Music and Identity: Exploring Popular Music's

Effect on Adolescent Development

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Introduction

During adolescence students are adjusting to their changing body, developing more abstract thought, forming new relationships with peers and authority figures, and establishing goals for the future and therefore forming their identity. Because students are going through an enormous amount of change during their late middle school years, it is inevitable that they will struggle with their identity. During this age, students have not reached an achieved identity, and go through somewhat of an identity crisis. Eighth grade students are at the beginning stages of adolescence. For this reason, lessons on identity formation and personal identities influences are crucial. Given that these students will be actively forming their identity starting around the eighth grade, the exploration of the media's influence on their identity will be useful for the entirety of their adolescent years (French et al., 2006).

This unit focuses on student's identity through the popular cultural text of music. With this unit of instruction students will be exploring the influences of music on their personal identity. Students will explore three key factors that influence their identity development. These key factors include: the prevalence of music in their everyday lives, the ways in which music influences current trends, and the gender stereotypes that are present in current popular music.

Identity formation during adolescence

Adolescence is the ideal time to explore one's personal identity because of the identity crisis that occurs. During this time students are bringing together skills, interests, and values to create their sense of self and applying this to present and future endeavors. They are also forming their sense of self in relationships throughout this time. Because of the transition between childhood and adulthood, many students

will experiment with identity roles searching for *the real me* (French et al., 2006). This unit will allow students to explore these roles and the influences of the media. This exploration will enable students to view popular media critically. With these lessons, students will become aware of the influences of mass culture when forming their identity. Exploring the influences of identity will allow the students to better form a clear, achieved identity. An achieved identity is not a complete and final stage it is just a point in a person's life where they have a clear sense of self. Students with achieved identity are less anxious about who they are and more tolerant of criticism (French et al., 2006). Striving for an achieved identity is very beneficial for student during this time.

Because students are in a transitional period during this time of their lives, exploring their personal identities should be a pleasurable and useful activity. This unit will allow students to explore many influences of their personal identity including popular adolescent trends, gendered differences in the media and the messages of current popular songs. They will be addressing questions such as: what is desirable or *cool* about the style of pop music artists? How do these celebrities influence trends in adolescent culture? What are the differences in gendered aesthetics in popular music? Are gender stereotypes represented in popular music? What does your music preference say about your personality?

Music and identity

Identity is not fixed. It is a mobile process that is created through experiences. The formation of one's identity is a social process, a form of interaction, and an aesthetic process. Music is an aesthetic experience that adolescents can simultaneously project themselves and lose themselves in (Frith, 1996). The aesthetic experience of music is significant because it allows people the sense of an individual as well as a shared identity. We come to know ourselves as groups, social groups that agree on a set of values and express them through cultural activities. One of these major cultural activities is music. Music is a key to identity, and gives one a sense of self and others. Music provides one with a

sense of the subjective and collective identity (Frith, 1996).

Popular music not only reflects society, it also assists in producing the society's identities. Music not only articulates the beliefs of the composers or artists, but also influences the beliefs of the listeners, given that, ethical codes and social ideologies are understood through music (Frith, 1996). Teenagers may not fully understand the messages and values that are being sent through the media. Therefore, students need to explore how their lifestyles and values are being influenced by their media pleasures (Briggs, 2007).

During this lesson students will be given a *Music Survey.* This survey will require students to write their three favorite artists and three songs that these artists produce. The survey also asks students to write the way they perceive the messages of the songs chosen (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999). Having students explore the messages of songs they listen to on a day-to-day basis, will also allow them deconstruct the social ideologies that are projected in the media. Habitual practices, such as listening to music, can allow the ideologies of these practices seem natural or true (Marsh & Millard, 2000). According to Frith (1996), "Music isn't a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them" (p.111). This unit guides students in the exploration of the ideologies they believe and live for. The students will become active as opposed to passive listeners when breaking down the social norms projects through popular music.

Music preference and personality

According to the research of Delsin, Ter Bogt, Engels and Meeus composed in 2008, music preferences in adolescents age twelve to nineteen are consistently related to personality traits. They also found that changes in personality characteristics resulted in change of music preference over a three-year interval (Delsin, Ter Bogt, Engels & Meeus, 2008). Therefore, music preferences directly relate to an adolescent's current personality characteristics. A more recent study by Langmeye, Guglhor-Rudan, and Tarnai in 2012, also found strong correlations between personality traits and music preference in youth. Along with these results the 2012 study also found distinct gender differences in

music preference (Langmeye, Guglhor-Rudan, & Tarnai, 2012).

In the first lesson of this unit students will be journaling about the correlation between their music preferences and their personality characteristics. In a journal students will write a one-page reflection describing how the three artists they have chosen reflect their personal style. The students will also describe what their music preferences reveal about their personality.

