music is also used as a tool to navigate through life and as a common thread within large social groups. The third chapter of this project, then, will address how music can be a tool for communication, exploring the functions that music can play in society.

Another passion of mine has been travelling, discovering new places and exploring new cultures. I have always been fascinated by the development of subcultures and have enjoyed dissecting artifacts of a culture's history. During my literature tour of England in 2008, I began to understand the unfolding of British history and how music has played a part in that. My two-month experience living in Italy taught me much about relating to people of another ethnicity, another language, another background, another story. I discovered that music was something that has the power to transcend cultural differences and provide a way to communicate with others of a different culture. Additionally, music helped me befriend fellow students on my trip and it began many conversations between me and people of my own culture.

Both music and culture have been strong forces in my curriculum choices and have undoubtedly influenced the degree that I have pursued. Four years ago, I began studying elements of human communication and transferred many of my interests (like culture and music) into the academic discipline of communication studies. Through this, I was able to explore many different facets of psychology, sociology, persuasion, influence, large and small groups, and the media. I dove into articles on semiotics, learned about message encoding and decoding, intercultural relations, performance studies, and many other phenomena of society and human behavior. Before my college career, I understood communication to be various forms of expression. I expected this to include visual, written and verbal expression and, as in the case of music, auditory and creative artistic expression. My wide range of classes confirmed this to be a true, but incomplete, definition of communication studies. One thing that I learned right away about human communication is that it is a two-way, interactive process including self-expression *and* responding to the expression of others. My classes have allowed me to expand my definition of communication to encompass much more, including topics that I listed above and will discuss in further detail ahead. This element of communication and social

interaction between individuals or groups is the missing piece in ethnomusicology research and is vital to understanding the function of music in society.

This paper, then, is an initial exploration into related topics of popular music studies, cultural studies, and communication studies. In what follows, I will attempt to define these three fields and preview their relationship with one another.

2. Initial Discussion and Preview:

My aim with this project is to highlight human communication as an essential part of culture and society and examine how music affects the communication process. There are a number of different approaches to determining the functions of music. By using what we know of intercultural communication research and by studying the dynamics of particular cultures, I will present several viewpoints into this topic.

2.1 Intercultural Communication and Cultural Studies

The term 'culture' cannot be easily defined. In fact, Roy Shuker writes that culture is "one of the most difficult words in the English language" (86). The values, beliefs, and attitudes held by a group of people cultivate both an identity for themselves as well as an orderliness to everyday life. Through various forms of socialization and upbringing, people are able to place things around them into categories and draw conclusions about the process of life. Each individual, then, understands reality and attributes meaning to the world around them in a unique way through experiences within their culture. The attitudes and practices of a particular group give unique value to this group's identity, yet the sharp contrasts between cultural groups can be softened by commonalities, like musical appropriation.

Culture can be seen as a force that both distinguishes and unifies human beings on earth. Intercultural communication scholars, Judith Martin and Thomas Nakayama, focus on a

dialectical approach in understanding exactly how culture influences the ways in which we think and live. They define a dialectical perspective to "assume that culture and communication are interrelated and reciprocal. That is, culture influences communication, and vice versa" (95). I will utilize this perspective throughout my paper to illustrate how essential each topic is to the other and how music is involved in the communication process.

Because of this reciprocal relationship between culture and communication, it is beneficial to understand the theories of each academic field independently. A brief discussion of cultural studies will illuminate my discussion of intercultural communication as well as offer additional information about how culture and communication go hand in hand. While cultural studies is not central to my discussion, nor is this a cultural studies report, knowledge from this field can serve my thesis and support my assertions. There is not enough time or space to thoroughly explore the field of cultural studies in this initial discussion. However, I will do my y best to outline key information as it is interesting and relevant to my project.

Although it is a relatively recent academic focus, cultural studies plays a significant role in several other areas of academic research, including communication studies and popular music studies. Similar to Martin and Nakayama's dialectical approach, cultural studies scholars believe one's worldview and one's social relations are dependent upon their culture. However, cultural studies differs from intercultural communication in its goals and aims of discovery. Cultural studies scholars concentrate much more upon the structure of society and groups as a whole; the study of marginalized groups or submissive cultures. The field of cultural studies emerged in the 1960's and 1970's and originally formed as a "reaction against the high culture tradition's strongly negative view of popular culture" and centered on this idea of hegemony (Shuker, 85). Contemporary cultural studies researchers continue to examine power relations and workings of modern-day subcultures. In fact, "contemporary" is one word used by cultural

studies scholar, Simon During, to describe the aims of the discipline. To state it broadly, this academic field emphasizes "the relations between social being and cultural meanings" (Shuker, 85). More specifically, it focuses on "the academic work on contemporary culture from non-elite or counter-hegemonic perspectives ('from below') with an openness to the culture's reception and production in everyday life, or, more generally, its impact on life trajectories" (During, 25). This focus on power relations and dominant versus submissive people groups distinguishes cultural studies from other humanistic fields. This will inform my analysis of how music impacts collective identity under the third section of this project. Understanding an individual's position in society and their worldview also informs my examination of personal identity construction and will provide some insight for music's involvement in this process.

