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Engl 106

The Impact of the 90's-2000's Boy Bands

The beginning of the 90's era focuses on a lot of new changes with technology, politics, arts, and most importantly the music. The airwaves were being dominated by artists such as Britney Spears, Nelly, Blink 182, Destiny's Child and many more. The huge idea of this era was the rise in boy bands and how impactful they've become with such a small amount of time.

A boy band can be defined as a vocal group consisting of young male singers, usually in their teenage years or in their early twenties who sing a majority of love songs, have very insync and amazing choreographed dance moves, no physical instruments being played by the members of the band, a huge fan base (usually younger girls), lastly, a couple of heartthrobs to make the fans go crazy.

Boy Bands started out not even being called boy bands but barbershop quartets and it would be a couple of members that sang in four-part harmonies. They were very popular for a while and helped spark ideas for the future. Throughout the years we've seen many different boy bands emerge in music. The Beatles, The Temptations, The Jackson 5, Menudo, New Edition, Boyz II Men and many more. Yet the impact of these two groups really changed the meaning of being and also hearing the words boy band. Backstreet Boys and *NSYNC have created new heights and really progressed pop music in many different ways. If it wasn't for the impact both

of these groups made for other groups such as Jonas Brothers, One Direction & BTS also including girl groups they're wouldn't be much room for creativity and expansion for singing and dancing groups in general.

The impact of Backstreet Boys and *NSYNC is prevalent to pop culture today because of this new epidemic they brought not only for boy bands but artist in general with new ways to appeal to their audiences and really use other marketing outlets to really make themselves into a really popular and huge groups. They both helped change pop music to this style of fun and give men this new way of expressing themselves without losing and feeling less masculian. This idea of masculinity in the music industry has become more and more about being a "tough guy" and everything is always about clothes, women, cars, money, and sex yet these groups helped change that. They gave all of these little boys the confidence to sing and express their emotions and still have this "masculinity" aspect to them. Signs of less masculinity in music wasn't expected or allowed at the time of these groups becoming huge stars they paved the way for other groups to do more with there music and take matters into there own hands. These paths of showing out for men with emotions as well as taking over the marketing outlets in there time have created a new culture for every other artist to come.

Background:

AJ McLean, Howie Dorough, Nick Carter, Kevin Richardson, and Brian Littrell. The Backstreet Boys, founded in Orlando Florida were a group who rose to fame international first before becoming mega superstars. They became popular with there debut self titled album

Backstreet Boys (1996), then came out with 8 other albums that all charted and did very well. The Backstreet Boys have sold over 100 million records worldwide, which makes them the best-selling boy band of all time. As of today they are still one of the most decorated and successful boy bands to continue a career throughout their peak.

The Backstreet Boys style and artistry was based on them and how they didn't actually see themselves as your typical boy band but a vocal harmony group. Others started to question them for it so they would have to sing a cappella at times to prove they could sing due to at the time a lot of lip-syncing scandals had come out and no one was believing that these boy bands could sing. They wanted to be more like singing groups like Jodeci, Shai, and Boyz II Men because these groups showed true singing talent and ability. "The Backstreet Boys often employ polyphonic harmony, which sets them apart from many other singing groups. In choruses, Littrell, Carter, and McLean usually sing the melody with Dorrough harmonizing above the melody and Richardson covering the bass parts" (Cooper) The group's music style changed throughout the years with an R&B and Dance/Pop feel with a little bit of New Jack Swing, they transitioned to Pop Rock, Adult Contemporary, a little bit of Reggae in their later years and of course a mix of some Contemporary Pop.

Justin Timberlake, JC Chasez, Chris Kirkpatrick, Joey Fatone, and Lance Bass. *NSYNC was also founded in Orlando, Florida but a little later than the Backstreet Boys. They both got there starts the same way with starting international before coming into the states. *NSYNC's album titled, *No Strings Attached* sold over one million copies in a single day as well as 2.42

million copies in one week which broke music record history for over fifteen years. They also were nominated for many Grammy awards in there years as a musical group. They also had to face legal battles with there manager, Lou Pearlmen as well as there former record label, Bertelsmann Music Group. The group started out in Sweden and worked on their first debut album, which with there first single titled “I Want You Back” charting really high in Germany then charting very high here in the states.

