Adolescents and values portrayed in music nowadays

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Abstract

Nowadays, the close relationship between adolescents and music is a fact reinforced by new technology. Music, in general, reflects values and attitudes in society and serves different purposes in life, however the crisis of values is a constant threat that may be eased by using music as a tool to engage with young people and reinforced ethical values. This work aimed at assessing perceptions of explicit content in pop music by 16-year-old adolescents by means of a questionnaire with a series of short-open questions. The results confirmed a relaxed attitude towards current social values but yet a robust self-claimed personality in young people

Keywords: adolescents; explicit content; music; ethical values

1.Introduction

Nowadays it can be observed that younger generations are involved in a culture of free music and therefore new business opportunities have consequently emerged over the last few years (Fouce, 2010). The music industry is constantly looking into different ways to call the attention of young potential listeners by portraying innovative sex standards, flexibility of profanity, among others in order to express personal experiences and making it explicit is the key to make their way to the music charts (Knobloch-Westerwick et al, 2006).

Further research conducted linguistic analysis of popular songs 1980–2007 to demonstrate that changes in the language "tune in to psychological change" (DeWall, Pond, Campbell & Twenge, 2011). It also showed that over time, the use of words related to self-focus and antisocial behavior increased, whereas words related to other-focus, social interactions, and positive emotion decreased. Song lyrics are a clear example of social changes occurring at a rapid pace.

In line with the above, highly sexualised lyrics have been analysed to show that

The relationship between the body and sex is unambiguously portrayed in contemporary media. Far too often lyrics show extreme explicit sex acts and body parts that have taken over personality or any other qualities of the person/s involved. Sex has become one of the main basis of relationships, even in so-called typical love songs where the listener, back in time, would have never expected that type of graphic vocabulary. (Aubrey, 2006)

Relaxation of ethical values in the name of globalisation has affected all paths of life, from language etiquette to social manners resulting in a general crisis and change of values (Amuthavalli; Sridevi, 2014; Kumar, 2015; Pajaziti, 2014) that is affecting western society and is being experienced, firsthand, by those who are most vulnerable, children and young adults. Besides, variety, forms of expression and specially globalisation (Bauman, 1998) has caused a change in song lyrics.

As claimed by Saarikallio & Erkkilä, (2007) music functions as a mood regulation device; this statement is reinforced by Sloboda & Juslin (2001) who claim that music can regulate and satisfy personal mood-related goals. Music can be used for several purposes, among which, the most used are "mood enhancement, coping with distress, identity construction and social identity formation" (Bogt, Mulder, Raaijmakers & Gabhainn, 2011). "Music's consoling effects were reported as resulting particularly from the sound and texture of the music itself, from attribution of personal meaning to music's lyrics, and, to a lesser extent, from perceptions of closeness to artists and other listeners" (Bogt, Mulder, Raaijmakers & Gabhainn, 2011).

The fact that young people are easily influenced by the music they listen to would cause them to follow the social trends those songs evoke (Babtrakinova, Voloshko & Snistaryova, 2017).

Music, being one of the most beneficial and influential methods to engage with people (Papinczak, Z. & Dingle; Genevieve & Stoyanov, S.; Hides, L. & Zelenko, O., 2015), is actually depicting a changing society that lacks an established set of values which could correlate with music preferences (Rentfrow, P., & Gosling, S., 2003) and social standards, therefore affecting life as a whole, therefore, can explicit music content influence the perception of adolescents towards trendy social standards and own ethical aspects of their personality?

1.1 Music as a resource

Music is one of the main resources of intellectual, cultural, artistic and, why not, technological and economical depth. Young people spent large amounts of money and time listening to music and the music industry is aware of that and they generate a great deal of music through different communication channels (Roberts, Henriksen, & Foehr, 2009). "Music is their soundtrack during this intense developmental period". On average, adolescents listen to music for up to three hours daily and accumulate more than 10,000 hours of active music listening throughout adolescence (Roberts et al., 2009; Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2000; Zillmann & Gan, 1997). Due to the fact that they are constantly listening to music they become young music experts.