2.2 Popular Music Studies

In the same way, the meanings of 'popular music' and popular music studies are not always clear. The International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM-US), for example, establishes that "popular music is broadly defined, and the subject is approached from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives." Music and musicology overlap with many academic disciplines, especially those which are focused on human practices and relationships, causing it to be inherently related to both culture and communication. Shuker writes that "all music consists of a hybrid of musical traditions, styles, and influences" (viii). He adds that popular music studies is "extensive and highly active" and discusses popular music as a "cultural industry" (ix). Because we are constantly surrounded by and immersed in culture, we can only define music from our own position in the world and from a perspective that we cannot separate ourselves from. In his book, Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music, Simon Frith asserts that "The 'meaning' of music describes, in short, not just an interpretive but

a social process" and that it's "'meaning' can only be defined institutionally" (249, 250). Therefore, popular music is more sociocultural than anything else and contains powerful communicative ability.

The IASPM-US, for example, lists several different syllabi for popular music studies programs in universities across the country. The University of Central Florida offers a class in popular music focused mainly on musical appropriation, or the "crossing over" of music styles between cultures, emphasizing different degrees of "separatism and homogeneity." At the City College of New York, the popular music studies program "emphasizes the relationship among analysis, history, composition, performance, and socio-cultural context." Again, at Syracuse University, the syllabus defines popular music studies to encompass viewpoints from sociology, media studies, feminist theory, semiotics, cultural studies, and to be "marked most of all by its interdisciplinary scope… [and] diverse histories and significance." Taken together, these course descriptions reinforce Frith's statements that music is a social process and Shuker's observation of popular music's hybrid nature. This is significant because it defines popular music as an academic field and exposes the interrelatedness between several other fields.

The discipline of ethnomusicology, by contrast, creates a comprehensive study of both culture (ethno) and music together. Ethnomusicology is defined by Shuker as the "study of music in its cultural context-the anthropology of music." According to the Society for Ethnomusicology, over 65 universities worldwide offer courses or programs in ethnomusicology or popular music studies and many scholarly journals publish research in this field. A few titles include: Journal of Popular Music Studies, Popular Music, Popular Music and Society, Popular Music History, Popular Musicology Online and the Journal of the Society for Ethnomusicology, among others.

Both Frith and David Hesmondhalgh, another prominent popular music studies scholar, agree that music is neither completely an individual experience nor is it a completely social phenomenon. While some scholars proclaim that listening is primarily a social gesture, Frith writes that music has important functions in society; it is not only inherently a social process, but also a form of artistic and creative expression (251). By learning more about ethnomusicology, one can understand the relationship between music and society more clearly. The connection between these two will be demonstrated in a variety of ways, particularly in the second and third chapter.

2.3 Communication Studies

My initial definition of communication contained the concept of expression that Frith mentioned. However, communication studies goes further and wider than just the expression of ideas. The Cal Poly Communication Studies department includes the vast range of topics that the field entails and acknowledges the rich history of the discipline. The university website lists three parts of the "general mission" of the Communication Studies program, one of which is to teach the students to "understand and appreciate the influence of culture upon their lives." My intercultural communication and communication theory classes, in particular, reinforced this appreciation and gave me the ability to maintain multiple perspectives of the world. The field of communication studies is "multi-dimensional" and aims to discover "with what effect people interact through language and extra-linguistic symbols." My media criticism, performance of literature classes, along with the research I have conducted specifically for this project have provided me with an understanding of this second part.

Hesmondhalgh's works provide an apt encapsulation of thesis of my project when he says that "One of the reasons that music is such a fascinating form of communication is that it

can involve both intensely personal and deeply collective experience" (523). In the following pages, then, I will address: 1. how music is used by individuals to regulate emotion, 2. how music is used by individuals to construct identity and self-perception, and 3. how music impacts society and how society impacts music; how collective identity is formed through music and how popular music serves as a core part of culture.

3. Emotional Regulation

Before music can play a developmental role in one's identity and cultural worldview, it must occupy a significant part of daily life. My relationship with music was born from the ways I use music as a tool and the ways that it permeates every area of my life. From a partner in work to a soundtrack to a long drive, music accompanies most of my day. While studying, while jogging, while cooking, while reading, while falling asleep, carefully created playlists are constantly streaming through my speakers or headphones. Others use music as a coping mechanism, as a stimulant, as an energizer, as an entertainer, or as a calming force in their day.

