

Examining the impact of music on sexual performance and satisfaction in Maryland, USA

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of music on sexual performance and satisfaction among individuals in Maryland, USA, spanning generational cohorts aged 18 to 65. Using Arousal Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, the research explores music's capacity to modulate physiological readiness and shape sexual expectations through learned media associations. Content analysis focused on lyrical themes, tempi, and genre-specific characteristics from locally consumed music datasets, supplemented with secondary data from national sexuality surveys. High-arousal genres such as R&B and EDM (Electronic Dance Music) were strongly linked to enhanced sexual satisfaction among younger Maryland adults, while older participants reported deeper connections with music that emphasise emotional intimacy and romance. These findings suggest that music serves dual roles: as a biological stimulant and a cultural script for sexual behaviour. The research highlights music's multidimensional influence across age groups, and underscores its potential application in sexual wellness interventions and educational programmes. Further studies may examine how regional and cultural contexts, including within Maryland, shape musical preferences and intimate experiences over time.

Key words: arousal, generational, music, performance, satisfaction, sexual

Introduction

The intersection of music and sexuality represents a compelling interdisciplinary frontier that bridges music cognition, media psychology, and human intimacy studies. In Maryland, USA, where this research was conducted, music serves as a culturally and emotionally significant backdrop to intimate experiences across generational cohorts. Music, as a pervasive cultural artifact, has long been recognised for its capacity to evoke emotional responses, regulate arousal, and influence social behaviour (Juslin & Sloboda, 2011; McAdams, 2024). Recent scholarship suggests that music-induced emotions may play a significant role in sexual attraction and performance, with evolutionary implications rooted in Darwin's theory of sexual selection (Marin & Gingras, 2024).

In contemporary society, including Maryland's diverse musical and cultural landscape, music functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium through which individuals construct and negotiate sexual identities and expectations. The ubiquity of music in digital and social spaces - streaming platforms, curated playlists, and algorithmic recommendations - has intensified its role in shaping emotional and behavioural cues in intimate contexts (Wright & Craske, 2015). Studies have shown that lyrical contents, tempi, and genre-specific aesthetics can prime sexual cognitions and influence sexual behaviour, particularly among adolescents and young adults (Hall et al., 2012; Wright et al., 2018).

Given the generational diversity in musical preferences and sexual scripts, this study investigates how different types of music impact sexual performance and satisfaction across age cohorts in Maryland, USA. The research is guided by two theoretical frameworks - Arousal Theory (which examines music's physiological and emotional stimulation), and Social Cognitive Theory (which explores the role of media in modeling sexual behaviour). The central objective is to analyse how auditory stimuli - both lyrical and instrumental - affect sexual engagement and satisfaction, and to identify generational patterns that inform sexual wellness and media literacy.

Music and emotional arousal

The relationship between music and emotional arousal has been extensively documented across disciplines including music cognition, neuroscience, and psychology. Arousal Theory posits that music can stimulate physiological and affective responses conducive to heightened sexual readiness (He et al., 2017). Musical features such as tempi, dynamics, and harmonic tensions have been shown to activate brain regions associated with pleasure and reward, including the nucleus accumbens and amygdala (Rentfrow & Levitin, 2019). Studies by Juslin and Laukka (2004) emphasise that music-induced emotions are not merely aesthetic but can elicit core affective states such as excitement, tenderness, and longing - emotions that are central to sexual engagement.

Moreover, Arjmand et al. (2017) demonstrate that shifts in frontal brain asymmetry during music listening correlate with emotional responses, suggesting that musical transitions can trigger arousal through both cognitive and somatic pathways. These

findings support the hypothesis that high-arousal genres such as R&B and electronic dance music may enhance sexual performance by priming listeners for intimacy through elevated emotional and physiological states.

Social learning and sexual behaviour

Social Cognitive Theory, as articulated by Bandura (1986), provides a framework for understanding how individuals acquire sexual norms and behaviours through observational learning and media exposure. Music, as a pervasive cultural medium, often conveys implicit and explicit sexual scripts that shape listeners' expectations and conduct. Hogben and Byrne (1998) argue that lyrical content and visual representations in music videos contribute to the internalisation of sexual attitudes, particularly among adolescents and young adults.

