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Negative Effects of Music Celebrities?

Evidence on Eating Disorders, Psychoticism, Delinquency, Celebrity Attitudes and Censorship

This presentation overviewed four studies carried out recently concerning the putative negative effects of music celebrities. These studies concerned respectively: Females, pop stars, and eating disorders; psychoticism and problem music; delinquency and celebrity attitudes; perceived effects of music and censorship.

Females, Pop Stars and Eating Disorders

Tiggemann and Pickering¹ showed that »Watching music videos predicted drive for thinness« sub-scale scores among 94 Australian female adolescents. Similarly, Borzekowski, Robinson and Killen showed that exposure to music videos related to measures of 837 American adolescents »perceived importance of appearance« and »weight concerns«²: crucially however this relationship disappeared when ethnicity and body mass index were controlled for, such that the link between eating disorders among females and exposure to the glamorised images of females presented by music videos is far from clear. To test this, North, Sheridan, and Wilson gave a questionnaire to 300 English females aged 16–30 years. They found that frequency of watching music television was not related to scores on the Eating Disorders Inventory (EDI), body mass index (BMI), or self-esteem.³

Psychoticism and the Fans of Problem Music

Various studies in the USA have identified links between liking for »deviant« music (such as heavy metal and rap) and each of psychoticism, reactive rebelliousness, tolerance of racial and sexual discrimination, risk taking, drug use, shoplifting, vandalism, violence, and aggression.⁴ However there is very little data on this issue from other countries. Consequently, North, Desborough and Skarstein asked 200 English students to rate their liking for rap, R'n'B, nu metal, indie, current chart pop, hip-hop, and rock, and also asked them

1 Marika Tiggemann and Amanda S. Pickering, »Role of Television in Adolescent Women's Body Dissatisfaction and Drive for Thinness«, in: *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 20 (1996), p. 199–203, here: p. 199.

2 Dina L. G. Borzekowski, Thomas N. Robinson and Joel D. Killen, »Does the Camera Add 10 Pounds? Media Use, Perceived Importance of Appearance, and Weight Concerns Among Teenage Girls«, in: *Journal of Adolescent Health* 26 (2000), p. 36–41.

3 Adrian C. North, Lorraine P. Sheridan and Vicky Wilson, »Frequency of Watching Music Television and Eating Disorders Among Young Females«, in: *Depression and Anxiety* (under review).

4 See e.g. Christine H. Hansen and Randal G. Hansen, »Music and Music Videos«, in: *Media Entertainment: the Psychology of its Appeal*, ed. by Dolf Zillmann and Peter Vorderer, Mahwah, NJ 2000, p. 175–196.

to complete the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Revised).⁵ Scores on the psychoticism sub-scale of the EPQ-R correlated positively with liking for ›deviant‹ musical styles (rap, nu metal, hip-hop, and rock) but not ›non-deviant‹ styles (chart pop or indie). As such this confirms findings from the USA.

Psychoticism, Delinquency, and Celebrity Attitudes

In a separate study, North, Desborough and Skarstein (2005) recruited 73 self-declared fans of problem music and 73 non-fans (with each group containing the same sex distribution). Participants were asked to complete the EPQ-R and the Social Reactive Scale (which includes sub-scales for proactive and reactive rebelliousness). They were also asked to state the frequency with which they carried out 12 specific deviant behaviours (e. g. shoplifting), and to complete the Celebrity Attitude Scale (CAS) which measured participants' feelings of affiliation with their favourite musician. Fans of problem music (especially females) scored higher than non-fans on psychoticism, reactive rebelliousness, and two deviant acts (marijuana use and carrying a weapon in public). However there was no difference between fans' and non-fans' responses to the CAS. Therefore higher levels of deviance among fans of problem music is not due to greater identification with the frequently licentious acts of their favourite musicians.

Censorship and Perceived Effects of Problem Music

North and Hargreaves⁶ investigated whether censorship of music causes a labelling effect, such that music which is labelled as causing problem behaviour has a more negative effect on listeners than music labelled as helping people through difficult times. Participants were played one of four pop songs containing ambiguous lyrics. (For example, *Lucky* by Radiohead featured lyrics such as »The head of state / Has called for me [...] by name / But I don't have time for him«). Before hearing the song, half the participants were told that the music had been implicated in the suicide of young fans and criticised by protest groups. The remaining participants were told that the music had been praised by health professionals for helping young people to work through difficult times in their life. The latter group perceived the song positively whereas the former group perceived the music as having negative effects (e. g. making them feel more depressed). In short, censorship of music has the potential to cause it to have negative effects.

In summary, the literature shows that there are numerous links between pop music and problem behaviour. However the research presented here shows that these links are not clear-cut and that they are not necessarily attributable to hero-worship of famous musicians.

5 Adrian C. North, Lucy Desborough and Line Skarstein, »Musical Preference, Deviance, and Attitudes towards Celebrities«, in: *Personality and Individual Differences* 38 (2005), p. 1903–1914.

6 Adrian C. North and David J. Hargreaves, »Labelling Effects on the Perceived Deleterious Consequences of Pop Music Listening«, in: *Journal of Adolescence* 28 (2005), p. 433–440.