*NSYNC’s style and flow was all based on the actual “squeaky clean boy band” image when under management with Lou Pearlmen. They would do the typical Love ballads, a little touch of R&B, with a high Dance feel and Pop style music style. They really were the picture perfect boy band, with having the in-sync dance moves, large vocals from each members depending on song, and high volume videos. Until after the court settlement with Lou Pearlmen, when they got to express themselves on there second album titled “*No Strings Attached*” as well as there last group album titled “*Celebrity*” with Justin Timberlake and JC Chasez writing a lot of the groups hits from the album with help from many others in the music industry. “*No Strings Attached*” brought us many hits such as the groups “signature song”, “*Bye Bye Bye*” and “*It's Gonna Be Me*” is full of just dance and fun songs. As a group, they went into the genre of more dance feeling songs and gave beats of inviting and infectious detail. This album helped them become writers as well as producers for the music industry.

Masculinity in Music:

Masculinity in music has been a very mixed with different meanings and feelings. As a “masculine” man you have to be tough, have a ton of courage, be independent, and assertive. So with the music industry, these men were trained to do the same as well. They would sing about women, cars, jobs, clothes, money, sex and many more “manly men” topics. Stereotyping these men in music had become normalized and the only way they could be in the music industry. Making sure that they did sing like a “man” or play an instrument that was “manly” (i.e guitar, drums, bass, etc.) With the rise of rock music and how these men sang about there feelings it was all about who was the “manliest” and who was going to rise to the occasion to be that man figure for everyone.

“Mainstream media representations play a role in reinforcing ideas about what it means to be a "real" man in our society. In most media portrayals, male characters are rewarded for self-control and the control of others, aggression and violence, financial independence, and physical desirability. In the report Boys to Men: Media Messages about Masculinity, three main themes about the portrayal of men in the media emerge: the majority of male characters in media are heterosexual Masculinity Media Sport 35 male characters are more often associated with the public sphere of work, rather than the private sphere of the home, and issues and problems related to work are more significant than personal issues, non-white male characters are more likely to experience personal problems and are more likely to use physical aggression or violence to solve those problems” (Harrison)

Masculinity in the music industry was seen as straightforward as masculinity in the normal life aspect. It was all about being a clean cut “man” and nothing more.

Until a couple of men decided to challenge these norms for example, David Bowie, Michael Jackson, Prince, and many more. They all felt as if these norms we had for men in music would stop them from expressing themselves with more feminine roles. With expressing themselves out of love, care and compassion. Also as time prevaled, the nineties were helping a huge change in music with having groups and solo artist start to not use musical instruments. “The binary nature of this type of research process seems to emphasize the stereotypical nature of instrument selection and leaves no option for instruments to be considered neutral.” (Harrison). Yet, with these changes being made lots of people didn’t want these groups or solo artist to play, sing or do anything that was outside there “gender norms” for example, men shouldn’t play the flute and women shouldn’t play the guitar or drums.

These gender norms that play in these men's lives is something they want to change and need to change. The rise of these huge stars that challenge these ideas create something for other men who want to express themselves. They truly believe they can do what they want and please.

