

“He has the whole package: lyrics, melodies, enigmatic, mythical”

Images of Bob Dylan – Results of Questionnaire

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In 2022, we conducted a questionnaire survey to explore Bob Dylan’s image as perceived by his fans and followers and how they use his songs. The Dylan questionnaire was part of the research project *Uses of Literature* (2016–2022, PIs Anne-Marie Mai and Rita Felski, the Danish National Research Foundation). We were motivated to conduct this questionnaire, as it is rather obvious from public comments about Dylan’s albums and books that his fans and followers have strong feelings about the artist and his songs and that they have often used his songs in different ways.

We wanted to explore these perceptions of Dylan and these uses of his songs and asked questions that were designed to reveal the respondents’ thoughts and opinions on Bob Dylan as an artist and their uses of his songs in decisive moments of their lives. We wanted fans and followers of Dylan to participate. It was our hypothesis that the fans and followers of Bob Dylan are mostly men, that they are middle-aged and older, that they use Bob Dylan’s songs for comfort, help, or support in decisive moments of their lives, and that they are more interested in his songs than in his other artwork. It was also our hypothesis that the fans and followers have been acquainted with Bob Dylan’s songs since their youth and that they have been followers for many years. We also wanted to know which qualities made Bob Dylan important to them and whether they consider it fair that Bob Dylan was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. The questionnaire is included in appendix A.²

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² Special thanks to PhD fellow Tatina Tilly, SDU, for her assistance with the questionnaire.

Method

The questionnaire consisted of questions that elicited the nationality, gender, and age of the respondents and their use of Bob Dylan's songs. The questionnaire consisted of both ticking boxes and boxes where the respondents could develop their answers. We wanted it to be easy to participate in the questionnaire, and the respondents were to be able to finish the questionnaire in 10 minutes.

We sent out the questionnaire to websites of Dylan's fans and followers and used social media to reach out to interested respondents. We focused on the following websites:

- The Dylan Review <https://thedylanreview.org/>
- Steve Hoffman Music Forums <https://forums.stevhoffman.tv/members/anne-marie-mai.143323/>
- The Bob Dylan Fanclub <https://www.facebook.com/groups/thebobdylanfanclub>
- Bob Dylan <https://www.facebook.com/groups/147477357117>
- Expecting Rain <https://www.expectingrain.com/>
- The TU Institute for Bob Dylan Studies <https://dylan.utulsa.edu/>
- Academy Europaea <https://ae-info.org/>

We also contacted the following Bob Dylan experts, who have large networks, and asked them to share the questionnaire with their contacts:

Professor Gisle Selnes; Norway

Professor Bjarne Kristian Markussen, Norway

Professor Sean Latham, US

Professor Nina Goss, US

Independent researcher Michael Gray, Great Britain

Professor Andrian Grafe, France

Professor Richard F. Thomas, US

Professor Thomas Palaima, US

Professor Jørgen Veisland, Gdansk

There were 1938 respondents, of which 1749 completed the whole questionnaire.

The respondents did an amazing job in sharing their experiences, their thoughts, and their uses of Bob Dylan's songs and artwork. Studying the answers has been a meeting with all kinds of people from many countries, ready to share their feelings and life experiences. The answers are very generous and full of wisdom about life. But the material was also very difficult to analyze because of the individuality and rich diversity of the answers.

"Images of Bob Dylan" is the first ever academic Bob Dylan questionnaire. The Bob Dylan Institute, University of Tulsa, publishes an ongoing series of online posts where they ask Bob Dylan fans "about the role The Bard has played in their lives" (<https://dylan.utulsa.edu/the-dylan-questionnaire-dylan-hills/>). But this is not a systematic questionnaire, and the answers are not analyzed. Social media platforms have promoted an open dialogue between Dylan's fans and followers. They exchange ideas and opinions on fan club sites, but information has only to a small extent been collected and analyzed. Barry Williams's PhD thesis "BOB DYLAN FANS and FOLLOWERS: Expressions of Music, Culture, Fan-Life, Perception and Interpretation" (2015, Aston University, https://publications.aston.ac.uk/id/eprint/33413/2/Williams_B._2015.pdf) draws on online Dylan fan narratives, oral histories, personal interviews, and interdisciplinary writings on Dylan, but Barry Williams did not conduct a questionnaire of his own. Williams' thesis concludes "that Dylan fans have related to how Dylan and his music have, 'been with them', in some direct and specifically personal way in their own particular life-journey experience. Listening to Dylan's songs (often over and over, and over again), and attending his live concerts (as often as they can) has, for many fans, been experienced as something very special and distinctly relatable to their own personal life journey" (p. 162). The result of our questionnaire is in accordance with Barry Williams' analysis but adds new systematically collected information and analysis to the fans' and followers' perceptions of Bob Dylan and their uses of his artwork. Barry Williams collects Dylan stories on his website: <http://mybobdylanstory.weebly.com/>.

Professor Jørgen Ellegaard and his team at the Centre for Quantum Mathematics, SDU, have analyzed the responses to our questionnaire, and this allowed us to get deeper into the many answers and find certain patterns.

The study used exploratory data analysis such as calculating summary statistics, visualizing data distributions with bar plots, word counting, and using large language models like ChatGPT to summarize texts and characterize patterns in the respondents' texts. The use of chat-GPT is motivated by the possibility to summarize free text input, which can be

matched against other free text input, and in turn form the basis for statistical test. We have not made linguistic or spelling corrections in the texts of the respondents.

Demographic Analysis

We first consider the distribution of age and gender of the respondents. The histogram and the bar plot are provided in the following. Then we present a preliminary analysis of nationality distribution. The main challenge is that participants provided their nationalities as free-text responses in the questionnaire. The variety in responses required a careful data cleaning and standardization process to ensure accurate analysis. Despite this complexity, our initial count highlights a prevalence of ‘American’, ‘USA’, and ‘Canadian’ identifiers for the North American respondents and Nordic and UK respondents, among others. A circle graph showing the corresponding to the distribution of nationality is attached at the end of the section. We notice that the majority of the respondents are aged between 60 and 75 and are male citizens of Northern America.

Fig 1(a): Distribution of Age

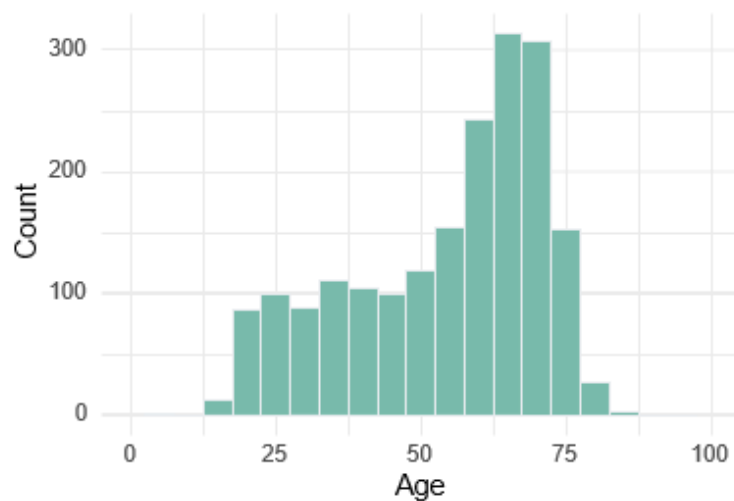


Fig 1(b): Distribution of Gender

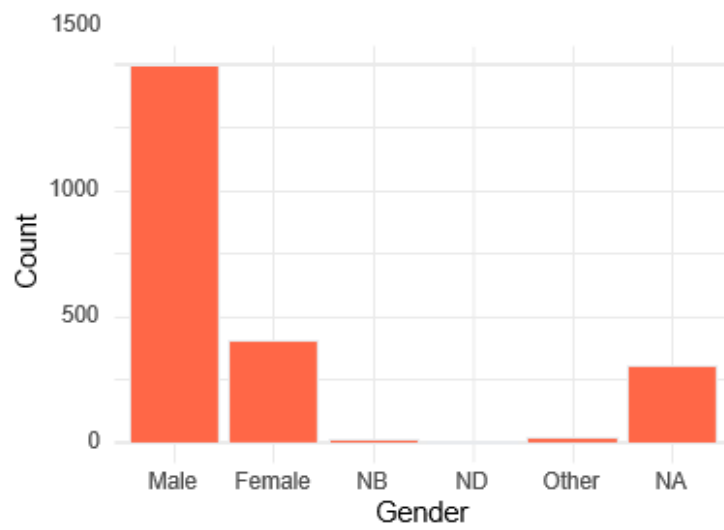
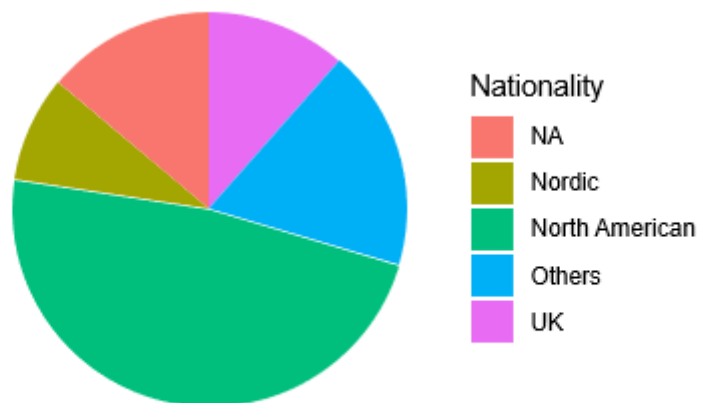