In 2007, two English researchers (by the names of Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic and Adrian Furnham) collaborated to study how twenty-first century listeners use music to improve their everyday lives and to ascertain what role an individual's personality plays in their listening behavior. A total of 314 surveys were collected to test a range of variables and proved that personality and cognitive ability *do* "partly determine the way in which we experience music" (Chamorro-Premuzic, Furnham, 175). The researchers found that many people use music for emotional regulation and coping as well as for impression management (creating an external image of themselves). Some interesting findings from the experiment were: extraverts use music as background stimulation, people with higher IQ's prefer more reflective and complex music, whereas people with lower IQ's prefer more

upbeat/conventional music. In addition, people with lower IQ's tend to use music in emotional rather than in intellectual ways, and many other cognitive implications of music use were included. Results regarding personality and music use were less clear, but showed that an individual's emotional stability is correlated with their emotional uses of music. In addition, neurotic individuals proved to be more sensitive to the emotional effects of music and conscientious (the trait opposite of creativity, imagination and art) individuals use music in more logical and rational ways. Overall, the primary uses of music across a wide range of individuals were: rational/cognitive appreciation, emotional regulation, and as background for other activities.

Simon Frith, a major music researcher and ethnomusicologist, states that, because of its emotional influence and powerful mood enhancement, "music just matters more than any other medium" (46). Other forerunners of music research consider the multiple ways that music is continuously interwoven into everyday personal and social life.

In her book, Music in Everyday Life, Tia DeNora supports the purposeful use of music to improve our lives and emotional states. She discusses a study in which 67 participants answered questions about personal music use and their emotional response to music. Forty-one of these respondents "identified music as, in some way, a 'change agent' in their lives" (DeNora, 47). Based on this and other studies, DeNora concludes that music is a conscious means for individuals to engage in emotional self-regulation and the "construction and maintenance of mood" (DeNora, 47). One respondent of DeNora's survey mentioned that "'I think everybody should listen to music. It helps you to be calm, relaxed, to see your life differently'" (DeNora, 46). This testimonial embodies one main way that music functions in everyday life.

While reading through studies on music interaction and emotional regulation, I observed frequent comments that music can be a significant ordering device "as a means for creating, enhancing, sustaining and changing subjective, cognitive, bodily and self-conceptual states" (DeNora, 48). These comments and the findings from previous studies reinforce my initial reflection about music in my own life; that it provides order, affirms my emotions, and can alter my emotional attitudes. Songs, then, become an active ingredient in our lives as we find ways to employ music as a tool to share in our life experiences and bring us to a desired emotional state. Consider occasions that call for a particular song; victory songs when a race is won, worship songs during church, sad songs after a break-up, Christmas songs near the holidays, patriotic songs during times of war, happy songs during weddings, and so forth. Indeed, throughout history, music has been used "in games and for dancing, to organize work and war, in ceremonies and rituals, to mark the moments of birth, marriage and death, to celebrate harvest and coronation, to articulate religious beliefs and traditional practices" (Frith, 44). Any one of these occasions would seem incomplete or less emotionally fulfilling if music were absent; this demonstrates another of music's emotional functions.

Emotionally intense songs are even used in movies to cue specific emotions from the audience for suspense, heartbreak, or a peaceful resolution. To illustrate, Mark Savage, an entertainment reporter of BBC News, interviewed dozens of music directors in charge of coordinating music scoring for huge, multi-million dollar films. Each director commented on the importance of choosing a song that "felt like it belonged" in the film as well as one that adorns the dramatic narrative and increases emotional intensity. One of the interviewees was Alexandra Patsavas, music supervisor on *The OC* and *Grey's Anatomy* (along with other shows and several Hollywood films), said that "the song has to support the drama" and the film or episode is made complete when "every song fits." Music thus fills a silence and an exigency that

satisfies our emotional needs and makes any current circumstance more manageable. In this way, we can use music to care for our mental and emotional health, and shift our "mood, energy level, conduct style, mode of attention and engagement with the world" (DeNora, 61). By using music as a tool, we can improve our overall life experience and can become more satisfied through music's involvement in our lives.

Expanding on the idea of music as a tool, DeNora emphasizes an interaction and relationship with music, personifying music to become not only a tool, but also a friend. Because we each orient to music in a personal way, we interpret it and place it in our lives in different ways. "Achieving this regulation requires a high degree of reflexivity," she writes, asserting that we act upon music and that music acts upon us as well. We assess each new circumstance and respond to each exigency with a particular song or genre to become the change agent for our emotions. It is not just music that creates or changes emotions, but how we intentionally use music for to achieve certain emotions. From this we can understand that dealing with music is an interaction.

Further research describes music as more than a friend, but rather as an extension of oneself. When we begin to identify ourselves by our music, we allow music to become a representation of ourselves and it shapes how are perceived. Let us, then, explore music as it relates to identity.