Masculinity in Pop Music:

As we expand on these ideals of masculinity in music, we see that in pop music it was a lot harder yet very open to more changes than other genres of music. These groups are more than just music but A platform for others to see and be more open about themselves. An article I read

about both groups it stated, “An article by Metro from 2016 mentions that Backstreet made it acceptable for guys to enjoy boy bands. Prior to this time, boy bands were aimed at teen girls. Songs from many popular boy bands were slow tempo, love songs. What made The Backstreet Boys iconic was their ability to have fun and relate to normal boys around their age. Not only did this group change boys minds on the typical “boy band”, but boy bands of the 90s changed the way people today see manliness in the music industry today. “They really made our concepts of adolescent masculinity a lot less rigid, which I think is a good thing. I think there’s a lot of young people out there who certainly don’t fit into our ideals for young male masculinity in terms of gender performance and sexuality,” says Craig Jennex in an article from The Star.” (Brognna) He continues, “I really want to show people how important pop music is to us in our everyday lives and I knew that if I could do that with boy bands, then maybe people would start thinking about pop music differently.” In his research Jennex notes the performance of 90s boy bands as “singing and dancing, but they don’t play instruments”. (Brognna)

Both of these groups wanted to define the odds of males and masculinity in these boy bands. They helped other boy bands as well as younger boys who would listen to these groups make it acceptable to be a man with feelings about a women and sing your heart out about how they felt about them. Backstreet Boys and *NSYNC created this new environment for other singing groups to learn and open up about themselves as individuals. They strictly wanted it all to be about the music.

Masculinity in boy bands and even just male singers in general is something that people see as a lack. People often believe that male singers and performers aren't "real men" and they can't do anything like a "real man" can. Which isn't the case whatsoever. Lots of men in the industry have tried to change these stereotypes they give these male performers for example, Prince, and Mick Jagger had this very androgynous look to them when they perform and go out into the public. Androgyny can be defined as the combination of masculine and feminine characteristics into an ambiguous form. Which means these men would take both aspects of both genders and make it their own. They wanted to make this masculinity aspect of male performers neutral. They wanted everyone to see that you can do both. "Men's position is under attack from various directions to the point that many of the privileges enjoyed by previous generations are being eroded." (Gregory, 84)

Thinking about Backstreet Boys and *NSYNC and how they dealt with their masculinity they wanted to show off their ways with their words and how they talked about their feelings. For example, In the HBO Special of *NSYNC's No Strings Attached tour at Madison Square Garden they talked about how they dedicated every song to the beautiful fans and how much they support them. They also talked about the music is all for the fans and they always sing their hearts out for them. "Such melodramatic suffering is deemed unmanly because in melodrama, masochistic identification is typically experienced from a female point of view" (Kuhn, 2007) (Gregory, 94) "Male teenybopper performers display a feminized masculinity that constructs male fan desire as homoerotic", further problematizing the dance spectacle by aligning straight men with gay male spectators. For straight men, the prospect of being looked at by same-sex

peers creates insecurity, not unlike that experienced by homosexual men within gay culture where, the physical body is held in such high esteem and given such power, body fascism then not only deems those who don't or can't conform to be sexually less desirable, but in the extreme – sometimes dubbed “looksism” – also deems an individual completely worthless as a person, based solely on his exterior.” (Gregory, 94). These men who are younger boys at the time of their releases are seen as less than a man by their peers just because of expressing themselves. Which is something that both groups didn't let phase them and get in the way of their success. They take this “hardcore” attitude that men are supposed to have and make it acceptable to be a man with feelings as well as express them with the world. It's hard for men to express their feelings in the first place so for both groups to be okay with sharing everything about what's going on in their lives really touches home for a lot of people as well as the younger generation.

For example one of *NSYNC's hit songs titled, “*This I Promise You*” the lyrics read,

*[Chorus: *NSYNC, J.C. Chasez, Justin Timberlake]*

And I will take you in my arms (I will take you in my arms)

And hold you right where you belong (right where you belong)

Til' the day my life is through

This I promise you, babe

Just close your eyes each loving day (each loving day)

And know this feeling won't go away (no)