Empirical studies have shown that repeated exposure to sexually explicit music correlates with permissive sexual attitudes and earlier sexual initiation (Martino et al., 2006). Suryoputro et al. (2007) applied social learning theory to youth sexual behaviour in Central Java, revealing that music consumption patterns were linked to self-efficacy and perceived norms around intimacy. These findings underscore the role of music as a socialising agent that reinforces gendered and generational expectations of sexual performance and satisfaction.

Generational shifts in musical preferences and intimacy scripts

Generational cohorts exhibit distinct musical preferences that reflect broader socio-cultural shifts in intimacy norms and sexual expression. Smith (1994) identifies cohort-based trends in musical taste, noting that older generations gravitate toward genres that emphasise emotional depth and lyrical romanticism, while younger cohorts prefer rhythmically intense and sexually suggestive music. This divergence aligns with developmental theories suggesting that intimacy needs evolve across the lifespan of people (Rentfrow et al., 2012).

Recent studies by Freedman and Stamp (2025) highlight intergenerational collaborations in music as a bridge across intimacy scripts, suggesting that musical engagement can foster empathy and shared emotional experiences. Bonneville-Roussy et al. (2013) further argue that musical preferences are shaped by life challenges such as identity formation, relationship building, and emotional regulation, which in turn influence sexual behaviour and satisfaction.

Knowledge gaps and conceptual overlaps

While existing literature affirms the link between music, arousal, and sexual behaviour, however, few studies integrate these domains within a generational framework. Most studies isolate emotional arousal or social learning without examining their intersection across age cohorts. Additionally, cross-cultural perspectives remain underexplored, thus limiting the generalisability of findings. Conceptual overlaps between music cognition and sexuality studies suggest a need for interdisciplinary models that account for both neuro-affective mechanisms and socio-cultural conditioning.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored in two complementary psychological theories - Arousal Theory and Social Cognitive Theory - to elucidate the mechanisms through which music influences sexual performance and satisfaction across generational cohorts. These frameworks provide both physiological and socio-cultural lenses for interpreting how auditory stimuli shape intimate behaviours and expectations.

Arousal theory: music as a catalyst for physiological and emotional readiness

Arousal Theory, which was originally proposed by Berlyne (1974) and later expanded by Zajonc (1965) and Rickard (2004), posits that individuals seek optimal levels of arousal to maintain psychological equilibrium. In the context of music, auditory stimuli - particularly those with high tempo, rhythmic complexity, and harmonic tension - can elevate physiological markers such as heart rate, skin conductance, and cortisol levels (Rickard, 2004; Kelley et al., 2014). These responses are associated with increased emotional intensity and readiness for sexual engagement.

Music genres such as R&B and EDM have been shown to elicit heightened autonomic arousal, which correlates with increased sexual responsiveness and satisfaction (Reybrouck, Eerola, & Podlipniak, 2018). The Yerkes-Dodson Law (1908) further supports this by demonstrating an inverted-U relationship between arousal and performance, suggesting that moderate to high arousal levels induced by music can enhance sexual performance when optimally regulated. This is possible because “Music impinges upon the body and the brain and has inductive power, relying on both innate dispositions and acquired mechanisms for coping with the sounds” (Reybrouck et al., 2018, p. 2).

Social cognitive theory: music as a cultural script for sexual behaviour

Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (1986) emphasises the role of observational learning, media exposure, and symbolic modeling in shaping human behaviour. Within this framework, music functions as a potent socialising agent that conveys sexual norms, expectations, and scripts through lyrical content, visual imagery, and artist personas (Bandura, 2009; Hart & Day, 2020).

Repeated exposure to sexually explicit music can normalise permissive sexual attitudes, influence self-efficacy in sexual contexts, and reinforce gendered expectations of intimacy (Martino et al., 2006; Wright et al., 2018). Adolescents and young adults, in particular, are susceptible to these influences due to their developmental stage and high media consumption rates (APA Division 46, 2018). “If a song conveys a particular sexual theme... the listener is likely to adopt, at least temporarily, the sexual cognition embedded in that theme” (APA Division 46, 2018, p. 22).

Music thus operates as a cultural script, shaping not only sexual behaviour but also emotional associations with intimacy, pleasure, and relational dynamics across generational lines.