4. Individual Identity Construction and Impression Management

Our relationship to music is inevitably based upon our emotions and internal connection to a particular song or sound. Simon Frith writes that

> "In responding to a song, to a sound, we are drawn into affective and emotional alliances. This happens in other areas of pop culture, of course; in sports, for example,

> or in fashion and style-social constructions which provide keys to the ways in which we, as individuals, present ourselves to the world. But music is especially important for our sense of ourselves because of its unique emotional intensity-we absorb songs into our own lives and rhythm into our own bodies (273).

Because of this emotional relationship, music can become deeply personal and intimate. So personal that people choose particular songs, artists, or musical genres to represent who they are to the world. In the past decade, the world has seen major changes in the way that music is distributed and consumed. For radio listeners, music is broadcasted on public stations, providing a platform for discourse about genres, artists, hit songs and musical epidemics. Individuals can choose particular stations by the genre and radio personalities that resonate most with them. This choice becomes a part of that person's identity and characterizes them as a certain type of listener. With records, tapes, and CD's, people are able to collect music and nearly memorize albums or songs and internalize messages of these songs. At concerts, fans can purchase t-shirts, bumper stickers, and other merchandise to support their favorite artists and broadcast their musical taste to the world. With each generation of music distribution (radio, satellite radio, tapes, CD's), genres have become more specific and people can narrow their taste to particular subsets of genres. This narrowing brought about iTunes and social media, allowing individuals to buy one song instead of an entire album. As social media became more popular, Myspace emerged as a huge influence on how musical trends spread, especially among young people. With Myspace, individuals can choose one song to be played on their personal profile page to represent who they are to the world. This song describes their interests and personality to their friends and expands to the hundreds of people who became part of their social network. After Myspace, other social media sites specifically for music became prominent, including Last.fm, SoundCloud, YouTube, Pandora, Grooveshark and most

recently, Spotify . Pandora offers listeners the ability to narrow their preferences even further and listen to a customized station based on just one song or artist. These sites not only assist new bands in publicity efforts, but, more important given the arguments I am seeking to make about music here, it also provides individuals with a way to express their identity.

Indeed, music becomes tied to and inseparable from our identity when used in this way. DeNora defines musical use as "self-conscious articulation work," or a tool to articulate ourselves to others in an intentional way. Individuals can continually change and update their musical image to manage new tastes and life changes. DeNora writes that "the sense of 'self' is locatable in music… Musical materials provide terms and templates for elaborating self-identity, for identity's identification"(68). This suggests that individuals use music to understand who they are and define themselves internally as well as externally; "musical activities are central for understanding who they are. Music making provides …. critical 'pathways' through life" (Frith, 46). Music, as we can see, has the potential to both teach us about ourselves (it can create a self-perception), and can allow us to form and manage the impressions that others have of us. This information reveals more about how our identity develops and how we become the person we are. It is important because it helps us to understand the development of our own self-perception and how we, consciously or unconsciously, manage our identities.

Impression management is defined by Martin and Nakayama as the way we communicate our identity to others; as "how people present themselves and how they guide the impression others form of them" (162). Impression management and the "self-articulation" that DeNora mentions is sometimes described as a performance metaphor. Adam Barnhart reviews this "dramaturgical approach," coined by Erving Goffman in his book The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Through this metaphor, we are each actors playing different roles on

the world's stage. "Interaction is viewed as a 'performance,' shaped by environment and audience, constructed to provide others with 'impressions' that are consonant with the desired goals of the actor" (Barnhart). We choose songs and artists to communicate our personality and character (or desired personality and character), sometimes even unknowingly. Goffman's theory is that the "performance exists regardless of the mental state of the individual," a constant and never-ending presentation. Much like learning a role in a play, a person can select a particular role to perform or a particular character to become. In playing this role, they use a number of things to express their identity, like clothing, language, and especially music. For example, a person can choose to assume the role of a cowboy and use country music to indicate this to the world.

Jonathan Ree and Simon Frith liken our personal identity to a narrative that we are each telling the world. As a result, personal identity is "the accomplishment of a storyteller, rather than the attribute of a character… [it is an] ideal, what we would like to be, not what we are" (273). Like the actor metaphor, a person can use music or other art forms to present themselves as they would like to be or tell their story as they would like it to go. In the same way that a story can change and go in a new direction, an individual can change music preferences to shift their identity as their life progresses. The artistic, emotional, and always-present qualities of music make this a perfect medium for storytelling.

The study performed by Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham provides additional support for music as a form of impression management. Their findings showed that this behavior transforms music into a resource rather than a commodity and that managing one's identity with music is most common among young people. Young people use music and identity to relate to others and participate in a certain culture. Examples of this occurring in today's subcultures include the trend of indie music among today's teens and young adults and the

introduction and evolution of rap music in America's youth. Young Americans can choose to ascribe to the culture of rap music and play a gangster or thug role. In this way, music has incredible power to construct a teen's identity and allows others to classify them in a certain way. Listeners of indie music also use certain artists and bands to send a message to the world that they belong to an indie subculture that counters mainstream music and behavior. The use of indie music or rap music immediately causes an impression to be formed about the person using and listening to it.