Fig 1(c): Distribution of Nationality



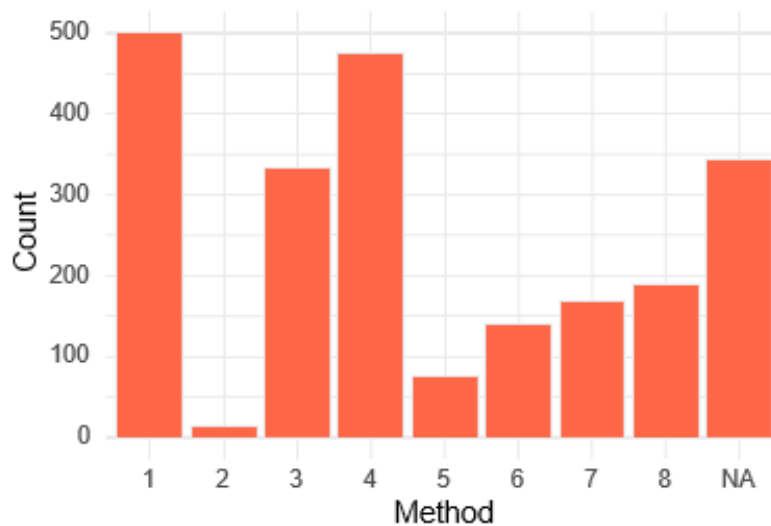
Music Discovery

In this section, we attempt to answer the following questions:

- How did the respondents first come across Bob Dylan’s music?
- What is the age distribution at the time of discovery?
- Does the age of discovery vary significantly between genders?

Fig 2(a) below highlights that most respondents first came across Bob Dylan’s music through radio, friends, or family members.

Fig 2(a): How did the respondents first come across Bob Dylan?



In Fig 2(b), we present a histogram illustrating the age distribution of individuals at their initial encounter with Bob Dylan’s music. Additionally, we provide a comparison in Fig 2(c) and Fig 2(d) between gender groups. It is noteworthy that both males and females have a median age of 14 when they first discovered Bob Dylan’s music, meaning males as well as females were children or teenagers when they first discovered Dylan.

Fig 2(b): When did the respondents first come across BD's music?

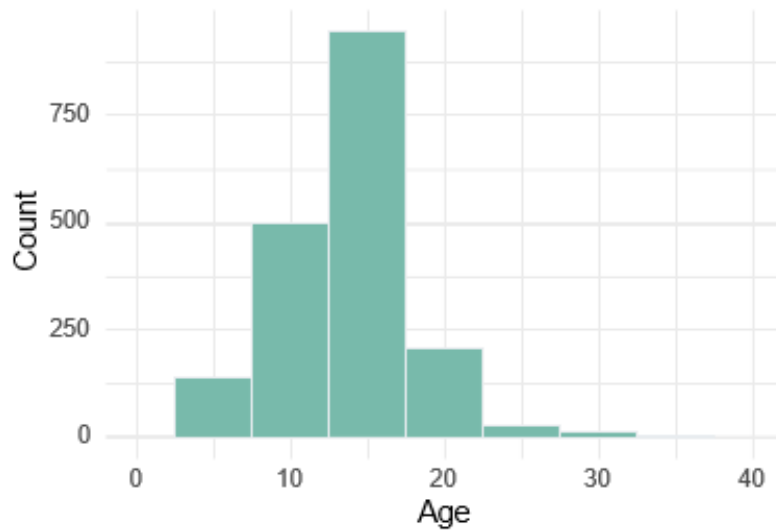
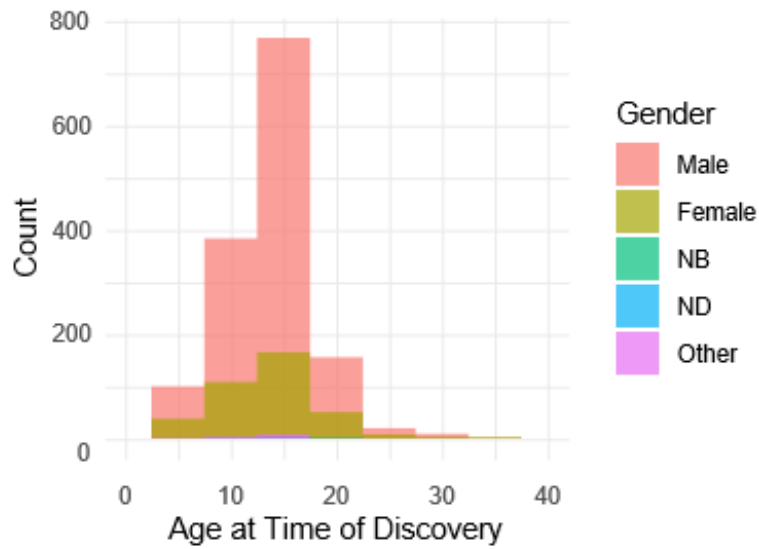
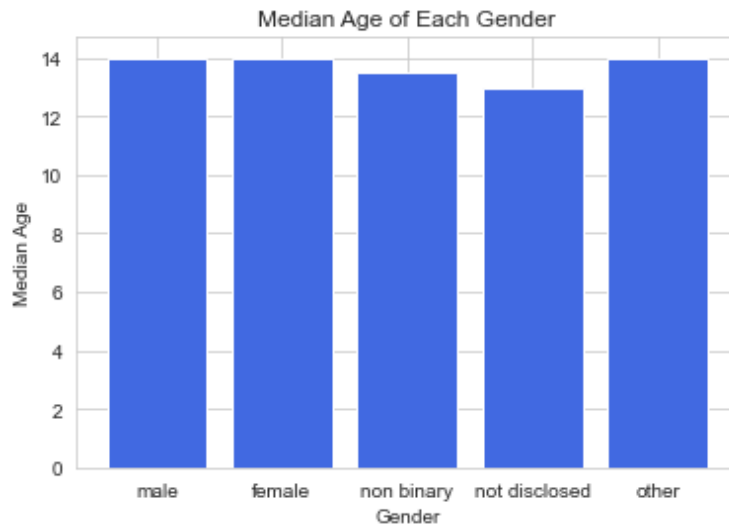


Fig 2(c): Age Distribution by Gender



In the figure below, which depicts the median age at which individuals of different genders first encountered Bob Dylan, it is evident that the median age for all genders is approximately 14 years old. This suggests a similar initial exposure to Bob Dylan for all genders.

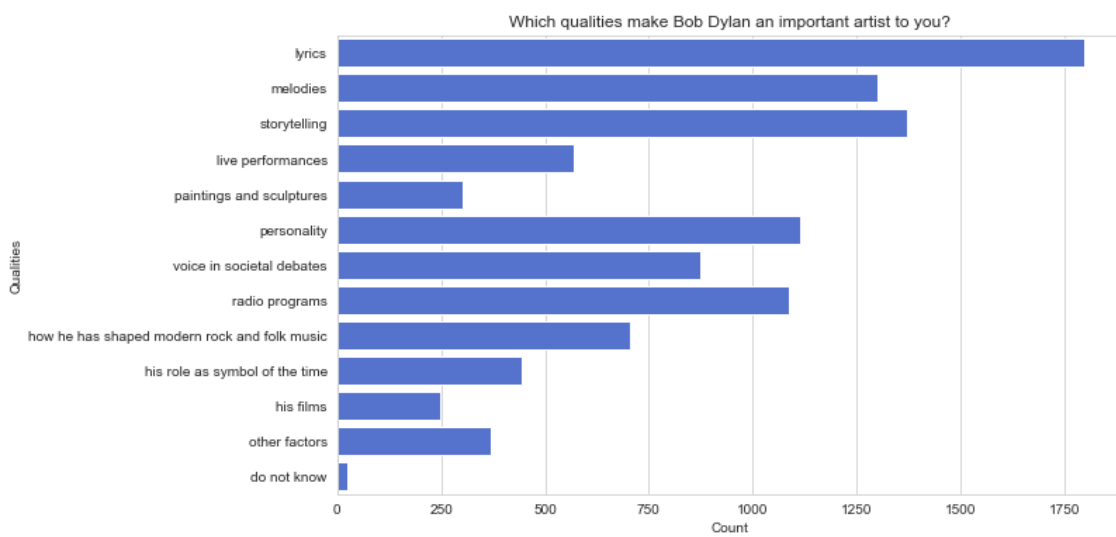
Fig 2(d): Median Age by Gender



Artist Qualities

Which qualities of Bob Dylan do the respondents value the most? From the figure below, we saw that the three leading qualities are his lyrics, melodies, and storytelling.