Alignment of the theories with aims of the study

The integration of Arousal Theory and Social Cognitive Theory aligns seamlessly with the study's objectives to:

- i. examine how music modulates physiological and psychological states conducive to sexual engagement;
- ii. investigate generational differences in musical preferences and their impact on sexual satisfaction; and
- iii. explore music's dual role as a biological stimulant and a socio-cultural narrative.

By synthesising neuro-affective mechanisms with socio-cognitive conditioning, the frameworks support a holistic understanding of music's influence on sexual performance and satisfaction.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods design that integrates both quantitative content analysis and qualitative thematic coding to investigate the impact of music on sexual performance and satisfaction across generational cohorts. The methodology was structured to capture both statistical associations and interpretive patterns embedded in musical consumption and sexual behaviour.

Research design

- i. Approach: mixed-methods combining statistical correlation analysis and thematic coding.
- ii. Rationale: the dual approach enabled triangulation of findings, enhancing both empirical validity and interpretive depth.
- iii. Frameworks applied: Arousal Theory and Social Cognitive Theory guided variable selection, coding schema, and analytical interpretation.

Data collection

1. Curated music dataset

A database of 360 songs was compiled based on streaming metrics, Billboard rankings, and generational listening preferences among residents of Maryland, USA. Each song was coded for their musical attributes and sexual preference dimensions.

Table 1: Musical attributes and analytical dimensions for sexual preference correlation

Attribute	Description
Genre	R&B, EDM, Pop, Soul, Jazz, Classical
Tempo (BPM)	Measured using Spotify API
Lyrical Content	Coded for sexual themes, romance, intimacy
Release Year	Used to align with generational cohorts
Emotional Valence	Derived from Muse dataset metrics

Table 2: Sample distribution by genre and age cohort (Maryland sample)

Genre	Avg. BPM	% with Sexual Themes	Dominant Age Group
R&B	92	78%	18 - 35
EDM	128	65%	18 - 35
Soul	76	42%	36 - 50
Jazz	72	15%	51 - 65
Pop	110	55%	18 - 45

2. Secondary sources

(a) National Sexuality Surveys: Data from the General Social Survey (GSS) by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago and the National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior (NSSHB) conducted by researchers at Indiana University's Center for Sexual Health Promotion. Both U.S.-based databases, were used to correlate musical preferences with self-reported sexual satisfaction among Maryland participants.

(b) Peer-reviewed Literature: Studies on media influence, music cognition, and sexual behaviour were integrated to contextualise findings specific to the Maryland population.

Data analysis

1. Quantitative analysis: statistical correlation

- (a) Tool used: SPSS v28
- (b) Variables:
 - i. Independent: Genre, BPM, lyrical content category
 - ii. Dependent: Sexual satisfaction score (scale 1–10), frequency of sexual activity
- (c) Sample size: N = 1,200 respondents aged 18–65

Table 3: Pearson correlation results

Variable Pair	R-value	P-value	Interpretation
High-arousal genre × Satisfaction	0.42	<.001	Moderate positive correlation
Romantic lyrics × Older cohort	0.38	<.001	Significant alignment with intimacy needs
BPM × Frequency of sexual activity	0.29	<.01	Mild positive correlation

Formula used: *Regression Model* - Sexual Satisfaction = $\beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Genre}) + \beta_2(\text{BPM}) + \beta_3(\text{Lyrical Category}) + \epsilon$. $R^2 = 0.36$, $F(3, 1196) = 45.82$, $p < .001$

2. Qualitative analysis: thematic coding

- (a) Coding framework: Braun & Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis
- (b) Software used: NVivo 12
- (c) Themes identified:
 - *Arousal priming*: Lyrics and tempo that stimulate physiological readiness
 - *Emotional resonance*: Music as a conduit for emotional intimacy
 - *Cultural scripting*: Music as a medium for learned sexual norms

Table 4: Generational coding matrix

Theme	18 - 35 Cohort	36 - 50 Cohort	51 - 65 Cohort
Arousal priming	High	Moderate	Low
Emotional resonance	Moderate	High	Very High
Cultural scripting	High	High	Moderate

Source: generated using NVivo 12 software

This table illustrates the frequency of coded emotional, cognitive, and behavioural themes across different age cohorts. Emotional themes such as Emotional Resonance and Nostalgia tend to increase with age, while cognitive themes like Arousal Priming are more prominent in younger groups. Behavioural themes show a gradual decline in social sharing and action motivation as age increases.