Despite its many definitions, to me, the meaning of culture is foundationally tied to the discovery and core of one's individual identity. Martin and Nakayama claim that "identity serves as a bridge between culture and communication" (162). This identity then causes a unique worldview and specific perception of reality. Edward T. Hall, in his book, Beyond Culture, indicates that culture is not innate, but rather learned through social construction; just as we are not born with a view of how things are, but form extensions that reflect our views and develop our identity. While we are socialized into a particular culture, we have the freedom to choose how to express our unique personality and character. Again, music is a perfect resource for extending ourselves and representing who we are within a particular culture.

Michael Hecht argues a communication theory of identity, stating that "communication is a communicative process and our identities emerge in relationships with others… these frames help us interpret reality and understand the social world" (qtd. In Martin, Nakayama). Essentially, identity comes from the fundamental value orientations of culture and this helps us to understand reality and truth. However, the complexity of culture does not allow for all individuals in one group to be characterized by the given beliefs. In other words, not everyone in the group adheres to all specific attributes of their culture.

To a certain extent in postmodern life, each individual has the power to choose where and how to identify, and one way to show this is through our musical choices. Selecting a certain cultural subgroup to ascribe to adjusts musical tastes, such as identifying with hip-hop, rap, dub step, techno, or electronic music. A person's choice is music, then, is reciprocal to and reflective of the role desire to fill. If a teen wants to create a trendy, cool image for themselves, they might use a particular music genre to construct this image. Roy Shuker writes that "in cultural terms, popular music is clearly of enormous importance in people's daily lives… and is central to their social identities" (Shuker, viii). Because music can be such a powerful symbol of our personality and identity, it can strongly influence our social group and determine who our peers are. Others can use our musical preferences as information about who we are and can even use music as a basis for attraction, allowing bonds to be created between us and our peers.

With resources like music, individuals can continue to shape their identity and modify their images to partake in many cultures or perform many roles. Different identities, realities and truths are formed, maintained, and transformed constantly as a process across the globe. Kenneth Burke writes that "all communities in all places at all times manifest their own view of reality in what they do. The entire culture reflects the contemporary model of reality" (qtd. In Martin and Nakayama). The collective understanding of reality is also shaped by popular music and the ways that music can be a communicative tool between members of cultural groups.

We cannot accurately create an ethnographic analysis of human cultures without examining cultural symbols like music. Martin and Nakayama define ethnography as "a discipline that examines the patterned interactions and significant symbols of specific cultural groups to identify the cultural norms that guide their behaviors" (59). Music undoubtedly serves as a cultural symbol as people use it to relate to others and as communities use it to

relate to the rest of the world, both on an individual and collective scale. Just as a symbol is "something that stands for something else (from the Greek symballein, which means 'put together')," songs or musical genres can stand for cultural values (Berger, 230). Popular music establishes new associations between people groups and values or practices and contributes to the concept of popular culture.

The importance of music in the perceptions of people groups is seen very clearly in particular subcultures. Subcultures, which can be understood as "factions of the larger social group… set in opposition to their parent culture," depend heavily on musical symbols to unify its members (Shuker, 313). Concerts, music festivals, a musical genre or a set of particular bands are of enormous symbolic significance and sustain the relationships between members of a subculture. Therefore, music is inherently a part of communication, in that it is a symbol of culture and actively sends messages about an individual's and a culture's identity. Martin and Nakayama define symbolic significance as "the importance or meaning that most members of a cultural group attach to a communication activity," in this case, music (88).

Because music is a cultural symbol and a social identifier, it plays a significant role in intercultural communication and interpersonal communication through symbolic exchange. The term "symbolic interactionism" was coined by Herbert Blumer in 1937 in a sociological context and essentially presented the idea that social interaction is the primary means of understanding ourselves within our culture. Randall Collins summarizes Blumer's idea by writing that "the process of meaning-construction is social; persons make their meanings during mutual role-taking with other persons" (Collins, 159). Blumer's ideas were built upon by Norbert Wiley's contributions in The Semiotic Self. Wiley included "a mechanism for agency or will" in his theory, suggesting that these parts of the self influence the way individuals communicate with each other (Collins, 155). If music is so central to our social identities, then

our music choices are highly important in relating to others and understanding our world through the lens of our culture. For example, I spend time with my teenage brothers listening to rock music and spend time with my parents listening to music with more blues and jazz sounds. In both cases, music helps create a bond between my family members, serves as a cultural symbol that I can share with them, and helps our relationship and understanding of each other. Understanding music in this way, then, allows me to understand my own relation music as being, at the same time, a relation to people and values that surround me.