Fig 3: Qualities of Bob Dylan



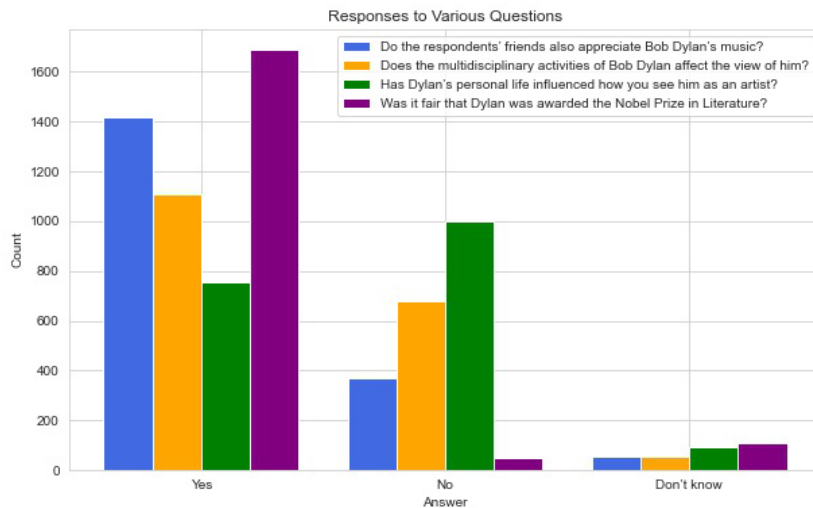
Influence and Perception

In this section, we delve into the following inquiries:

1. Do the respondents' friends also appreciate Dylan's music?
2. Have Dylan's multidisciplinary activities (such as memoirs, film, painting, and sculpture) influenced the respondents' perceptions of him?
3. Has Dylan's personal life had an impact on how respondents perceive him as an artist?
4. According to the respondents, was it fair for Dylan to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature?

The questionnaire revealed that 77% of the respondents have friends who appreciate Bob Dylan's music, emphasizing the widespread influence of his work. Furthermore, 60% of the respondents acknowledged that Dylan's multidisciplinary activities significantly shaped their view of him. Surprisingly, 54% of the respondents felt Dylan's personal life did not have an impact on their perception of him as an artist. Notably, 91% of the respondents believed it was fair for Dylan to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Fig 4: Bar plot of responses to questions related to Bob Dylan's influence



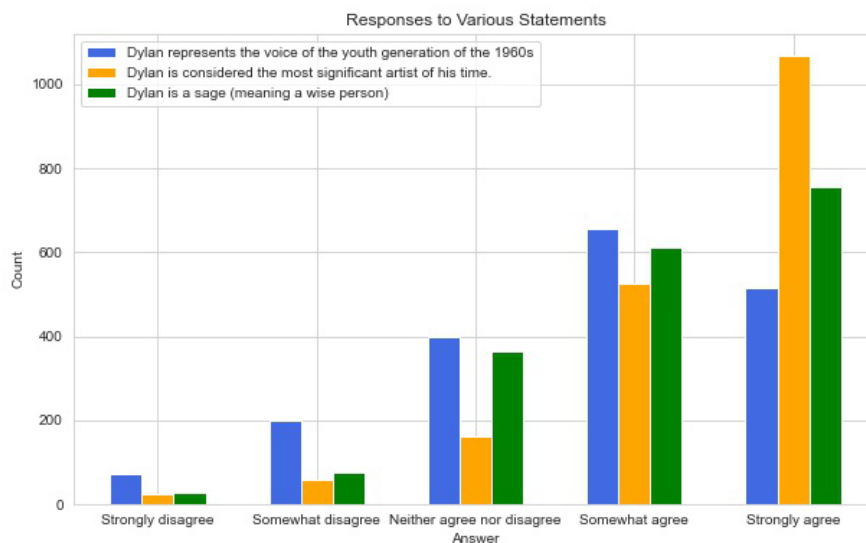
Some More Questions About Dylan

In the following statements, we examine some further perceptions of Dylan:

- Dylan represents the voice of the youth generation of the 1960s.
- Dylan is considered the most significant artist of his time.
- Dylan is regarded as a sage, symbolizing wisdom.

In relation to various statements about Bob Dylan, 64% of the respondents think Bob Dylan represents the voice of the youth generation of the 1960s, 87% believe that Bob Dylan is considered the most significant artist of his time, and 75% think that Bob Dylan is a sage.

Fig 5: Bar plot of responses to questions related to Bob Dylan's significant role in the time



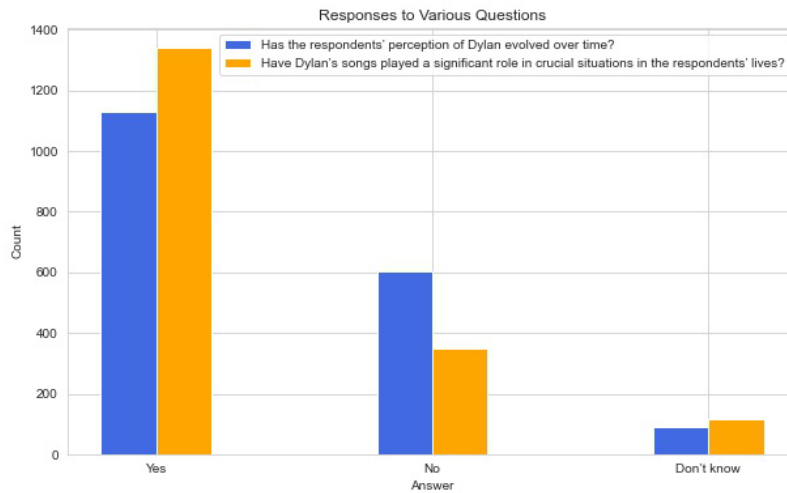
Opinions About Dylan

In this section, our focus is on the following two questions:

- Have the respondents' perceptions of Dylan evolved over time?
- Have Dylan's songs played a significant role in crucial situations or moments in the respondents' lives?

62% of respondents said that their perception of Bob Dylan has changed over time, and 74% said that Bob Dylan’s songs played a significant role in crucial situations in their lives.

Fig 6: Bar plot of responses to questions related to opinions about Bob Dylan’s



Decisive Moments

Dylan’s songs have been important in different situations and moments in life. Based on the respondents’ answers, the following notable moments were identified after feeding the answers to ChatGPT.

- (i) Coping with heartbreak: Many respondents mentioned that Dylan’s music helped them through breakups, divorce, and relationship troubles. Songs like “Blood on the Tracks” were particularly significant during these times.
- (ii) Personal reflection and self-discovery: Dylan’s lyrics and songs provided a framework for introspection and self-exploration, helping respondents navigate through various stages of life, make important decisions, and understand themselves better.
- (iii) Loss and grief: Dylan’s music served as a source of comfort and solace during times of loss, including the death of a loved one. Songs like “Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right” and “Death Is Not the End” offered reassurance and helped in the healing process.

- (iv) Spiritual and philosophical exploration: Respondents mentioned that Dylan's gospel albums and lyrics with spiritual themes influenced their faith and offered insights into existential questions and matters of faith and doubt.
- (v) Social and political awareness: Dylan's songs became anthems during times of social and political conflict, serving as a means of expressing activism, challenging injustice, and providing a perspective on societal issues.
- (vi) Milestones and celebrations: Dylan's music was woven into significant life events such as weddings and funerals, with songs being played to commemorate these moments and express emotions.
- (vii) Coping with illness and mental health challenges: Several respondents mentioned that Dylan's music helped them cope with depression, illness, and other mental health struggles, offering comfort and understanding during difficult times.
- (viii) Coming of age and adolescence: Many respondents mentioned that Dylan's music accompanied them during their teenage years and helped shape their identity, worldview, and interests. Dylan's songs resonated with their experiences of growing up and navigating the complexities of youth.
- (ix) Inspirational and motivational support: Dylan's lyrics provided inspiration and motivation during times of adversity, such as overcoming personal challenges, pursuing artistic endeavors, and striving for personal growth. His words served as a source of encouragement and perseverance.
- (x) Professional and academic pursuits: Dylan's artistry influenced respondents' professional paths and academic endeavors. Some mentioned incorporating his work into their studies, writing dissertations on his contribution to literature, or using his lyrics to inspire their own creative pursuits.
- (xi) Guidance through personal crises: Dylan's music acted as a guiding light during difficult times, offering wisdom, perspective, and a sense of direction. His songs helped respondents navigate through crises, make sense of their experiences, and find strength and resilience.
- (xii) Relationship milestones: Dylan's music played a significant role in romantic relationships. Some respondents associated specific songs with falling in love, relationships, and even had Dylan's songs performed at their weddings. His

lyrics captured the complexities of love and provided a soundtrack to their emotional journeys.