These lyrics that the members of *NSYNC are singing are all about their feelings and what they would do for their women in their lives. Even if you just take the chorus alone from this particular song, *“And I will take you in my arms, And hold you right where you belong, Til' the day my life is through, This I promise you, This I promise you”* They're promising to these women that they will never hurt them and make them feel bad. Most men today and even then wouldn't do have of the things they talked about in this song and for a group of men to sing about promising their lives to these women and giving them the world really shows that masculinity is something they don't think twice about. They want to express that they are all about giving women the compassion they deserve and showing them their worth. If these songs reflect how they feel then this is something that other men in groups or even solo artists. Not everything that a man does has to be “manly” things can have some emotions to them and they should be expressed in a healthy and creative way. As well as telling a woman you love that, *“I've loved you forever, In lifetimes before”* is something that should be normal but yet as a society we've made a lyric like this more common for men to sing about than something that *NSYNC or even The Backstreet Boys would sing, *“Freak hoes, freak hoes, Bounce that ass, make your knees touch your elbows.”* by today's top rappers.

As well as the video to *“This I Promise You”* [*“This I Promise You” *NSYNC*](#) throughout the entire cinematic video they show examples of couples in the mist of bubbles flying around them of many different mixes with being young, interracial, old, young, etc. being in love and showing each other how much they love each other. With having different couples show their affection to the song that is all about being in love with your significant other.

As well as the Backstreet Boys single titled, “*Everybody (Backstreet’s Back)*”

[Verse 1: AJ]

Oh my God, we're back again

Brothers, sisters, everybody sing

Gonna bring the flavor, show you how

Got a question for you, better answer now, yeah

Backstreet Boys singing to everyone in there back to the music industry anthem is huge because they’re telling everyone who listens to music that it's acceptable to like them and there music. Its okay to be different and sing and dance about your feelings. They said hey I know the boys and girls would and will truly enjoy this song so why not tell them to sing along. It's great that they all want to sing with us because they all can and should. These men very similar to *NSYNC gave themselves as well as other groups a new doorway to go about love music and ballads for men. Men should be able to share how they feel anyway they can but yet society doesn’t feel as if men are capable of doing it yet do they even want them to do it. If one of these men weren’t apart of this group singing this song and were on there own they would look at them differently and probably call him many names because they don’t see the expression value of this but this one sided gender norm that these men have when it comes to singing, dancing or expressing themselves in anyway.

Not to mention the music video to the song “*Everybody (Backstreet’s Back)*” ["Everybody \(Backstreet's Back\) The Backstreet Boys](#) had so much detail and thought brought into it. With being a parody on the horror film genre and all of the members being different slasher characters shows them being very exciting and fun and also has clips of them being scared of this haunted house they’re approaching together as a group. It takes away this ideal of men being strong and showing they can be scared of things rather than being aggressive and showing no fear. With Howie being sleep at the end of the video, realizing it was a nightmare was something never seen because masculine men aren’t supposed to be frightened with things of that nature. This video opened doors for many other groups with the concept and marketing aspect of things.

These ideals that both the Backstreet Boys and *NSYNC had was no one could hurt them because they’re trying to make a difference not only in music but for the younger male generation and giving them a light to see that you can do everything you want to do and still express yourself. “Boy bands made boundaries a little less rigid when it comes to sexuality and gender. I think they have created a safer space for young men to perform their masculinity and grow.” (Jennex & Brogna)

Marketing & Television Impact:

Boy Bands were the hottest things on the music charts in the early 90’s through the 2000’s. The media was filled with these huge groups and really wanted to really expand on these groups and do more with them. “Historical examples demonstrate that popular music has always

relied on clever marketing (Ogden et al, 2011)” (Gregory, 60) The marketing aspect and approach that both the Backstreet Boys and *NSYNC took we’re very smart on the management and groups parts. One outlet both groups really took huge leaps on were music videos. Music videos became a huge and popular demand in the late 1980s, and by the time boy bands like Backstreet and *NSYNC were popular, music videos were highly anticipated. Both bands created music videos that set standards for all future musicians, not just other boy bands.

Total Request Live, also known as TRL was an american televised video countdown program that gave the people at home and there central location of New York City in the middle of Times Square a chance to watch and see some of there favorite artists and songs. The show would play the top 10 requested songs at the moment voted by the viewers and also was called a live show yet it would be pre-recorded. This show was aired on MTV network and lasted from September 14, 1998 to November 16, 2008 until it was revamped and now it is back on the airwaves yet with a different dynamic to it.

