

Music and Identity: The Effect of Background Music on Israeli Palestinians' Salience of Ethnic Identity

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ABSTRACT

Background

Adolescence is a significant age for the development of identity, which has a great impact on the development of competence and motivation later in life. The construction of individual identity is influenced both by personal and by social factors. Beyond the issue of personal identity, an important issue in adolescents belonging to a minority is ethnic identity. Ethnic identity differs from personal identity in that it involves a shared sense of identity with others belonging to the same ethnic group. Strength of ethnic identification among minority groups is positively related to their academic adjustment and psychological well-being. Moreover, several studies have shown that women have stronger ethnic identity than men and identify more with their ethnic roots. Israeli Palestinian citizens are defined as a minority group in Israel, constituting about 20% of the total population. Their sense of identity may be split between their national (Arab or Palestinian) and civic (Israeli) identity. Research has shown that the two factors are contradictory, so that the higher one is, the lower the other. Higher national identity in Israeli Palestinians has been related to well-being and self-esteem. Music plays an important part in identity, particularly in adolescence. It is important for young people's ingroup identification, ingroup preference and influences the perception of others. In addition, females tend to be more influenced by music than males.

Aims

The aim of the study was to examine the effect of background music on Israeli Palestinians adolescents' salience of ethnic identity.

Method

242 participants took part in the study (mean age = 15.15, $SD = 1.33$), 90 boys and 152 girls. Participants were randomly assigned to four groups: National Palestinian songs, Arab love songs, English rock songs, and no music. Participants in the music groups were first asked to listen to the music and write associations evoked by it. All groups completed an ethnic identity questionnaire, which contains 4 scales: 1. Feeling Palestinian (FP), 2. Collective self esteem (CSE), 3. In-group identification (IGI), 4. Elements of Israeli identity (EII). The fourth group only filled out the questionnaire.

Results

A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted, with group and gender as fixed factors, and scale scores as dependent variables. A main effect for group was found on all scales. In general, scores were higher with all music types than

without music. No main effect of gender was found. An interaction between gender and group on FP and IGI were found. Separate ANOVAs for boys and girls showed different patterns of the effect of music on the various scales.

Associations to the music were categorized by affect: negative, positive and neutral. Significant differences were found between the affect evoked by music: love songs evoked most positive affect, national music evoked more negative affect than love songs, and love songs evoked least neutral associations.

Correlations between associations and identity scores for the whole sample were not significant. However, when looking separately at boys and girls, a positive correlation between number of positive associations and FP was found for boys, whereas for girls the correlation was negative.

When looking only at participants who had any positive, negative or neutral associations, several significant differences were found between the music types, and different patterns of differences were found for boys and girls.

Conclusions

Results of the present study suggest that music in general affects the salience of ethnic identity. However, it does so by evoking different types of feelings and associations according to type of music. Moreover, several gender differences in these effects exist.

Keywords

Ethnic identity, Palestinians, adolescence