- (xiii) Coping with societal challenges: Dylan’s music served as a companion and source of solace during times of societal turmoil, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, political unrest, and social justice movements. His songs provided a voice for collective struggles and a means of finding comfort and understanding amidst chaos.
- (xiv) Personal transformation and self-acceptance: Dylan’s artistry was cited as instrumental in personal transformation and self-acceptance. His music allowed respondents to embrace their individuality, challenge societal norms, and find strength in their own beliefs and values.
- (xv) Daily life and everyday situations: Dylan’s lyrics and songs seamlessly intertwined with respondents’ daily lives, offering a relatable perspective on ordinary experiences. Whether it was a random thought, a moment of reflection, or a shared emotion, Dylan’s music provided a connection to the human condition.

Fig 7(a): Top 50 words and their frequencies in the responses for whether Dylan’s music has been important in decisive moments (Total)

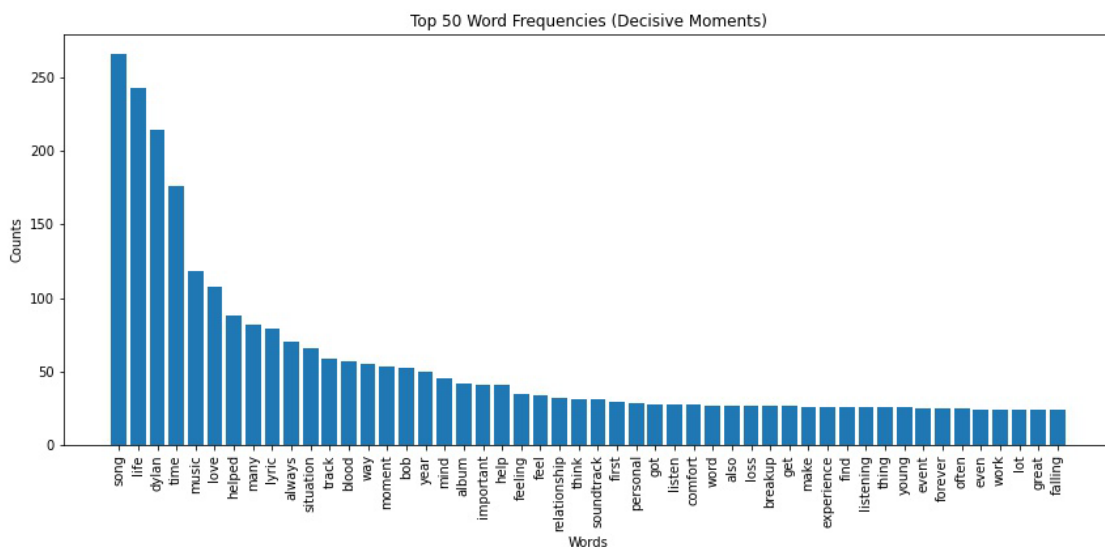


Fig 7(b): Top 50 words and their frequencies in the responses for whether Dylan’s music has been important in decisive moments (Male)

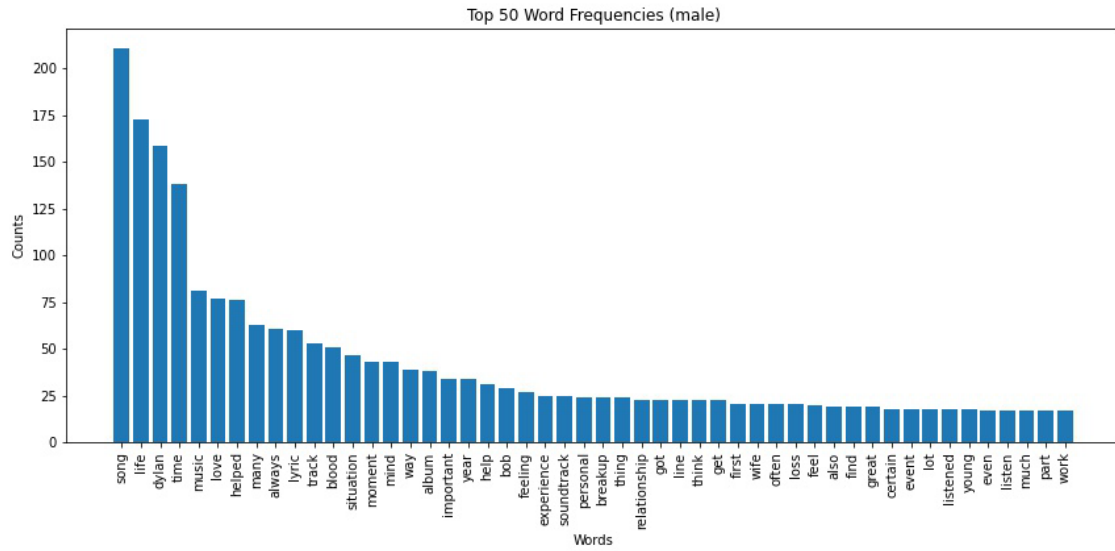
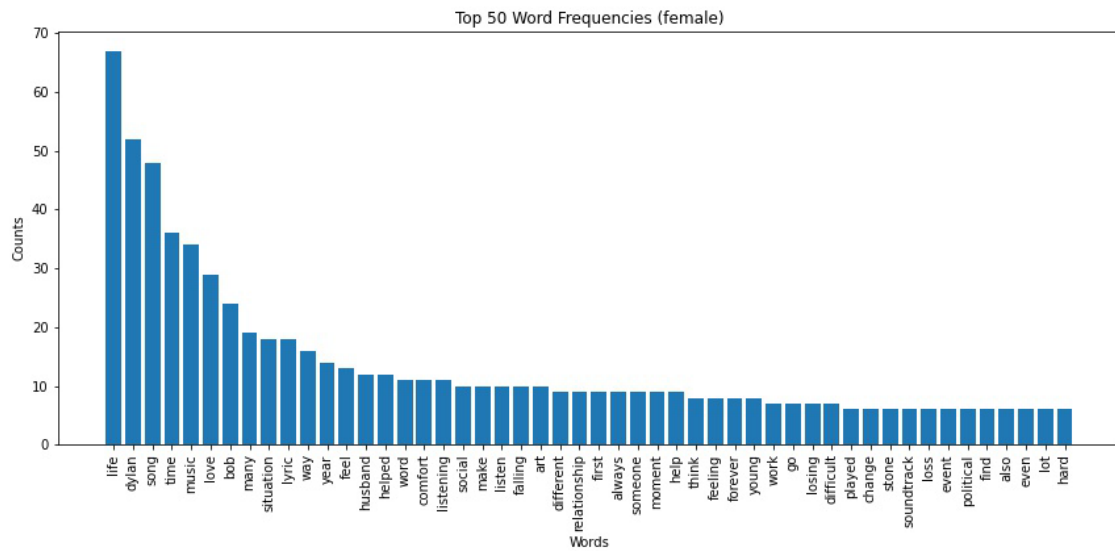


Fig 7(c): Top 50 words and their frequencies in the responses for whether Dylan’s music has been important in decisive moments (Female)



We have also used natural language processing methods to count the most frequent words in the responses.

The NLTK library was utilized to identify tokenization, lemmatization, and filtering of stop words and specific part-of-speech tags. Each word was counted, and the top 50 words were extracted, and their distribution is shown in Fig 7. For example, we saw words like “help, loss, comfort” show up frequently.

The following quotations support the ChatGPT analysis:

“In nearly every meaningful moment in my life, I have come to find comfort in a Dylan song. From growing up and dealing with high school, to heading off for college, to moving abroad, to falling in love, to marrying my wife, to having kids, etc., there has always been a lyric or a song that has captured that particular moment or feeling.”

“His song ‘My Back Pages’ helped my wrestle with my political confusion and changing and conflicting viewpoints.”