Goffman describes symbolic interactionism as "[developing] identity or persona as a function of interaction with others, through an exchange of information that allows for more specific definitions of identity and behavior." Conversations surrounding music fall into Goffman's description of information that could be exchanged; as individuals build their identity with music, they interact with others to collect information about their culture. Symbolic interaction is thus closely related to identity negotiation theory, both of which are very much at work in communication about music or when music is included in self-presentation. Identity negotiation theory emphasizes the "process of communicating one's own desired identities while reinforcing or resisting others' identities as the core of intercultural communication" (Martin and Nakayama, 166). This theory provides great insight into the function of music in subcultures or how members of a subculture might use music to resist their parent culture's practices or beliefs.

British scholar Stuart Hall offers a communicative definition of culture, stating that "[it] is concerned with the production and exchange of meanings-the 'giving and taking' of meaning-between members of a society or group" (qtd. in Berger). The ways that music functions between individuals and their society, through cultural symbolism, is demonstrated by this definition.

5. Collective Identity and Music as Communication

Because our relationship with our culture and our music choices are so interwoven with our identity, it is difficult to determine how much of our identity formation is impacted by outside forces and how much of our identity is internally created and expressed through our music choices. Emile Durkheim, a prominent sociologist, theorized that each of us create our identity while in constant tension with our culture. Like DeNora's idea that we reciprocally act upon music while music acts upon us, Durkheim believed that "we are 'in' society, but on the other hand, society is 'in' us" (qtd. in Berger). It is impossible to separate our own worldview and value judgments from our culture, including musical preference and musical identification.

Malcom Gladwell's research on epidemics and mass movements in his book, The Tipping Point, provides insight to how popular music becomes "popular." He emphasizes the power of context as one of the three main agents of change, writing that "epidemics are strongly influenced by their situation, circumstances and conditions and particulars of the environments in which they operate," like cultural patterns or specific historical moments (26). His research shows that sometimes the smallest things can become factors that cause people to change their behavior. These factors usually involve our relationships with others and rely on the particular time or place that the phenomenon is experienced. Our position in society and history, our peer groups, and our location all provide context for our music consumption. Gladwell claims that our constant involvement in our culture and subculture causes us to be hypersensitive to contextual changes.

His examples of how historical events have caused an epidemic to 'tip' shed light on why a song becomes the number one song on the charts, why Grammys are won by certain artists, and how music videos 'go viral'. The virality of music and its immediate spread is an example of an epidemic that "tipped, by tinkering with the smallest details of the immediate environment"

(139). As participants in popular culture, we usually assist these epidemics, sometimes even unconsciously. Even when I don't personally like a song, but hear it on the radio over and over again, I unintentionally create associations with other parts of my life and somehow find it in my own iTunes library. One example is what I experienced with the "Adele craze" over the past year. While my roommates, classmates, co-workers and family members all seemed enthralled with Adele's melancholy lyrics and vocal talent, I didn't find the same appeal. However, as the songs became more familiar, I found myself singing along to "Rolling in the Deep" and "Someone Like You" and unconsciously conformed to the trends in popular music. The example Gladwell uses is the instant growth of crime and vandalizing public property in New York City during the 1990's. He writes that each of us is "far from someone who acts for fundamental, intrinsic reasons and who lives in his own world… [but] is someone acutely sensitive to his environment, who is alert to all kinds of cues… prompted to [act] based on his perception of the world around him" (150). Sometimes "popular" behavior, like my new appreciation of Adele, is a result of my social context and not out of any particular intrinsic resonation with the music.

Another example is Rebecca Black's "Friday" music video that "tipped" as Gladwell would say, and spread through social media in only a few days. Although all who shared the YouTube video with their networks of friends did not especially appreciate the song for its musical qualities, it became a name that everyone knew and referenced often. In this way, our environment and peers strongly influence our music consumption and play a role in the evolution of our culture and society, despite, at times, our own individual preferences or taste. Gladwell cites several behavioral studies of specific people groups (like convicts in prison and children taking a test) to determine how much our actions are influenced by our immediate environment. He concluded that "for certain kinds of environments… our inner states are the

result of our outer circumstances" (152). Actions that we would not commit alone (like listening to "Friday" several times) are done when in participation of a social group.

The power of context seems to support the significance of cultural patterns and circumstances created by cultural behaviors. Musical epidemics all occur naturally within our community and subculture and some even become a significant historical sensation nationwide. In May 2012, Adele was awarded 12 Billboard honors including: Top Artist, Top Female Artist, Top Digital Songs Artist, Top Radio Songs Artist, Top Digital Media Artist, Top Pop Artist, Top Streaming Song, and others. These awards and public recognition of Adele's achievements represent an identity for modern America through music. In addition, a certain musical genre or artists may easily become symbolic of a people group and can then be decoded to understand cultural messages and values. Some examples are: jazz music in the 1920's, the Beatles music in the 1960's, Michael Jackson in the 1980's. Gladwell attributes the rise of trends to a theory of contagious behavior, especially behavior that our culture or peer group is engaging homogenously. Within a cultural group, contagiousness can become an "unexpected property of all kinds of things," impacting everything from fashion styles to viruses to hit songs to something as simple as yawning" (10). Just as we can't help yawning when we see others yawning, we feel an urge to laugh when we hear a room full of others laughing-hence the invention of laugh tracks on comedic TV shows.