Starting by the close relationship between music and teenagers, it is stated that when a teenager is going through emotional distress or low stability, it is music that consoles them and regulate moods and emotions (Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014). Teenagers, no doubt, engage with music and if that piece of music contains strong lyrics, they might engage with them and make them part of their lives. Besides, music serves as therapy when working through conflictive situations and lets feelings arouse (Laiho, 2002; Sloboda, 1992; Ziv, 2004).

1.2 Music as a value

Family passes values from generation to generation (Ilisko, D. & Kravale-Paulina, M., 2015), they are linked to ethics and morals inherited from our ancestors. Self-exploration, self-improvement and self-recognition are present in the human value system and guide our patterns of activity, which in turn are intrinsic to the behaviour pattern itself (Wilson & DuFrene, 2009). Our values guide our actions, emotions and behaviour, which is significant for different fields of study such as sociology, philosophy, education and psychology. Values prepare us to choose actions according to consequences involved in those actions. Music is universal and so are values; music can change perceptions and so can values.

According to Abbott (2002:10), songs express cultural aspects such as feelings or ideas, which can be received through the listening of them. All in all, music is a multi-purpose tool for young people, as it comes with traditional cultural baggage as well as new social trends.

1.3 Music nowadays

Nowadays, popular songs overuse sexual vocabulary and insults as demonstrated by various studies by Hall et al. (2012) about sexualisation in the Billboard Top music lyrics 1959-2009, also reported by Martino et al (2006) regarding consumption of music with degrading sexual references. Songwriting experts claim that explicit content in music occurs so often that the only way to call

the attention of listeners is to add even stronger language. All in all, patterns of behaviour are portrayed by music.

Music is said to a reflection of social beliefs and attitudes therefore, taking into account the global crisis of values young people are going through Sortheix, F. & Parker, P.; Lechner, C. & Schwartz, S., 2017) and today´s music lyrics reflecting general moods and views young people have, music could be the savior, a tool to engage with young people from an early age and influence their ethical values, which then will turn into positive attitudes.

1.4 Music as an engaging tool

To choose the appropriate type of music is essential to young people use it as a tool (Fonseca-Mora, M.C.; Toscano-Fuentes, C.,& Wermke, K. (2011) for different needs, such as a calming environment, a family atmosphere, a friendly exciting environment, mood regulation (Saarikallio, S., & Erkkilä, J. (2007), as the more understanding of the lyrics of a song, the more aware an individual would become.

Themes and references in popular music lyrics do matter since it focuses on the fact that popular music reflects what is on the minds of the artist as well as of the individual who consumes that type of music; after all, lyrics mirror social trends related to worries, concerns, aspirations (Christenson, P. G., de Haan-Rietdijk, S., Roberts, D. F., & Bogt, T., 2019). The emotional part of this experiences is valuable as it moves and changes perceptions of people and create the "domino" effect, causing human nature value reconsideration and attitude change (Rokeach, 1973).

2.Methods and Instruments

Moved by the research question: can explicit music content influence the perception of adolescents towards trendy social standards and own ethical aspects of their personality? The

approach of the study was fundamentally psychological in the sense that the aim was to discover internal explanations for human behaviour.

The first stage involved searching for related past literature on how lyrical content may affect attitudinal change on young people, followed by a collection of top singles from official international music site covering USA and British music (Billboards.com) based on popularity and sales (2014-2019) with the aim to confirm the relaxed social and ethical attitude portrayed in songs, mainly by an overuse of profanity. The songs chosen were love/melodic as easy-listening would not generally disturb anyone and be generally enjoyed.

The second phase of the research, once permission from school managers was granted, implied the quantitative method (Creswell & Clark, 2017) as these proved to be easy, fast and cost-effective taking into account the number of participants. Internet search tools, paper surveys, recording systems and statistics applications were used for both methods in order to reach utmost reliability, validity and objectivity.