“Throughout my life I have benefited from listening to his music it has made me a more understanding person.”

“I have learned more from him than I did at school.”

Dylan has also helped some of the respondents with the choice of their professional career:

“I figured out myself thanks to Bob’s music. I became a writer because he showed me the value of the written word, I met my wife at a Dylan show. I moved to Minnesota because my wife and Bob Dylan are from Minnesota. And much more.”

“I decided to learn how to play music after listening to his albums. I said to myself ‘I will be fulfilled when I’ll know how sing and play the harmonica and the guitar at the same time’. Of course, that was not case but just the just beginning of music and critic career. I guess listening and studying his works is so relevant for me because it reminds me the real and genuine reasons why I started doing what I do.”

When it comes to the importance of Dylan's songs the respondents mention both happy and tragic moments. Dylan's songs have been used in connections with rituals of courtship, marriage, or funerals, with the births of children, and the deaths of relatives and friends:

"I quoted him when asking out the girl who became my wife."

"I only just started liking Dylan at 21 but met my husband & he was a huge fan. His music & words filled all areas of our lives. Had a dylan song at our wedding, named our two daughters & played his songs at my husband's funeral. We were able to see him many times live."

"I started listening to Dylan when I moved to NYC as a recent college graduate. I knew no one in the city and his music was like my only friend. I feel his music helped me become an independent adult. I also walked down the aisle at my wedding to 'Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands'."

Dylan songs mentioned as being played at weddings are "I want you", "Forever Young", "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight", "Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands".

Funerals are the most mentioned ritual where Dylan-songs are used. The favorite song of the deceased is often played, and several respondents call "Lay Down Your Weary Tune" a perfect choice, saying that they have even decided it should be played at their own funeral:

"I have chosen 'Lay Down Your Weary Tune' to be played at my funeral. Had it played at my sisters funeral recently. It was perfect!"

Dylan's songs are also related to both falling in love and breaking up:

"My Dylan t-shirt helped me find the love of my life."

"They have been a constant in my relationship with my wife for 54 years. My dad-daughter dance at my daughter's wedding was North Country. And I use Dylan lyrics/song titles as the beginnings of most of my scholarly articles (am a mostly-retired law professor)."

Some respondents met their future partner at concerts or started dating because they both share an interest in Dylan. Some made their partner interested in Dylan.

Several respondents mention that Dylan's songs have shaped their experience of love:

“Dylan's personal romantic life helped frame my own experiences with love. He helped me deconstruct the romantic ideal and realize that love takes commitment, labor, and sacrifice. Ultimately, Dylan's music gave me the courage to let other people into my heart. The thrill of danger and comfort of being truly known by someone—its all there on *Blood on the Tracks*. Sadly, my wife doesn't like Dylan's voice. That's just part of the sacrifice.”

But the songs have also been important in relation to getting divorced. The albums *Blood on the Tracks* (1975) and *Time out of Mind* (1997) are often mentioned:

“‘Time out of Mind’ Album got me through a long (2 year), bitter, and agonizing divorce.....saved my life at a very dark point in my past.”

“‘Idiot Wind’ and ‘Mississippi’ have lyrics that spoke to me through my divorce. ‘I know you're sorry; I'm sorry too’ seems to be a very good way of letting go and forgiving in the aftermath of a longstanding relationship.”

“It helped me learn how to relate to my ex wife in a way that was healthier. Specifically the song Sara off *Desire*.”

It seems that Dylan's songs have been a frame of interpretation of their experiences:

“‘Love Sick’ told me my marriage was over.”

Many respondents mention that during periods of illness and death they have found support or comfort in Dylan's songs. They most often mention serious physical illness and depression. The songs reflect their feelings or make it possible for them to express the negative feelings of depression:

“I’ve struggled with depression and anxiety for years. Weed and Dylan are the best medicine.”

“I went through a rather long, painful period of depression. Dylan’s ‘Ain’t Talkin’ was the only song that captured how I felt. I listened to it religiously. ‘It’s Alright Ma’ taught me everything to know about life.”

“The songs on the album ‘Time out of Mind’ talk about grief, sadness, emptiness, disappointment and emotional pain in general. When I was undergoing depression these songs helped me to feel and express negative emotion.”

The songs seem to have helped several respondents get through serious illness or the serious illness of their relatives. The word “recovery” is mentioned, and the songs seem to have an almost healing effect:

“Too many to talk about but yes, his songs have been important to me during the time I was told I had bone cancer and wouldn’t live, his music got me through that period, while my uncle was slowly dying we listened to ‘time out of mind and oh mercy.’”

“After surgery, Dylan was what occupied my brain during physical recovery.”

“After an operation this year I awoke with the first lines of ‘Tangled Up In Blue’ in my mind.”

At relatives’ deathbeds, Dylan’s songs have also been important. Family members make it possible for a dying father or mother to listen to Dylan’s songs to be comforted or relived. But often they also use the songs to find comfort themselves after losing a family member:

“When my father was dying, I made a playlist called ‘Not Dark Yet’ of contemplative Dylan tunes for him. I’m not sure if he had a chance to listen as he died within a few weeks, but I’ve listened to it frequently as part of my own mourning process and it’s been helpful.”

Very few respondents declared that Dylan's songs have not been important to them in decisive situations or moments in their life, but to some the importance of the songs became clear in retrospect:

“Some Dylan songs have been important, yes, but more in retrospect, not always in the moment. He can make even melancholy have a shade of joy. His language and phrasing on albums and in performance is uplifting. His example as a creative artist over time is inspiring.”

We can conclude that Dylan's songs were important to most respondents in decisive situations or moments in their lives, both on a very personal level and on a political and social level. Dylan has been an important part of their upbringing and formation as adults. The songs frame and interpret their experiences of love, sorrow, and loss. Dylan's songs have been used in ritual contexts such as weddings and funerals. The songs seem to have an almost healing effect on depression and offer comfort and support to people during severe physical illness and the deaths of relatives.

What Makes Dylan Different from Other Artists?

The respondents use a rather diverse choice of words to characterize what makes Dylan different from other artists. The consensus is that Dylan's lyrics are what makes him different from other artists. Almost 18% of the respondents mention his lyrics but many also uses the word “everything” to describe his special qualities. He is characterized as authentic, creative, original, intelligent, timeless, wise, and in direct contact with the Holy Spirit. He is an artist who has “raised the bar” in popular music, as one of the respondents puts it. He differs from other artists because he is mysterious and enigmatic. He is true to his visions, and he always follows his own path, but he is no “greatest hit maker.” He does not listen to critics, and truth is a guideline for him. Several respondents emphasize his authenticity, integrity, and his creativity. Many respondents find his longevity fascinating, and this longevity makes him different from other artists. He has been on stage for 60 years, he is hardworking and still renews his songwriting. He is both ancient and modern at the same.

The question of Dylan's difference from other artists paints a portrait of a genius who lives up to the tradition of the American Dream of the right to seek one's own happiness through hard work (see James Truslow Adams' *The Epic of America*, 1931) and also to Martin

Luther King's dream of a future of racial equality and freedom for all, expressed in his famous speech "I have a dream" at the civil rights March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, 1963, where Dylan performed for the audience along with Joan Baez.

Ten characteristic statements:

1. What makes you different from me? We have the record of this person's work. I don't know that good, better, best is what I seek in my engagement with art. I love every sparrow falling. Art is a natural condition arising from human sentience, consequently it is magnificent and mysterious like life itself. I love it all – and his version of it – like I love the clouds. This is not meant to be evasive or glib. I don't buy into cults of personality in anyone, anywhere and that is one thing I learned from him.
2. There's nobody else who can speak on the human condition with such authority whether he is truly wise or not (he has lifted plenty of works from other great minds) he can make you absolutely believe what he has to say. He can make you feel in a way nobody else can with his delivery. Early takes of Idiot Wind, stripped back acoustic versions, will break your heart, while the album version is bitter and spiteful and makes you feel that same scorn. Dylan can make you feel what he feels, but most importantly can help you better understand how you feel.
3. The way he has shaped and impacted our culture in such a way that even people who don't think they know who Bob Dylan is are familiar with him and his work to some degree.
4. The richness, depth, and complexity of his lyrics; few others come close to that ability. That, together with his emotional fearlessness – he doesn't hold back in his songs – set him apart.
5. The fact that he is always changing regardless of what people and his fans think. The action of always changing his songs with different interpretations and verses shows that every thing is in flux and can't be contained. In the movie don't look back he makes a statement to a reporter about the meaning of words and how

people react to the same word differently. During his career he has shown that that is true even to himself.

