CultureCase

How people acquire new tastes in music

This research was conducted by **Alessandra Lembo** at the **University of Chicago, USA.**

Summary

Honky Tonk Night Happy Hour is a hard country music club night at small venue in a large mid-western US city. The study took place over 15 months via a combination of observation and life history interviews with about 30 regulars at the club. This study shows how different experiences and life trajectories, rather than social background, shape taste and aesthetic appreciation of culture in adulthood. Previous theories of taste and experience have focused on their social distribution (often by age or class).

The event’s name comes from the setting it seeks to imitate

Country dance clubs and drinking establishments rose to popularity in the wake of the late 1920s Texas oil boom. Hard country music emerged in the 1920s and was overtaken by the ‘Nashville sound’ in the 1950s. Country music is associated with the born and bred rural working class, but the attendees of this club night came to this music later in life and are mainly from a different class background – liberal, urban professionals.

Understanding Listeners, Players and Dancers

Of the attendees at the Honky Tonk Night, about half are musicians (Players), a quarter are there to dance (Dancers) and the last quarter are those who just love the music (Listeners). Listeners and Players resemble each other, they both describe the process of ‘getting into’ country as ‘working their way’ to it via other genres. Listeners are most likely to have cultural roots in the South.

Players develop their appreciation by learning to play it, they describe this as ‘imitation’. For Dancers it is about interpreting the music. Their experience is deeply embodied and holistic and the dancing takes time to learn. Dancers experience a conversion: for example one dancer started as a fan of rockabilly and swing prior to becoming a Honky Tonk regular.

This summary is by **Sheridan Humphreys, King’s Knowledge Exchange Associate**

Keywords

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Author email	**alelembo@uchicago.edu**

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