A total of 76 secondary students (36 males and 40 females in total) divided into three groups of 20 students and one group of 16 students (in this case, these subjects belonged to the bilingual branch offered by that particular school and were studying music at the local conservatory) aged 16 from four different local schools, were addressed based on purposive sampling (Saunders et al., 2003: 175) as they most suited this research project mainly due to their age (still on a developmental stage) and experience with music, which would reveal awareness of the matter and repercussion on their daily routines. The students were encouraged to take part in the survey by providing research credit.

Besides, in order to interpret in-depth information about the awareness of the matter and views of adolescents on profanity and explicit content affecting their personality, two short-open questions were posed during the ethics class, as it was considered to be a topic for debate regarding critical pedagogy.

As the atmosphere was confidential and at the same time it provided an entertaining environment for the students, that allowed the participants to feel free to respond to the posed questions and even discussion afterwards in order to challenge views (Saunders et al., 2003: 270).

This method allowed freedom of speech among the participants and a place for debate to compare different views and obtain a general overview of the beliefs and provide new insights based on experiences and meanings provided by lyrics.

The methods used may be self-conducted and predict similarities in future research for similar groups of participants.

3. Results

Starting from the point of knowledge provided by previous literature related to the influence of music lyrics on adolescents, the hypothesis of this work was: Exposure to explicit music content would lead young people to follow social unethical trends evoked in it. In order to analyse results, the inferential statistical method was used (Glass & Stanley, 1980), generally applied to social studies.

Firstly, from a lexicon point of view regarding the use of profanity, after the analysis of 65 love/melodic songs in search for the most common used profane words, eleven different strong words were found (ass, bitch, damn, dick, fuck, hoe, nigga, piss off, pussy, shit, whore), however, the highest occurrence of profanity was represented by the F-word and the S-word followed by the B-word and N-word.

Secondly, the participants were asked to chose between explicit or non-explicit music content and give reasons behind their choices.

Out of 72 participants, results reveal that 80.6% preferred the explicit version as they expected real feelings from the artist and they considered this was a better and more emphatic way to provoke reactions in the listener. On the other hand, 16.7% of participants preferred the non-explicit version as they believed for love songs it would be preferable to have softer, nicer, kinder lyrics. Finally, 2.8% showed no preference between the two versions as they considered them the same.

2.When the participants were asked if they thought explicit music content would actually influence their personal ethical values and vision of life, the responses were:

"With good foundations and manners behind my personality should stay firm and not change", "Nobody and nothing can change my personality or the way I envisage life", "Strong language is something normal nowadays and nobody finds it disturbing", "Lyrics are just words, not actions", "Rhythm is what really matters, so in that sense, I do not pay attention to music lyrics", "It only affects you if you live in similar environments of those shown in the song and if you are easily impressionable", "It may influence your personality as it is related to everyday situations and if you are going through the same", "Only if you are really young, it may influence you"-"Personality does not change but language may be affected" (various subjects, 2019).

Out of 72 participants, 70 claimed that explicit content in songs would generally not change or affect their personality if well-established, as lyrics are just words and, after all, they mostly paid attention to the rhythm of the song. They also stated that profanity in music is normalised in everyday situations and did not call the attention of people as much. On the other hand, only 2 participants were concerned about young people being influenced in terms of language if they were continuously exposed to strong lyrics.

4. Discussion

Music, in all its representations, has no doubt been affected, showing an increase of profanity (Hall et al, 2012), probably due to the influence of other music genres and the effect of globalization (Bauman, 1998). Relaxation of social standards and values is a fact and that is reflected in song lyrics, considered as just words by young people, who in turn prefer direct expressions rather than epithets.