6. His lack of self censorship, his ability to live in the present, his collaborative work, he doesn't care what others think of him or his work, his ongoing pursuit of creative possibility, his encyclopedic memory and ability to weave the mundane and profound together to make art, his sense of humor.
7. His instincts, his phrasing and timing, his knowledge and use of music history, his ability to capture individuality and collectivism, his ability to capture emotions, experiences and what makes us human within the lyrics of a song, his work ethic, his refusal to let his creativity idle.
8. His devotion to issues we are all facing.
9. He is just so damn good at what he does, and he does it so effortlessly. He has the Holy Spirit about him, it's like he communicates with God.
10. He has the whole package: lyrics, melodies, enigmatic, mythical. He is an intellectual, but his music moves me. He is both head, heart, and hips. His integrity is incredible. He stays true to his course but won't tell you where he is going.

Has Your View of Dylan Changed Over Time?

Most of the respondents answer positively to this question, and many indicate that they have grown older with Dylan, and as he has changed, they have too. To many respondents, the change has been a positive experience. We find statements such as the following: "The years have just confirmed why I have deep respect for him." Many of the respondents feel that they have been together through life with Bob Dylan, and they highly appreciate his influence on their life: "His albums are my life's soundtrack."

Their experience of his music has become more profound, as has his art. The experience of change has an existential dimension: "The more I've learned about Bob, as well as discovering more of his unreleased studio and live recordings I've heard have

allowed me to paint a more vivid picture of his overall person and art. I don't know if I'll ever fully understand him, but I don't think I'll ever fully understand myself either." To several respondents, his Christian albums (1979–1981) were a challenge, but some of the respondents returned to Dylan when he released the album *Oh Mercy* (1989). The change of their view of Bob Dylan also implies that some of the respondents no longer consider him to be a god or hero-like figure. Their view has become nuanced, and Dylan has become more human in their opinion.

Some of the respondents appreciate Dylan as an artist but have begun to distance themselves from him as a person. One of the respondents writes: "When I was younger, my world centered on Dylan. He could do no wrong. As I got older, I realized how selfish and hedonistic he could be, ignoring the feelings and thoughts of others. I'm not sure I would like him if I were to meet him." Or many, he is not a role model and his relationship with women is criticized, but only by very few respondents (three in all). A few of the respondents are critical of the aging of Dylan's voice and think that he should stop his live performances.

The respondents' answers show that many have known his songs since they were very young and that they feel deeply attached to his art.

Bob Dylan's Top 40

Bob Dylan has written more than 500 songs and released 40 studio albums. It seems very difficult for many of the respondents to choose a favorite Bob Dylan song. 57 respondents declare that this question is impossible to answer, 21 are unable to choose a single song, some simply answer "no," some declare that it is too difficult to choose, and some write: "Why don't you ask which of my children I like best!", "Stupid question," "Hundred different titles," "150 songs out of 600," "Are you kidding?," "Bold of you to assume that I can choose a favorite Dylan song," or "Too many."

This means that 157 respondents of the 1938 respondents, or almost 8%, do not answer this question. The variety of answers is immense – 261 titles are mentioned as a favorite song by the respondents, and several of Bob Dylan's songs are chosen, many just by two or three respondents. Some of the respondents add "Today my favorite is..." or "I'm listening to..."

Number one on the list, "Visions of Johanna," gets 6.4 % of the votes.

The Top 40 looks like this:

Visions of Johanna 114
Tangled Up in Blue 97
Like a Rolling Stone 73
Desolation Row 68
Every Grain of Sand 66
Mr. Tambourine Man 56
Impossible to choose 45
Idiot Wind 37
One Too Many Mornings 37
Shelter from the Storm 34
It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding) 33
'Cross the Green Mountain 32
Not Dark Yet 32
Blind Willie McTell 30
Simple Twist of Fate 30
Forever Young 26
Love Minus Zero/No Limit 23
It's All Over Now, Baby Blue 22
Don't Think Twice, It's All Right 22
Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands 22
Mississippi 21
Jokerman 20
Up to Me 17
Abandoned Love 17
So many 16
Key West (Philosopher Pirate) 16
Red River Shore 15
Blowin' in the Wind 15
Things Have Changed 15
A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall 14
Cannot pick one 14
Ballad of a Thin Man 14
Changes depending on the day 13
Brownsville Girl 13
Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again 12
Boots of Spanish Leather 12
Changing of the Guards 12
Queen Jane Approximately 11
To Ramona 11
One More Cup of Coffee (Valley Below) 11

Many of these songs were released in the 1960s, such as “Visions of Johanna,” “Like a Rolling Stone,” and “Mr. Tambourine Man.” But “Tangled Up in Blue,” “Idiot Wind,” and “Shelter from the Storm” were tracks on *Blood on the Tracks*, which Dylan released in 1975 when a crisis in his marriage to his first wife, Sara Dylan, seems to have started. They divorced in 1977. Songs from recent albums, such as “Murder Most Foul” from *Rough and Rowdy Ways* (2022), are also on the list with very few votes.

The answers indicate that the respondents are familiar with many of Bob Dylan’s songs from different albums. They prefer to listen to a variety of songs and do not have just one favorite.

Perception of Dylan over Time

Overall, the respondents’ perceptions of Bob Dylan have evolved from initial admiration to a deeper appreciation of his artistry, his ability to evolve as an artist, and the enduring relevance of his music. The following observations were identified after feeding the answers to ChatGPT:

- (xvi) **Growing Appreciation:** Many respondents mentioned that their appreciation of Dylan’s music and artistry has increased as they have grown older. They have gained a deeper understanding of his lyrics, recognized the breadth of his musical talent, and discovered new layers of meaning in his songs.
- (xvii) **Evolution and Change:** Dylan’s own evolution and willingness to change as an artist resonated with respondents. They appreciate his ability to explore different styles and phases throughout his career, seeing it as a testament to his artistic growth and integrity.
- (xviii) **Shifting Perspectives:** Respondents acknowledged that their perspectives on Dylan have shifted as they have gained more life experiences and knowledge. They have come to appreciate different aspects of his work, such as his role as a curator of musical traditions, his use of historical references, and his influence on popular culture.
- (xix) **Separation of Artist and Person:** Some respondents mentioned that while their admiration for Dylan as an artist has grown, their perception of him as a person has become more nuanced. They recognize his quirks, inconsistencies, and occasional controversial views, but it does not diminish their appreciation of his artistic genius.

- (xx) Timeless Relevance: Many respondents noted that Dylan’s music remains relevant and continues to speak to them, even after several decades. They find that his songs still resonate with their own lives and current social issues, reinforcing his status as a timeless and influential artist.

Fig 8(a): Top 50 words and their frequencies in the responses for perception of Dylan over time (Total)

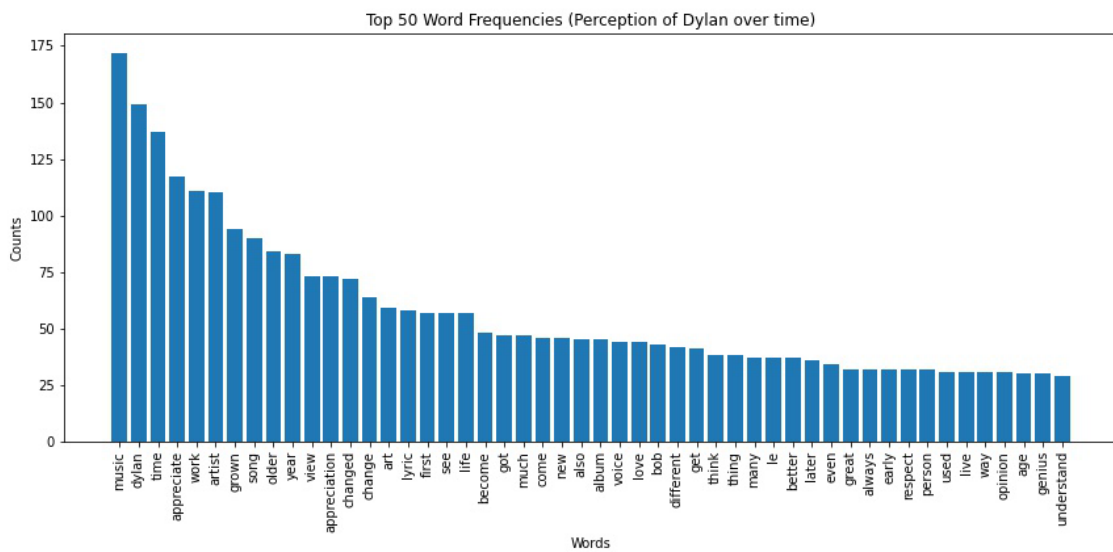


Fig 8(b): Top 50 words and their frequencies in the responses for perception of Dylan over time (Male)