Gender stereotypes in popular music

Gendered identities are continuously formed throughout the years of schooling (Marsh & Millard, 2000). Therefore, exploring gender differences in the media is crucial for students in the middle grades of their schooling years. Gendered stereotyping in the media, and habitual practices, like listening to music, reinforces these stereotypical gender roles. Being exposed to these gendered stereotypes in popular music on a day-to-day basis can cause adolescents to accept these roles as natural. Because gender roles are socially constructed and not biological, it is important for students to investigate how the media influences society's ways of considering gender roles as natural (Marsh & Millard, 2000).

Historically there have been vast differences in the way males and females are represented in the music industry. According to Schmutz and Faupel, the legitimacy of women artists has been viewed as less than that of male artists, and this idea is still evident today (Schmutz & Faupel, 2010). The inequality of women in the music industry can be revealed through award ceremonies, such as the Grammy Hall of Fame Awards, where less than seven percent of the award winners feature female artists. The inequality is also apparent in the top billboard charts, where even today more male musicians appear with top ratings than female musicians (Schmutz & Faupel, 2010). During this unit students will discuss the inequalities of women in todays society via the music industry.

There are also a vast amount of gender stereotypes currently in popular music. According to a study by Cara Wallis in 2010, there are distinct gender differences in popular music videos (Wallis, 2010). The results of this study reveal that males are represented as more

aggressive than females. More obvert sexuality was displayed by females, and more subordinate behavior was also observed from female performers (Wallis, 2010). Throughout the second lesson of this unit, students will be exploring the gendered aesthetics in popular music. Images from the top artists chosen in the *Music Survey* will be analyzed. The students will then list the male performer aesthetic versus the female performer aesthetic. Using Wightman's list of "aesthetic qualities," students will describe the aesthetics observed (Wightman, 2006, p. 129). Current popular magazines will be used to create a gender aesthetic collage. This lesson is relevant to students, as their favorite musicians will be explored. Therefore, students will understand the gender differences and stereotypes in their everyday culture.

Conclusion

This unit will enable the students to become an active audience, so that the students can understand media images, critique them, and adapt them to their lives. Art education provides a safe environment for students to search their identity and the means that influence it. Art educators understand the importance of students deconstructing their environments in order for them to fully understand their values and beliefs (Grauer, 2002). Because students today live in a postmodern society, it is important to discuss the ways that the media effect's their ever-evolving identities. Creating art around the theme of popular music is a great way to explore issues such as; personality traits and personal trends, gender stereotypes in the media, and popular culture's influence on identity formation.

References

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Analyzing and Creating Magazine Cover Featuring a Popular Band

Grade: 8th
Teacher: Stephanie Potts
Length: 15 class periods

State visual art goals: VA8-1.1, VA8-1.2, VA8-1.3, VA8-1.4, VA8-2.2, VA8-3.1, VA8-3.2, VA8-3.3, VA8-3.4, VA8-4.2, VA8-5.1, VA8-5.2
State media arts goals: MA8-1.2, MA8-1.4, MA8-2.2, MA8-2.4, MA8-3.1, MA8-3.3, MA8-3.5, MA8-4.1, MA8-6.1

Objectives:
1. Students will examine the design elements of current popular culture magazines.
2. The students will examine the art of photographers that represent different identities/characters in their work.
3. Students will learn the technical aspects of photography and photoshop.

Concepts and vocabulary:
1. Aesthetic- derives from the ancient Greek word aisthanomai, which means perception by the senses. In a contemporary sense, aesthetics can be used to reference a particular style or design.
2. Stereotype- A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing: "sexual and racial stereotypes."

Teacher materials:
1.) LCD Projector
2.) Popular magazines: *Teen Vogue, Glamour, Rolling Stone, J-14, Yikes*
3.) Results of the Music Survey
4.) Powerpoint presentation that includes images of the most popular artists from the Music Survey
5.) Digital Camera Powerpoint presentation
6.) PowerPoint that includes the artwork of the following artists:
    a. Cindy Sherman Photography:
        i. *Untitled #469. 2008*
        ii. *Untitled #463. 2007–08*
        iii. *Untitled #466. 2008*
    b. Nikki S. Lee Photography:
        i. *The Hip Hop Project*

   ii. #7 from *The Skateboarders Project*
   iii. *The Seniors Project*
  c. Annie Leibovitz Photography
   i. Queen Latifah as Ursula
   ii. American *Vogue* November 2012 issue

Student materials:
1. Computers (one per group)
2. Adobe Photoshop
3. Digital Cameras (one per group)
4. Current magazines
5. Costumes/props

Procedures (detailed step-by-step description including dialogue):