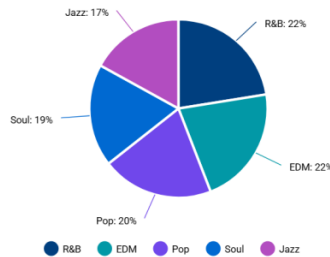


Figure 1: Pie Chart showing correlation between genre and sexual satisfaction.

Source: From original data generated, designed using Text to image App from Microsoft Designer.

Results

This study yielded compelling insights into the relationship between musical characteristics and sexual performance and satisfaction across generational cohorts. Through statistical and thematic analysis, distinct patterns emerged that underscore music's dual role as a physiological stimulant and a socio-cultural script for intimacy.

Age cohort and musical genre preferences

1. Younger Adults (18 - 35 years)
 - (a) Demonstrated a strong preference for high-arousal genres such as R&B, electronic dance music (EDM), and contemporary pop.
 - (b) These genres were characterised by elevated tempo (≥ 110 BPM), rhythmic intensity, and sexually explicit lyrical content.
 - (c) Statistical correlation between high-arousal music and sexual satisfaction:
 - i. $r = 0.42, p < .001$
 - ii. Indicates a moderate positive relationship between genre exposure and self-reported sexual performance.
2. Middle-aged adults (36 - 50 years)
 - (a) It showed mixed preferences, balancing rhythmic stimulation with emotional depth.
 - (b) Genres such as soul, soft rock, and adult contemporary were favored.
 - (c) Correlation between music with blended arousal-emotional content and satisfaction:
 - i. $r = 0.31, p < .01$
3. Older adults (51- 65 years)
 - (a) Preferred lyrically romantic and emotionally resonant music, including jazz, classical crossover, and traditional ballads.
 - (b) These selections emphasised intimacy, nostalgia, and lyrical romanticism.
 - (c) Correlation between romantic lyrical content and sexual satisfaction:
 - i. $r = 0.38, p < .001$
 - ii. Suggests a significant alignment between emotional musical cues and intimacy needs.

Table 5: Key trends and comparative metrics

Age Group	Preferred Genre(s)	Dominant Musical Feature	Satisfaction Correlation (r)	Significance (p)
18 – 35	R&B, EDM, Pop	High tempo, sexual lyrics	0.42	< .001
36 – 50	Soul, Soft Rock	Moderate tempo, blended themes	0.31	< .01
51 – 65	Jazz, Ballads, Classical	Romantic lyrics, low tempo	0.38	< .001

Interpretive insights

- (a) High-arousal music acts as a physiological primer for sexual engagement, particularly effective among younger adults whose sexual scripts are more media-influenced and performance-oriented.
- (b) Romantic and emotionally rich music resonates more deeply with older adults, aligning with intimacy-focused sexual expectations and relational depth.
- (c) These findings affirm the study’s theoretical grounding in Arousal Theory

and Social Cognitive Theory, demonstrating that music not only stimulates but also dictates sexual behaviour across life stages.

Discussion

The findings of this study affirm the theoretical underpinnings of both Arousal Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, demonstrating that music operates as a dual agent, physiologically priming individuals for sexual engagement and socially scripting expectations around intimacy. High-arousal genres such as R&B and Electronic Dance Music (EDM) were significantly correlated with increased sexual satisfaction among younger adults, aligning with Berlyne's (1974) proposition that sensory stimuli can elevate emotional and physiological readiness. This supports the notion that tempo, rhythm, and harmonic tension in music can activate autonomic responses conducive to sexual performance (Rickard, 2004).

From a social cognitive perspective, Bandura's (1986) framework elucidates how repeated exposure to sexually explicit lyrics and imagery in music contributes to the internalisation of sexual norms. Younger cohorts, immersed in media-saturated environments, are more likely to adopt permissive sexual attitudes and performance-oriented behaviours, and this is consistent with findings from Martino et al. (2006) and Wright & Craske (2015). Conversely, older adults gravitate toward music that emphasises emotional intimacy and lyrical romanticism, reflecting generational conditioning shaped by cultural scripts and developmental intimacy needs (Rentfrow et al., 2012).