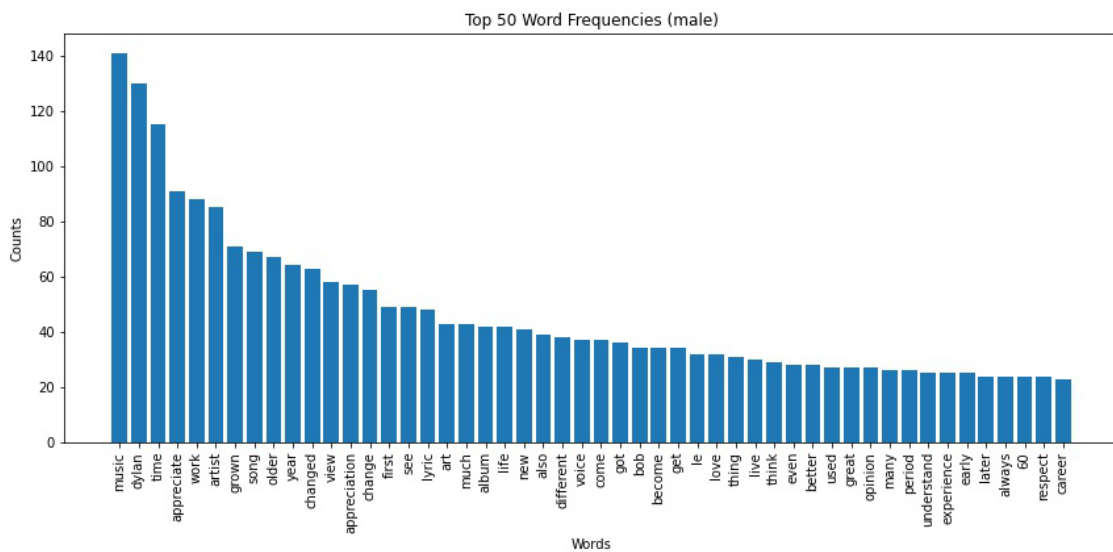
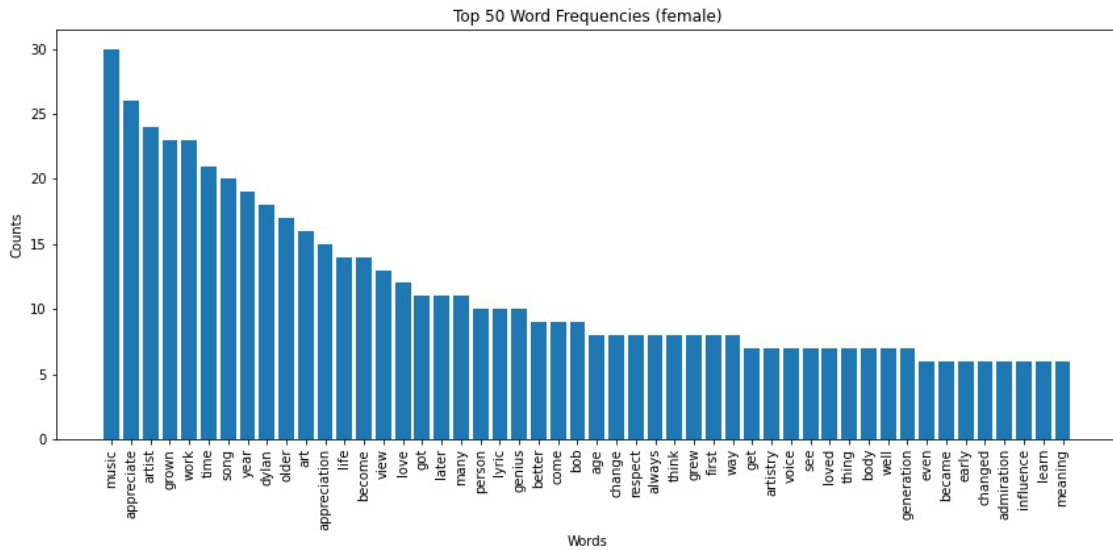


Fig 8(c): Top 50 words and their frequencies in the responses for perception of Dylan over time (Female)



Characteristics of Dylan

The following key factors that set Bob Dylan apart from other artists were identified after feeding the answers to ChatGPT:

- (xxi) Originality: Dylan’s uniqueness and individuality shine through in his music, lyrics, and persona. He follows his own path, defying expectations and staying true to his artistic vision.
- (xxii) Intellectual depth and lyrical brilliance: Dylan’s lyrics are consistently praised for their depth, literary quality, and ability to convey powerful messages. His songwriting is often compared to poetry, setting him apart as a master wordsmith.
- (xxiii) Constant evolution and reinvention: Dylan’s willingness to embrace change and explore new artistic territories throughout his career differentiates him from other artists. He consistently pushes the boundaries and refuses to stay stagnant.
- (xxiv) Breadth and volume of exceptional work: Dylan’s vast catalog of songs, with numerous masterpieces, distinguishes him from his peers. His ability to consistently produce high-quality music across different genres and styles sets him apart.

- (xxv) Longevity and relevance: Dylan’s six-decade-long career and his continued ability to stay relevant and influential in the music industry is a testament to his lasting impact. He has remained a cultural touchstone over the years.
- (xxvi) Authenticity and independence: Dylan’s refusal to conform to popular expectations and his dedication to being true to himself make him stand out. He follows his own artistic instincts, unafraid to challenge norms and expectations.
- (xxvii) Mystique and enigmatic persona: Dylan’s mysterious and enigmatic personality adds to his allure. His private nature and elusive persona create an air of intrigue and fascination among fans.
- (xxviii) Influence and cultural significance: Dylan’s impact on popular culture and his influence on other artists are frequently cited. His contributions to music, poetry, and social commentary have left an indelible mark on the artistic landscape.

Fig 9(a): Top 50 words and their frequencies in the responses of characteristics of Dylan (Total)

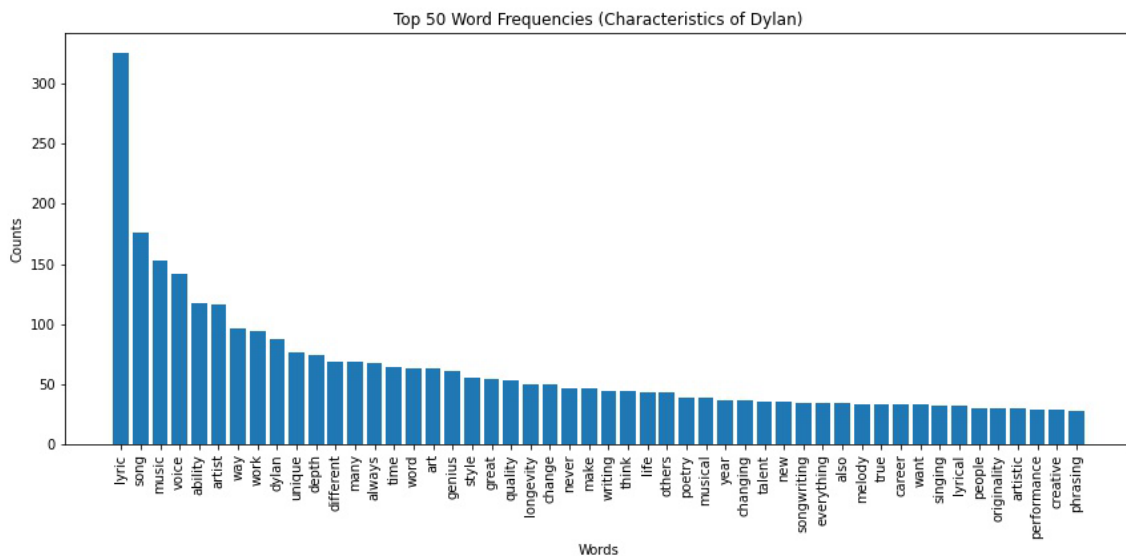


Fig 9(b): Top 50 words and their frequencies in the responses of characteristics of Dylan (Male)

