

THE CONTRIBUTION OF HIP HOP TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF PERSONAL IDENTITIES OF SOUTH AFRICAN FEMALE LATE ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

Identity construction is an integral task during late adolescence. In this study, I argue that hip hop music contributes to the process of identity construction among female late adolescents. The contexts that the female late adolescent is exposed to affect her process of identity construction. These contexts include family, friends, peers, religion, and popular culture, among other things. Hip hop music forms part of present-day popular culture. Adolescents have access to this genre of music via the mass media and social networks.

The aim of this study is to explore the nature of hip hop's contribution to the identity construction of female late adolescents in South Africa. To this end, I engaged seven female late adolescents in several research activities, which enabled them to make sense of their perceived identities in the context of hip hop music. I then interpreted the participants' stories, in order to understand the process by which hip hop had contributed to their sense of personal identity.

The participants in this study were first-year students in the Faculty of Education, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, who were all in the developmental phase of late adolescence. Narrative inquiry and participatory research (PR) approaches were the preferred strategies of data generation. The data-generation techniques included the use of drawings and lyric inquiry. These techniques served to stimulate the generation of narrative data. They also provided frameworks within which the participants could engage with their sense of identity in the context of hip hop music.

The research revealed that hip hop music does indeed contribute to the process of personal identity construction of the female late adolescents who participated in the study. It does so by compelling the adolescent to think about herself in relation to her continual self, which draws from her past, present, and future, her interactional self, both at the personal and social levels, and her situational self. The appeal of hip hop to her cognitive capabilities is enhanced through the strong link that hip hop has with her emotions.

The significance of this study can be summarised in three points. Firstly, this study provides empirical evidence of hip hop as a meaningful resource for the female adolescent as she constructs her identity. As such, the findings of this study negate the public notion of hip hop as being a bad influence on young people, and provides proof of its significant role in the lives of South African female adolescents. Secondly, this study is important for education in South Africa. The significance of hip hop music in education settings lies in its fundamental communicative capabilities, which can be effectively utilised in the classroom situation. Thirdly, this study strengthens educational research in South Africa, especially research aimed at the liberation and emancipation of female adolescents in South Africa. In this regard, this study provides alternative methodologies of inquiry to conventional research strategies, such as questionnaires and surveys.