Robert Cialdini discusses "canned laughter" and gives what can be considered another name for Gladwell's theory of contagious behavior by introducing his principle on social proof. Cialdini's work provides valuable insight into the dynamics of a social group and how individuals relate to the group they are either a member of or an outsider to. The principle of social proof repeats the idea that we determine what is correct by finding out what other people think is correct and how we see it performed. Cialdini emphasizes that the principle of

social proof operates most strongly when we are observing the behavior of people just like us, within our social group and within our culture. He provides cults as an example of a subgroup in which all members intensely adhere to similar behavioral patterns. Social proof is a powerful force in value judgments as well as practices. Both Cialdini and Gladwell recognize that "the greater number of people who find any idea correct, the more an individual will perceive the idea to be correct" (Cialdini, 108). This explains why certain hits become hit songs, how music videos become viral, or why all of America now marvels at Adele's most recent album. Not only does social proof and contagious behavior sometimes cause us to behave in the same ways, it creates relational bonds and cultural unity. Both authors emphasize the condition of similarity and how we mimic those that we perceive to be "just like us," inevitably creating comfortable norms and social solidarity. Martin and Nakayma use the similarity principle to explain why we gravitate and are "attracted to people [we] perceive to be similar to [ourselves]" (390).

When an entire community becomes more or less musically homogenous, it is easy for a collective identity to form for that particular culture. By creating a social identity through their music, individuals can also bond with others to form a collective identity and "establish in-group preference and exclusivity" (Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham, 176). This is the case with jazz music and the black community in the United States, which proves to be a useful case in point. The Jazz Preservation Act was passed in 1987, which defined jazz as a black American art form, "thus using race, national identity, and cultural values as key aspects in making jazz one of the nation's most subsidized arts" (Farley, 113). The approval of this legislation gives jazz a strong association with both the "black culture and with America as a whole" (Farley, 118). Discussion of how racist oppression is expressed, how jazz has been interwoven into America's political traditions, and the cultural history of the music itself is included in the article. Through this act, we see a particular art form become part of the definition of what it

means to be American. The Jazz Preservation Act states that, it is "important for the youth of America to recognize and understand jazz as a significant part of their cultural and intellectual heritage" (Farley, 116). This act is an example of how a musical style can be a symbol of a culture and reinforces the idea that music can bring two people groups together, especially when Hesmondhalgh's idea of "musical borrowings and appropriations" is considered. Through the appropriation of jazz music as first a black subcultural symbol, then as a national symbol, music has undeniably played a role in cultural development, symbolism, and unity.

The expression of black identity can thus be seen in the representation of other art forms as well. Eric Robertson's (of the James S. Coleman African Studies Center at UCLA) evaluation of African-American identity classifies African clothing and fine art as cultural symbols in the same way that jazz music has been. From his research in Harlem, New York, Robertson reported that "many black Americans consider clothing of African design to be related to the proud display of one's African heritage" (Robertson, 1). The clothing styles and decorative arts have also been borrowed and included in national trends; "We see African-inspired clothing in Michael Jackson videos and in inner-city McDonald's restaurant uniforms" (Robertson, 1). The recycling and re-use of cultural symbols contributes to the evolution and emergence of collective identity. This type of cultural borrowing and re-appropriation is very present in the history of and modern day music industry. These newly formed symbols are "markers used to classify individual, social or cultural groups" (Martin and Nakayama, 167).

Renowned popular music scholars, David Hesmondhalgh and Georgina Born eidted a book titled Western Music and its Others to engage topics of difference, representation and appropriation in music. The two explore "how social and cultural differences come to be constructed and articulated in music," and instances where music can become a form of mass

communication (2). Several examples are given as to how certain genres develop and express attitudes, beginning with an examination of the ties between African American culture and jazz music. Because of its popularity and significance throughout the world, Hesmondhalgh and Born identify "black musics" to be "at the heart of debates about cultural identity, property, and belonging in popular music" (22). Music like ragtime, jazz, and the blues (included in the Jazz Preservation Act) continues to leave a legacy of African ancestors. Many critics and music scholars have commented on the interesting sociocultural shift concerning power relations. The African-American music styles-as a subculture of white American hegemonic superculture, were expected to fade and mold into the dominant music styles, but instead, the opposite occurred. Music scholar Gregory Stevens observed this as "intercultural dialogue between ethnic groups," occurring in today's American youth through the art of rap music (22).

