

Bob Dylan: A source of inspiration for medical scientists

December 14 2015



Credit: Charles Rondeau/public domain

The number of articles citing the lyrics of Bob Dylan in the biomedical literature has increased exponentially since 1990, according to a study in the Christmas issue of *The BMJ*.

In 2014, it was revealed that a group of scientists at the Karolinska

Institutet in Sweden had been sneaking the lyrics of Bob Dylan into their papers as part of a long-running bet.

So, another group of Karolinska researchers decided to investigate how the lyrics of Bob Dylan are cited in the titles of published biomedical papers.

A search of all his song and album titles was conducted in May 2015. A selection of the most popular Dylan songs were also searched to find modified titles.

In all, 213 of 727 references were classified as unequivocally citing Bob Dylan and were included in the subsequent analysis.

According to the search, the first Dylan-citing article appeared in 1970 in *Journal of Practical Nursing*, eight years after his debut album was released.

Interestingly, the researchers note that, after a handful of citations during Bob Dylan's heyday in the first half of the 1970s, very few articles in the [biomedical sciences](#) cited Bob Dylan until 1990.

However, since then, the number of articles has increased exponentially.

The two most cited Dylan songs are *The Times They Are A-Changin'* (135 articles) and *Blowin' In The Wind* (36 articles).

The search also revealed the use of other popular titles such as *All Along The Watchtower*, *Knockin' On Heaven's Door*, and *Like A Rolling Stone*.

Some journals have a greater preponderance of Dylan-citing articles than others; for instance, no less than six articles citing Dylan songs were

found in *Nature*. However, citing Bob Dylan in a paper doesn't appear to generate more attention in the research community, say the authors.

Recent evidence suggests that Bob Dylan has a great deal of respect for the medical profession, they add, as shown in the song Don't Fall Apart On Me Tonight, in which Dylan laments:

"I wish I'd have been a doctor / Maybe I'd have saved some life that had been lost / Maybe I'd have done some good in the world / 'Stead of burning every bridge I crossed."

Based on this present survey, the researchers suggest that the [medical profession](#) shows the same respect for Bob Dylan.

They point to several possible explanations but conclude, "it is clear that Bob Dylan's rich song catalogue has provided a source of inspiration for medical scientists."

More information: Freewheelin' Scientists: Citing Bob Dylan in the Biomedical Literature, *The BMJ*, www.bmj.com/cgi/doi/10.1136/bmj.h6505

Provided by British Medical Journal

Citation: Bob Dylan: A source of inspiration for medical scientists (2015, December 14) retrieved 29 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-12-bob-dylan-source-medical-scientists.html>

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