We as human beings have an ingrained desire to make, to explore, and to be around beautiful things. I will be focusing on the human need to make and to explore music. There are a multitude of reasons that humans love music, but I have found that the core of our interest in music is in the fact that it satisfies the human need for social togetherness, identity, and emotional impulse. My research is from a selection of articles that support Wayne D. Bowman's article “Why Do Humans Value Music?” and further solidify these three core draws that music has on human beings.

People value music due to its inextricably social and ethical nature. This is seen in ancient cultures such as the Ashanti people, who had an entire language that was based on musical tones. It is also seen when church gatherings sing together to a higher power, when rock bands experience camaraderie through the music they create, and even when an individual identifies with the message portrayed through the music he or she listens to on his or her iPod. Our love for music is more than just a response to auditory stimulus, it is an inherently social concept that sustains identity, invokes universally known emotions, and calls for that thing inside all of us that strives for something higher and greater than ourselves.

The world is full of beautiful creations: from songbirds, to colorful flowers, to vibrant sunsets. Animals, plants, and natural formations portray characteristics that humans perceive as “beautiful” and “pleasant.” But, to an animal, plant, or rock, these characteristics serve a specific function, or they are the result of natural occurrences (such as erosion or the effects of the light spectrum). For example, a bird’s song is used to find mates, plants use flowers to attract pollinators, and the colors in a sunset are the result of bending light rays from the sun as the earth rotates. But for human beings, we have an ingrained desire to make, to explore, and to be around beautiful things. I will be focusing on the human need to make and to explore music. Wayne D. Bowman states in his article “Why Do Humans Value Music?” that humans value music because of “the contingency and multiplicity of musical value, and music's inextricably social and ethical nature.” In other words, he is saying that the good feelings, beauty, and fulfillment found music, as well as its tendency to bring people together and satisfy a social need, are the reason that people enjoy music. I agree with Wayne D. Bowman that humans love music for a multitude of reasons and based on my research, the core of all these reasons is that music satisfies the human need for social togetherness, identity, and emotional impulse.

Bowman’s article explores the different reasons why music is essential for all humans by asking questions such as “Why do people seem to have such an affinity for experiences and activities that are, in some way or other, musical?”2 To answer this question, Bowman looks to Francis Sparshott, who points out that music reaches the human tendency to explore limits that are given, and the human tendency to give structure to discovered values. Bowman also adds three other “human interests”.3 These are “human interest in communicating… participating or collectivity, … interest in similarities and differences.” He finds that these three interests have “their grounding in human social experience and interaction” based on Terry Gate’s response to the question in MENC’s Vision 2020 project. He elaborates that because humans are “fundamentally social creature[s],” that the opportunities to create, share, and communicate through music “satisfies a basic human interest in belonging, relating, and collaborating with others.”4 Bowman uses information from the Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education titled “A Somatic, ‘Here-And-Now’ Semantic: Music, Body, and Self” pointing to how humans love music because it is an interaction of the body and mind that is “utterly unique in human experience.”5 Another point that I agree with is that music is more than just a response to “auditory ‘stimulus,’”[but] rather it is an “inherently social” concept that sustains “both individual and collective identity.” And further, that music goes beyond being a calculated, logical concept, such as calculus or grammar, by tapping into our “emotional and sensational responses.”6 Bowman compares the reasons that humans value music to the complexity of human nature itself, and sums up the reasons humans need music:

“Because of the way sound engages the body; because we are social; because of the limitless ways these facts map onto and enrich human experience; and because musics are potent and unique vehicles for the construction of our personal and social worlds.”7

The first piece of evidence to why music is essential to being human explores how music meets the human need for social togetherness. On a small scale, music brings groups of people together with the common goal to make art and participate in the experience that music creates. This concept is seen in the camaraderie among rock bands, church choirs, marching bands, and any other group where two or more people gather together to create music. On the other hand, people will gather in masses to a field, stadium, bar, or concert hall to join others in listening to music. As a unified whole, each member of the audience shares the same music experience as the person next to them. In Paul A. Aitkin’s article on a choral event focused on bringing together a variety of religious groups, he points out that “music has the invariable capacity to bring people together, and to develop a common cause about which we can all agree.”8 In Margaret Mead’s article “Music Is a Human Need”, she writes that the variety of music between cultures is a “delight to the modern world, something which there can be free exchange from one people to...

2 Bowman, “Humans Value Music?” 57
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7 Bowman, “Humans Value Music?” 61
another." Margaret Mead’s work shows how music can bring entirely different cultures together through their unique musical ideas. It is this unity found in music that allows groups and individuals to start defining who they are in the music they listen to and play.