Another example of assimilation of music styles and the appropriation of a cultural symbol lies in the origins of country music. The following is an excerpt from Born and Hesmondhalgh's collaborative work:

> "Country music, on the surface a musical form with deep roots in the southern United States, has a long history of borrowings, drawing on sources as diverse as Swiss yodeling and Hawaiian guitar. Famously, a number of British and American musicians incorporated Indian styles and instrumentation into their work of the 1960's, including the Beatles, the Kinks, and the Byrds" (25).

With a complex and somewhat tangled history of a particular music style, like country, it can be difficult to determine "the links between a musical form or practice and its production or consumption by particular social groups" (31). The collection of music styles seen in the development of country music provides information about how unlike individuals unify to express themselves as a group. DeNora asserts that music can be employed to achieve

"collective ordering… organizing potentially disparate individuals such that their actions may appear to be intersubjective, mutually oriented, co-ordinated, entrained and aligned…. [this] creates an important space for culture" (109).

Music, in either its original or re-appropriated form, is used as a tool to develop a majority identity. Martin and Nakayama declare that "people begin to refocus or redirect their energy toward redefining their identity in a way that recognizes their privilege and works to eliminate oppression and inequities" (179). As shown in the similarity principle, each individual has a desire to belong to a social group or subgroup. Majority identity forms as a result of individuals ascribing to the dominant group and music plays a critical role in the way we participate in the dominant group, therefore creating popular culture. Popular songs are vital artifacts that serve as representatives of popular culture. Martin and Nakayama state that "popular culture is ubiquitous. We are bombarded with it every day and everywhere. Not only is it ubiquitous but it also serves an important social function" (350).

The ubiquitous quality of popular music and popular culture, as we can see, provides a ground for greater commonality between individuals or groups. Hesmondhalgh proposes the idea that music as a cultural symbol is "intensely social" and "both articulates and offers the immediate experience of collective identity" (514). By manipulating it for our emotions and identities and sharing music with those around us, we create an "aesthetic experience that can act as the basis of affiliation and communication between different groups" (514). Each day, we both intentionally and unconsciously participate in collective identity and cultural solidarity through our music consumption. This reveals the communicative power of music and gives insight into identity construction and management.

6. Concluding Remarks:

By understanding the functions of music on multiple levels, the relationship between culture and communication becomes apparent. The meaning that music provides to our worldviews, our connection to others, and even the way we understand ourselves is extraordinary. Communication can be defined as "a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed. The defining characteristic of communication is meaning, and we could say that communication occurs whenever someone attributes meaning to another person's words or actions" (Martin and Nakayama, 94). The three thematic clusters of this paper work to synthesize my three main areas of research (popular music studies, communication studies and cultural studies) and blend my coursework within the Communication Studies major.

During the first part of this essay, I discussed the impact music has upon our emotions and the way individuals use music as a tool for regulating or enhancing their mood. I also recognized how present is in nearly every aspect of many peoples' lives and how it becomes a valuable resource because of this. During the second part of this essay, I outlined how music can govern the construction of our identities and a way to present ourselves to others; how the "aesthetic experience of music gives us a way of being in the world, a way to make sense of it" (Hesmondhalgh,514). Simon Frith's work has provided much inspiration to my understanding of music as a means of communication and sociability, and has allowed me to draw upon my knowledge from psychology, communication theory, and interpersonal communication. The third part of this essay was devoted to communication between groups and participating in a collective identity. A compilation of Hesmondhalgh's work contributed many ideas about how music can be dialectical and irreplaceable in society. This section included many facets of Communication Studies, such as intercultural communication, communication theory,

persuasion, and more. I listed the development of jazz and country music as examples of how musical styles change and art is re-appropriated and borrowed to construct new collective identities. I discussed epidemics and the powerful principle of similarity within cultures, something that Martin and Nakayama advise to "not underestimate the importance of culture in providing us a feeling of familiarity and comfort" (89).

With further research, I would like to incorporate more theories of psychology to expand on parts one and two, as well as additional theories from intercultural communication and small group communication for the third part. Small group communication theories would provide more information about specific dynamics of subcultures. I am also interested in utilizing methods of rhetorical criticism to analyze particular songs as cultural artifacts and dissect select songs to represent different cultures. This might include studying the semiology of songs from different approaches, using knowledge I gained from media criticism and rhetoric classes.

This exploration of popular music in relation to cultural studies has helped me understand communication as a set of symbols and symbolic messages instead of just words. My hope is that readers of this project can gain the same insight that I now have about my orientation to music and to others through music. I have a better understanding of identity construction and how we instinctively orient to the world through our cultural perspective, but also by our musical choices. This is important because I can now better use music to form connections with others and understand it more completely as a tool for individual emotions and identity. My study of communication and culture has also given me a fresh look at music and how it relates to me in everyday life. I am learning and will continue to learn about how

communication between groups (or between an individual and a group) is processed and factors that contribute to various phenomena.

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