As nowadays profanity has flooded all top music charts, romantic music material has also experienced it, therefore impacting on adolescents´ perceptions of what is evoked in them, causing them to actually prefer explicit material as they consider it real therefore there is general acceptance of profanity (Coyne et al., 2011) however, at the stage of this work no relevant impact on their physical and physiological development as they claimed to have a well-established personality.

As the aim of the research was to assess the influence of explicit content on their personal values, statistics showed that most participants would not consider explicit content as an influential factor in their lives, however as it is a long-term effect and the participants were still going through developmental stages, more time would be needed to confirm this hypothesis.

This statement provided an overview of young people claiming to have established personality pillars to guide their actions and although music lovers, they preferred things to be called by their names, in the sense that they were used to profanity in their lives and considered that type of language as standard, a type of language that was direct and honest.

All in all, it can be stated that their attitude towards profanity was relaxed, therefore not much of a negative impact on their values could be perceived at that stage; more time would be needed for an adolescent to complete their developmental stage and be able to observe any relevant behavioural impact. This aspect was of importance to realise that adolescents considered they has a

solid personality able to face unethical circumstances, which could also be used for ethical academic purposes by combining different resources such as command of a language and music can provide a different perspective of other cultures (Abbott, 2002).

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At this stage, H1 could not be confirmed.

4.1 Findings

The assessment of the correlation between profanity reflected by social trends in music and acceptance of it (Coyne et al., 2011) by adolescents as a consequence of the relaxation of social values provides scientific contributions that can be applied to support, namely, social, cultural and academic fields of study.

The findings provided guidance to ethics professionals, who can use music to create critical thinking about the different cultures evoked in the lyrics depending on the language. This would, in turn, to improve the understanding of values among all communities and the importance of social responsibility.

The attractiveness of music for adolescents led to active participation and revealed sets of self-claimed ethical values shared amongst them, resulting in the majority of participants providing similar statements.

The analysis of data obtained provided social as well as academic relevance as this research backs up studies carried out in the past to corroborate similar results, especially concerning the

close relationship between music and adolescents (Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014) and impact on social behaviour (Wilson & DuFrene, 2009), this could would broaden their critical skills and be used and applied for academic purposes (Fonseca-Mora, M.C.; Toscano-Fuentes, C.,& Wermke, K., 2011).

Some profane words seem to be overused, which shows an attitude of relaxation towards them in contrast with most powered-words which are less commonly used probably due to the rank of power-charged words that society has established.

The results would benefit all parties involved in the study as it raise general awareness about a topic seen from a parental, academic and social point of view. On the other hand, the strengths of the study included available fast, low-cost data gathering which enhanced the accuracy and credibility of the research and easiness for replication.

4.2 Limitations and recommendations

The age of the groups only showed perspectives from specific age group, therefore generalization may not be applied to other age groups.

As recommendations, future research on how explicit songs may also affect L2 learners is advised as it could broaden the literature of how foreign language are perceived by listening to music and repercussion on their social or language skills as well as ethical standards.

5. Concluding comments

Music provides the appropriate scenario to engage with people ((Papinczak, Z. & Dingle; Genevieve & Stoyanov, S.; Hides, L. & Zelenko, O., 2015) regarding universal ethical values which, no doubt, will provide young people with beneficial outcomes such as the improvement and appreciation of relationships.

Adolescents were proud to claim their personality could be not be affected by explicit content evoked today in music, which revealed maturity at that age when dealing with constructs difficult to measure in a short period of time. As young people are constantly being influenced by different aspects of life, explicit content in music may not, at this stage, be as relevant as previously expected. On the other hand, the results proved to be efficient to provide a framework to change perceptions and help enhance values using something as revealing as music.

As music is an enjoyable activity that expresses feelings (Laiho, 2002; Sloboda, 1992; Ziv, 2004) and values of society, people can benefit from it, especially during academic periods, which in turn will bring discussion in the ethics class and could collaborate to palliate the crisis of value and create a more critical perspective in students and improve quality of life.

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