

Music Television and Social Identity: A Study of First Year College Students and Sophomores

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ABSTRACT

Music television has been identified as a socializing agent for first year college students and sophomores. The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of the socialization. First-year college students and college sophomores living in the dormitories at a suburban regional state university were surveyed in an effort to qualify the relationship between students' social identity and use of music television. The survey measured the influence music television had on aspects of social identity including: clothing, hairstyle and noticeable attitude. Results of the study helped determine how first year students and college sophomores create a social identity that is deemed acceptable among their peers during their first two years of college.

Some mothers talk negatively about them and their children appear to either dress or act too much like them. The "them" being talked about are the popular musicians of today's society. Topics such as: what impact does Britney Spears's clothing have over her fans or does the music Eminem produces provoke violence, have constantly been in rotation within our society. The only difference is that a different musician seems to be under scrutiny every time the discussion arises. Just how much influence do musicians have over their fans? Do their fans realize that their favorite musicians are influencing them? These questions are what originally motivated this research.

Literature Review

Since its debut in 1981, MTV (Music Television) has become an unstoppable force in the cable industry. Its name seems to have become closely related to popular youth culture. In the year 1994, Walker and Bender found that MTV had an audience of 210 million people in 78 countries. No longer a fad that will lose its popularity, as many had believed, MTV has become a constant feature of today's popular culture. However, there were no current statistics available dealing with the amount of MTV young adults watch.

MTV is a major influence in the lives of young adults. Young adults are characterized as people in the age range of 17 to 20 (Hepburn, 1998). MTV not only provides music videos or short films for songs, but it also allows for a young adult to see what would be considered in style. A young adult, defined in this study as first year students and sophomores, can find many uses for MTV. These uses include: finding out what their favorite musician has been up to in recent news, what clothes and hair styles are popular (Wilson & MacGillivray, 1998), or a more recent feature, to find out what their favorite musician is like behind the cameras, and how they "normally" behave. A young adult may then choose to change their own appearance and attitude based on what or how their favorite musician behaves and what they are wearing (Englis, Solomon & Olofsson, 1993).

There are two theories that frame this research. The most important theory is the social identity theory. Social identity is when individuals conform to standard roles and rules defined and borrowed from society. An individual conforms to social expectations and presents himself or herself as “one of the group” (Treholm & Jensen, 1996). The two most obvious ways an individual may choose to express themselves as “one of the group” according to Wilson and MacGillivray (1998), are through his or her appearance and noticeable attitude towards other people. An individual’s appearance includes their clothing and cosmetics.

Social identity theory is closely tied to personal identity theory. Personal identity theory can be applied when an individual resists standard roles or makes his or her own rules. These people tend to deviate and are seen as individuals who stand “apart from the crowd” (Treholm & Jensen, 1996).

Musicians have the tendency to be trendsetters and rule breakers. Marilyn Manson, for example, breaks every conventional rule set by society. He does not dress or acts like the average man on the street. Manson and his behavior is closely linked to the personal identity theory. Manson, who is a popular musician, is also a trendsetter within our society. It appears that many of Manson’s followers dress and act like him. This type of conformity from his fans is related to social identity theory. Music television allows for musicians to express their personal appearance, beliefs, and behaviors to a large audience. This exposure makes Manson more known, which in turn creates an understanding of Manson and his identity. This acceptance makes it easier for his fans to act, dress, and behave like to him. This relationship that musicians have with society is the reason that music television was investigated as the socializing agent of first year students and sophomores. Tension between conformity and independence is probably felt to some extent in all cultures, but it is particularly strong in American culture (Treholm & Jensen, 1996).

First year students, recently graduated from high school, are living in college dormitories where they have no parental supervision and have different and new experiences. Most college sophomores, who have only been enrolled in college for a year, are still living in college dormitories. The majority of first year students and sophomores do not have as many friends as they did in high school. Therefore, they may create a different social identity, or may reinforce their current social identity. This is why the relationship between first year students and the music on music television is being investigated. Music television is very easy to access in the dormitories and is something that researchers have defined as a part of popular culture (Wilson & MacGillivray, 1998; Englis, Solomon & Olofsson, 1993; Sun & Lull, 1986; Alfelderheide, 1986).