Music has been used to express both individual and cultural identity. Many religions often have music at the center of their rituals or in worship. In Christianity, worship music brings a congregation of people together who identify themselves as God’s children, or as “saved by Christ.” The people worshiping share the same identity in their beliefs and values. This also seen in the stereotypes of those who listen to or play a particular form of music: Latin music with Latino people, R/B with African Americans, classical music with pretentious rich people. Now stereotypes are often misleading and negative, but it is this concept of different ethnicities having different music that has shaped the identity of cultural groups. As Christopher Small says in his book on music and society, “music is perhaps the most sensitive indicator of the culture, and of all the arts is the most closely tied to the subconscious attitudes and assumptions on which we build our lives within a society.”

Entire cultures and languages are given identity by their music. The Ashanti “like many other African peoples…developed a most intricate and beautiful drum language” where different tones used to pronounce the same syllable have different meanings in their language. The Ashanti are a perfect example of how music creates identity in a culture because their unique language is music. With those who create music, Mead also points out that “we have to look at the part each individual plays in developing a style,” because each person creates their music from their personal identity.

It is important to understand that even within a culture, the music is made up of many individual influences. When one “feels” or relates to the rhythm, tones, and lyrics in the music they love, they “identify” with it. For example, I identify myself with passionate music that is characterized by a driving and building rhythm and specific chord progressions that can be heard by groups such as Coldplay, with contemporary worship in church, and in many movie scores. I identify with the passionately executed instrumentation and the meaningful lyrics, and I portray that same passion in my life through my love for people and in enjoying everything that is good in this world. Someone who is a cynic and is angry at the world might identify with music that has angry lyrics and intense chords and rhythms. An article on the Iroquois from the Grove Music Dictionary of Music and Musicians talks about how the music of the Iroquois varied from one longhouse to another. In social dance music, a singer would have “expressed his personality and creativity via his singing style and his compositions.” The artists who create music put their experiences, their story, and their emotions into what they write.

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11 Mead, “A Human Need” 25
12 Mead, “A Human Need” 26
Humans have emotional responses to beautiful things. Like the joy felt on a perfect spring day, or the feelings of sadness while looking at an artistic, yet morbid painting. Music also stimulates these emotional responses in people. According to a quote that Margaret Mead uses from her own book *People and Places*,

“[a group of people] who have enough food…but no equipment in a place where there is an abundance of plants and animals…would have some idea of making life more beautiful by…patterning sound by singing, or beating on the ground, or blowing on pipes and reeds, or twanging a piece of gut or sinew… the idea of music would be there.”

Mead’s quote shows how humans need to create and be around art and music, even when they are living on the barest of necessities. It appears that without the emotional outlet that music provides, these humans couldn’t survive.

During a Belmont chapel service, religion and the arts major Garrison Wash said in his speech “I think we can all agree that we have been impacted by music…there is something very profound and transcendent about it.” I believe, as creations of God, that this “profound and transcendent” feeling we have when we experience music stems from our deep desire to worship or interact with something greater than ourselves. People emotionally connect with God through hymns of praise or thanks, such as the chorale rendition of the Muslim prayer for peace mentioned in Aitken’s article. Humans will also emotionally reject God through songs of anger towards God, as in the case of some death metal bands such as Vital Remains or Cradle of Filth. Though these types of music offer different emotional responses to a higher being, they still show a form of interaction between creator and created. Listen to the radio, and you will hear that about nine out of ten songs are about love or heartbreak. Emotions such as love, anger, hurt, desire, and happiness are the inspiration for much of the music that has been created. Music provides an emotional outlet for musicians, and music brings out emotional responses in the listeners.

Humans are emotional beings. We crave the sense of community that comes with being connected to others. We have a desire to be a part of a greater purpose than ourselves, while still maintaining a sense of our personal identity. We have a need to express our feelings and engage in meaningful relationships with other people and a higher power. Because of this, I completely agree with Wayne D. Bowman that people value music due to its “inextricably social and ethical nature.” Music satisfies human needs by bringing people together, unifying people under common values and goals, and allowing people to release and share emotional expression.

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14 Mead, “A Human Need” 29
15 Garrison Wash, “Music and Faith,” (chapel discussion, Belmont University, Nashville, TN, October 10, 2014)
16 Aitken, “Music in Worship” 53
17 Bowman, “Humans Value Music?” 63
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Wash, Garrison. “Music and Faith.” (chapel discussion, Belmont University, Nashville, TN, October 10, 2014)