TRL helped pave a way for both groups to become as successful as they did. With having both groups always coming on the show to talk about what they had going on, having there videos play every single day and many more.

Everyday with TRL aring the best videos and content everyday The Backstreet Boys and *NSYNC led the number 1 and 2 spots on the charts for years upon years. In 1998 both groups flip flopped the top spot for the entire year and no other groups or solo artist could get that spot

because they both had it on lock. Until the rise of female pop vocalist started to approach. Yet these groups were everything MTV and TRL wanted to become. Huge on the charts and public eyes, as well as marketing opportunities for the companies who ran these groups as well as who ran merchandising companies.



**Nsync mid interview with TRL host Carson Daly.*



The Backstreet Boys in an interview with Carson Daly

Marketing for these groups really became huge with the rise in boy bands became a rise in merchandise and music videos.

For example, the budgets for both groups music videos were super high and they made many big music videos that went on to win multiple awards. The music video starring the Backstreet Boys titled “larger than life” cost over \$2 million, which helped set and create a standard for music videos for everyone in the industry and was seen by some on the same level of a Michael Jackson music video which was the real pathway. These music videos created a guide for all genres of music. *NSYNC was also creating some iconic dance moves in their music videos. Songs like “It’s Gonna Be Me” and “Tearin’ Up My Heart” showcased the talents

of the members of *NSYNC not just musically, but through dance and creativity. With “It's Gonna Be Me” music video the entire storyline of the boys being plastic dolls in a large toy store and how the whole video they're trying to get purchased to become their real life selves again was thought about by *NSYNC's own group member Justin Timberlake. He was a major part of there creativity aspect.

With the merchandize aspect of each group they both helped other companies sales with each group having different group shirts, keychains, posters, in the 2000's hit childrens toy called “Hit Clips” both groups had multiple songs for the toys, and many more memorable. They created this new dynamic for bands and really created a high demand for new group merchandise. *NSYNC alone had bed covers and pillows, group dolls, an official band book, hats, Funko dolls, clocks, pencils, stickers, purses and backpacks and many more things you could think of. These groups created a new dynamic for the term of music industry merchandise, they created a new lifestyle for there fans.

Boy Bands are a top market for any music manager because of the appeal that can come out of the groups for example the biggest boy band of 2019 BTS. Everywhere you go that sales different music, shirts, etc BTS is there. They have there faces on skin products, shirts etc. It would be a dream for a music manager to find a boy band because the fans if they truly liked the group and there music they would do and buy anything that has the group on it. These boy bands made a way with marketing and really created a new epidemic for other artists to come. These marketing efforts helped these groups with there popularity with giving fans merchandise to

connect with them in their everyday lives. With the fans going to school with backpacks, stickers and other merchandise it helped make groups bigger because if one person didn't know about the group they were going to learn about them around their peers which would cause a ripple effect and make the groups even bigger than before.

Both groups had very different but exciting new visions with their work on their music videos. And everyone of course got to see them right when they got home from work and school because it was the rise of MTV and TRL. Both groups became megastars from TRL with appearances, concerts, etc. it helped them reach new heights with their work.

Conclusion:

Without The Backstreet Boys and *NSYNC, male music today would not be the same. Boy bands gave men the ability to sing songs about emotion in a sensitive way. Not only were the two bands highly recognized in the US for their music, they left a legacy for future bands. They created a new epidemic for male artists in the music industry with having huge fans that support them with buying their merchandise and concert tickets, sticking to what their groups mission was singing about the loves of their lives, dancing like they didn't have a care in the world, all while still having the masculinity about themselves that no other man can tell them about. They didn't let the pressures of the society they lived in affect their music but inspire them to reach outside of their comfort zones and be the pioneer of taking your music into your own hands. From the way men are viewed in the music industry, to music videos, and so many

other reasons *NSYNC and The Backstreet Boys will always be some of the most popular and memorable boy bands.

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