Research Questions

This research was designed to investigate first year students and sophomore’s social identity and music television. Social identity is composed of three different factors: clothing, hairstyle, and attitude. Each aspect of social identity was studied individually and collectively. The amount of time spent watching music television and type of genre one enjoys watching were the two factors included in the definition of music television.

This research asked five questions. RQ1: What is the relationship between how many hours of music television first year students and sophomores are watching and their social identity? RQ2: Is one genre of music more influential over first year college students than sophomores? RQ3: Is one gender’s social identity more influenced by music television?

RQ4: Is one genre of music more influential over first year college students' than sophomores' perceived attitude? RQ5: Does the participants' year in college effect the level of influence music television has over similar appearance styles?

Research Methods:

This research included 100 students, 24 first year students and 66 sophomores, living in the dormitories at a suburban regional state university. Overall, 34 males participated in this research and 56 females. All of the participants were enrolled in the required communications course, CST 110.

The instrument used was created specifically for this research. The survey asked the participants their favorite type of music and who was their favorite performer. After establishing this, the participants answered 18 questions on a five point Likert scale about their favorite performer. Survey participation was voluntary. Confidentiality was assured for all participants.

RESULTS

Results were found for the following five questions. RQ1: What was the relationship between how many hours of music television first college year students and sophomores are watching and their social identity? An ANOVA was used in researching the level of influence for different time amounts of music television watching. No significant difference was found in the level of influence ($F = 1.20, p = .399$). RQ3: Is one gender's social identity more influenced by music television? Female participants ($M = 3.63, SD = .347$) scored higher than the level of influence measure than male participants ($M = 3.46, SD = .256$). There was a significant difference between the two scores ($t = -2.66, df = 87.90, p = .009$). RQ2: Does the genre of music effect the level of influence music television has over first year students' and sophomores' perceived attitude? RQ4: Does the genre of music effect the level of influence music television have over first year students and sophomores than other genres? After conducting an ANOVA, no significant difference was found in the attitudinal level ($F = 1.711, p = .075$) and level of influence ($F = .674, p = .839$) for different genres of music.. RQ5: Does the participants' year in college effect the level of influence music television has over similar appearance styles? First year students ($M = 2.75, SD = .68$) scored slightly higher on the similar appearance measure than sophomores ($M = 2.70, SD = .53$). There was not, however a significant difference between the scores ($t = .321, df = 33.72, p = .75$).

DISCUSSION

Only one of the research questions was found to be significant. Female participants are more influenced by music television than male participants. Females may be more influenced by music than males due to the amount and type of pressure females receive from society. American society wants their female girls to dress pretty and to act nice. Females also tend to be more collectivistic and have more friends and family around for support. According to social identity theory, girls who feel more pressure are more likely to be influenced by the musicians on music television than boys, who tend to be more individualistic.

The remaining research questions that this study asked were found to have no significant difference. Overall, relationship between music television and first year college students' and college sophomores' social identity is weak.

There are a lot of things that could have been changed to make this research stronger. The definition of social identity contains many different variables. In future research only one variable such as appearance should be investigated. Otherwise, social identity is defined as too broadly and conclusions are difficult to draw.

The research should be conducted using more participants. Though this research found no significant difference for most of its research questions, some of the results neared statistical significance. Using more participants increases the likelihood of generalizable sample and may help find significant differences for some of the study's research questions. By obtaining a more generalizable sample, the results found in this research will be able to be more applicable to the population as a whole. More participants would also help determine if there is truly a significant difference for the majority of the research questions.

Lastly, future researchers should consider using younger participants for further research. This study did show that there was a slight difference between the means of first year students than college sophomores when dealing with similar appearance styles. This suggests that the younger the research participants are the more influence music television has over them. Future research using younger participants may find their research to be more relevant and applicable.

CONCLUSION

Further research on music television and its influence over an individual's social identity is strongly suggested. Further research should limit in its focus on social identity and genre of music. This may mean limiting the age of the participant, the aspect of social identity that is being researched, and the genre of music. By limiting the focus of the research, further research is more likely to highlight the ways social influence works.

Music television is a prominent feature in today's popular culture. The effect music television has over viewers has yet to be completely determined. Yet it appears that society enjoys blaming music television for the behaviors and the problems of today's youth. This research is an important first step in understanding exactly what the relationship between music television and society's problem really is.

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