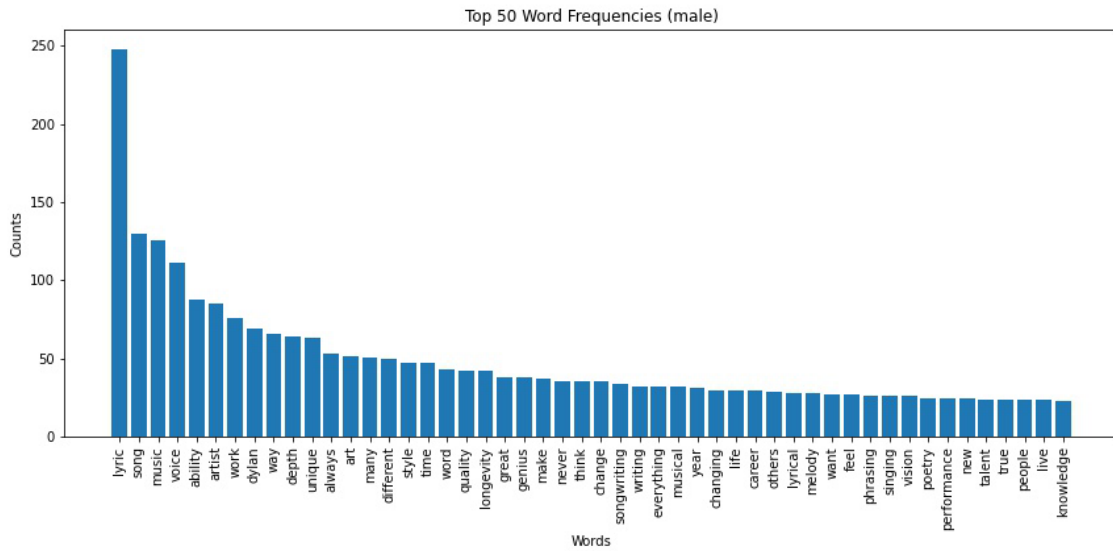
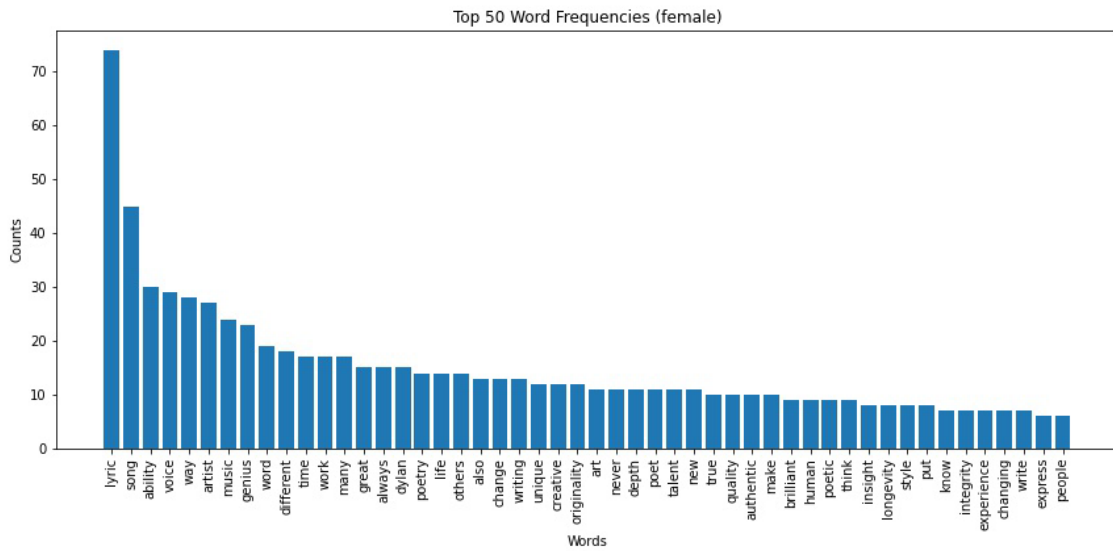


Fig 9(c): Top 50 words and their frequencies in the responses of characteristics of Dylan (Female)



Conclusions

Most of the respondents are male, ranging in age from 65–70, and our review gives us a picture of Dylan as a male artist, appreciated by males. This is important and interesting because it means that the study of Dylan’s songs might help us to get a better understanding

of a certain generation of males and their understanding of the relation between art and life. Both the female and the male respondents came across Dylan at an early age and have remained interested in him throughout the entirety of their lives. Many consider Dylan to be a genius, a mysterious and enigmatic artist. Most think of Dylan as a musician and a poet. Dylan has been important to them in decisive and difficult moments of their lives, they appreciate his live performances and his lyrics, and they appreciate that he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2016. Most respondents rate his lyrics more highly than his films and paintings. For the respondents, Dylan's songs have been a way of dealing with difficult feelings, with sorrow and pain, and some even have used his texts in relation to rituals such as weddings and funerals. Dylan's songs release deep emotions in his male fans and followers, and their uses of his songs are sometimes therapeutic. The respondents have used the songs of Bob Dylan to connect with their emotions and express themselves emotionally, and many of them have grown up experiencing gender relations where deep sensitivity has not been considered central to the hegemonic masculinity (Pascoe & Bridges, p. 18–23, 2016).³ The written responses are very diverse, and the top word frequency lists show that feelings are often mentioned. It seems that Dylan's songs help both the male and female respondents to understand their feelings and approach deep and difficult emotions and existential questions, and there are only a few differences between the most frequently used words of males and females. Thus, males and females do not use Dylan's songs in different ways, but the male respondents seem to have experienced a sensibility through Dylan's songs that expand the gender relations of their 1950s generation. The gender of the respondents is male or female – only very few indicated “no answer” and even fewer “other.”

The respondents also use the songs to keep in touch with their past, to remember their youth, and it is important for some of them to pass on Dylan's legacy to new generations.

Our hypotheses were confirmed, but our understanding was also deepened. It was notable that the answers of the males and the females were so alike and that the fans and followers valued Dylan's performances more than his songwriting.

³ C. J. Pascoe & Tristan Bridges: *Exploring Masculinities. Identity, Continuity, and Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Appendix 1

The questionnaire was presented in this way:

Images of Bob Dylan

The aim of this questionnaire is to explore the images that fans have of Bob Dylan – and how they use his songs.

Anyone who considers themselves a Dylan fan is invited to participate.

It should take about ten minutes of your time.

The answers will become the basis for a research essay by Dylan scholar Anne-Marie Mai, professor of literature at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU) and board member of the University of Tulsa Institute for Bob Dylan studies.

The questionnaire is anonymous, information is protected according to the European rules for GDPR, and email addresses cannot be tracked.

Your age:

Your gender:

- (1) Male
- (2) Female
- (3) Non-binary
- (4) Prefer not to disclose
- (5) Other

Your nationality:

How did you first come across Bob Dylan's music? (Choose one option)

- (1) Heard it on the radio
- (2) Heard it at a party/festival
- (3) Heard/Read about it in the media
- (4) Introduced by a friend
- (5) Introduced by a family member
- (6) Introduced by a teacher

- (7) Other
- (8) Don't remember

What was your age at the time?

Which qualities make Bob Dylan an important artist to you?

(Choose as many as applicable)

- (1) His lyrics
- (2) His melodies
- (3) His storytelling
- (4) His voice in societal debates
- (5) His paintings and sculptures
- (6) His live performances
- (7) His personality
- (8) How he has helped shape modern rock and folk music
- (9) His role as a symbol of the time
- (10) His radio programs
- (11) His films
- (12) Other factors
- (13) Don't know

Do any of your close friends appreciate Dylan's music as well?

- (1) Yes
- (2) No
- (3) Don't know

Dylan is also active as an artist in memoirs, film, painting, and sculpture. Does that affect your view of Dylan?

- (1) Yes
- (2) No
- (3) Don't know

Has Dylan's personal life influenced how you see him as an artist?

- (1) Yes
- (2) No
- (3) Don't know

Was it fair that Dylan was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature?

- (1) Yes
- (2) No
- (3) Don't know

To which degree do you agree with the following statement:

Dylan is the voice of the youth generation of the 1960s

- (1) Strongly disagree
- (2) Somewhat disagree
- (3) Neither agree nor disagree
- (4) Somewhat agree
- (5) Strongly agree

To which degree do you agree with the following statement:

Dylan is the most important artist of his time

- (1) Strongly disagree
- (2) Somewhat disagree
- (3) Neither agree nor disagree
- (4) Somewhat agree
- (5) Strongly agree

To which degree do you agree with the following statement:

Dylan is a sage (meaning a wise person)

- (1) Strongly disagree
- (2) Somewhat disagree
- (3) Neither agree nor disagree
- (4) Somewhat agree
- (5) Strongly agree

Has your view of Dylan changed over time?

- (1) Yes
- (2) No
- (3) Don't know

Please elaborate on your opinion

Have Dylan's songs been important to you in decisive situations or moments in your life? (e.g. falling in love, losing someone, getting ill, recovering from illness, a change of social circumstances)

- (1) Yes
- (2) No
- (3) Don't know

If yes, please elaborate

What is your favorite Bob Dylan song?

In your opinion, what makes Dylan different from other artists?

Thank you very much for taking the time!

Please feel free to share this survey with others.