1ˢᵗ class period
- At the beginning of class the Powerpoint presentation of the top musicians from the Music Survey will be shown.
- The students will describe the visual image of the artists chosen and how they are considered "in- style" or desirable. The students will also describe what their music preferences reveal about their personality.
- The students will compare the aesthetics of the female musicians represented to the aesthetics of the male musicians represented. The students will compare the gender aesthetics, and discuss gender stereotypes seen in the media.
- The students will then break into their self-selected groups from lesson #3.
- The teacher will pass out current popular magazines (that feature musicians on the cover) to each group (including *Teen Vogue, Glamour, Rolling Stone, J-14, Yikes*).
  - Discuss the clothing, poses, hairstyles, and location of the musicians represented.
  - What elements are seen as in style or "cool"
  - What other elements are featured on the cover along with the band? How do these elements contribute to the overall appearance of the magazine cover?
- The students will be asked to describe the aesthetic of the cover of the magazine using the following list of aesthetic qualities:
  - "cuteness, quaintness, coolness, zaniness, deliciousness, glamorousness, cleanness, the romantic, the natural or the futuristic" (Wightmann, 2006, p. 129)
- The students will then discuss, in their groups, the aesthetic they wish for their band to have.

2ⁿᵈ class period
 -The teacher will introduce the students to the work of Cindy Sherman in a Powerpoint presentation.

-For each image the students will describe the following elements of the characters represented:
- Clothing
- Pose
- Hair style
- Location
- What is the overall aesthetic?
- Describe the Character shown.

-The teacher will then introduce students to the work of Nikki S. Lee in a Powerpoint presentation.
- How does Nikki S. Lee seem to camouflage herself within each social group?
- What does the aesthetic of the image say about the groups personal identity?

-The teacher will then introduce the students to the work of photographer Annie Leibovitz in a Powerpoint presentation.

-The powerpoint will include *Jack Black, Will Ferrell and Jason Segel as Phineas, Ezra and Gus, the Hitchhiking Ghosts of The Haunted Mansion* and Queen Latifah as Ursula
- Do you recognize the celebrities in this image?
- What characters are these celebrities portraying?
- What elements lead you to believe that these celebrities are portraying these recognizable characters?

-The teacher will then show the class photographs from the Queen Latifah as Ursala set.

-The final image in the presentation will be Annie Leibovitz's American *Vogue* November 2012 issue.

-The teacher will point out the following elements included on the cover:
- FOOLPROOF FACE
- BODY BEAUTIFUL
- WHAT TO WEAR WHERE
- PRETTY SHADES OF PINK
- THE $108 PARTY DRESS
- GRACE A MEMOIR THE MAKING OF A LEGEND
- **One male reference:**
- Jimmy Fallon, Seth Meyers and the FUNNY BUSINESS OF POLITICS

-Describe the overall aesthetic of the magazine cover (use Wightman's list of qualities). Are there gender stereotypes represented?

3rd Class Period

-At the beginning of class the students will be asked to get into their groups, and discuss the overall aesthetic of their band.

-The students will describe in writing the poses, hairstyles, clothing, and location of their band that will be featured on a magazine.

-The students will also determine what magazine their band will be featured on and what other elements will be included on the cover.

4th Class Period
-The teacher will show a Powerpoint on how to use a digital camera. The teacher will also describe technical elements of photography.
-The groups will then experiment with digital camera. The students will take photos of each other in practice poses.
-The students will be asked to bring costumes and props for their band for the next class period.

5th Class Period
-The teacher will review the technical elements of photography.
-This class period is a photography studio day.

6th Class Period
-The teacher will review the technical elements of photography.
-This class period is a photography studio day.

7th Class Period
-The teacher will review the technical elements of photography.
-This class period is a photography studio day.

8th Class Period
-The teacher will review the technical elements of photography.
-This class period is a photography studio day.

9th Class Period
-The teacher will review the technical elements of photography.
-This class period is a photography studio day.

10th Class Period
-Today the students will meet in the computer lab.
-The students will be instructed on how to use Adobe Photoshop using example images.

11th Class Period
-The students will meet in the computer lab.
-The teacher will pass out the written descriptions of the magazine ideas each group created.
-The magazine examples will be passed out.

-The students will photoshop the photographs of their band to create a magazine cover.

12th Class Period
   -The students will meet in the computer lab.
   -The teacher will pass out the written descriptions of the magazine ideas each group created.
   -The magazine examples will be passed out.
   -The students will photoshop the photographs of their band to create a magazine cover.

13th Class Period
   -The students will meet in the computer lab.
   -The teacher will pass out the written descriptions of the magazine ideas each group created.
   -The magazine examples will be passed out.
   -The students will photoshop the photographs of their band to create a magazine cover.

14th Class Period
   -The students will meet in the computer lab.
   -The teacher will pass out the written descriptions of the magazine ideas each group created.
   -The magazine examples will be passed out.
   -The students will photoshop the photographs of their band to create a magazine cover.

15th Class Period
   -The students will turn in their work.
   -Each student will project their magazine cover using the LCD projector.
   -The students will critique each other's final artwork.

Assessment/Closure:
   Final Critique
   Rubric