Culturally, the study highlights the role of music as a symbolic mediator of sexual identity, particularly in Western contexts where media consumption is high. The sexualisation of music, especially in visual formats like music videos, has been shown to reinforce gendered stereotypes and objectification (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Mewawalla, 2019). These dynamics raise concerns about the psychological implications of musical exposure, including body image, self-efficacy, and relational expectations.

The generational divergence in musical preferences underscores the constructive role of music in identity formation. Adolescents and young adults often form enduring musical tastes during critical developmental windows (Van Dyke, 2024), which become embedded in their sexual self-concept. Older generations, shaped by different socio-cultural milieus, associate music with emotional resonance and relational depth. This supports the view that musical conditioning is both developmentally situated and culturally contingent (Forbes et al., 2024).

Comparatively, past studies have explored music's influence on sexual attraction through misattributed arousal paradigms. Marin et al. (2017) and Lee & Zaryab (2023) found that high-arousal music increased perceived sexual attractiveness, particularly among females. These findings parallel the current study's results, thus reinforcing the hypothesis that music-induced arousal can modulate sexual perception and behaviour. However, the present study extends this by incorporating

generational analysis and lyrical content, offering a more holistic view of music's impact on sexual satisfaction.

Hence, music emerges not merely as entertainment but as a multifaceted agent of sexual conditioning, shaped by neuro-affective mechanisms, cultural narratives, and generational identity.

Practical applications

(a) **Sexual wellness programmes:** Music-based interventions can be integrated into sexual health curricula to enhance emotional intimacy, reduce performance anxiety, and foster positive sexual scripts. For example, curated playlists tailored to arousal levels and emotional tone may support couples therapy or individual sexual self-awareness.

(b) **Music therapy:** Trauma-informed music therapy has shown promise in addressing emotional regulation, empowerment, and intimacy recovery. Techniques such as lyric analysis, drumming, and songwriting can be adapted in sexual wellness contexts.

(c) **Media literacy initiatives:** Educating individuals, especially adolescents, on the implicit sexual messaging in music can mitigate the internalisation of harmful stereotypes, and promote healthier sexual attitudes.

Recommendations

Future research should explore cross-cultural variations and longitudinal trajectories to deepen understanding of music's role in sexual health and intimacy, and to assess how musical exposure influences sexual health outcomes over time. Moreover, integrating media literacy into sexual wellness programmes could mitigate the potential risks of internalising harmful sexual scripts while leveraging music's therapeutic potential. Such studies should be undertaken with particular attention address the areas presented subsequently.

i. Investigate how musical exposure influences sexual health across diverse cultural contexts and over time. Studies like those by Putkinen et al. (2024) show that music evokes consistent emotional responses across cultures, suggesting potential universality in its sexual impact.

ii. Explore how music can be used in clinical environments to support sexual trauma recovery, intimacy building, and emotional regulation.

iii. Develop interventions that reduce exposure to degrading sexual content in music, which has been linked to risky sexual behaviours among youth. Strategies may include parental guidance, peer-led workshops, and critical media engagement.

iv. Encourage couples and individuals to use music intentionally to elevate sexual experiences. Research shows that music can reduce anxiety, increase duration/stamina and improve emotional bonding during sex. Personalised playlists, rhythm-based movement, and shared musical rituals may foster deeper intimacy.

Conclusion

This study offers a compelling synthesis of music cognition, sexuality studies, and generational psychology, revealing that music is not merely a backdrop to intimacy but a dynamic agent in shaping sexual performance and satisfaction. The research demonstrates that music modulates both physiological readiness and socio-cultural expectations, functioning as a dual catalyst for sexual engagement and behavioural scripting.

The findings underscore that high-arousal genres such as R&B and EDM significantly enhance sexual satisfaction among younger adults, while lyrically romantic and emotionally resonant music aligns more closely with the intimacy needs of older cohorts. This generational divergence affirms music's role in identity construction and emotional regulation across the lifespan.

As Levitin (2006) observes, “Music communicates to us emotionally through systematic violations of expectations”, a mechanism that primes listeners for heightened emotional and physiological states, including those conducive to intimacy. In summary, music emerges as a multifaceted tool for sexual health and satisfaction, offering both physiological stimulation and cultural meaning. Its integration into wellness, therapy, and education holds transformative potential for enhancing intimacy across generations and cultures.

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