THE ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

"WHAT’S GOING ON?: AFFINITY OF MILLENIALS TOWARDS SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS MUSIC

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A Paper submitted

in partial fulfillment of the

Bachelor of Science degree

in Advertising and Public Relations.

Degree Awarded:

Spring Semester, 2014
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SPRING SEMESTER, 2014

ABSTRACT: The present study examines the relationship between interpersonal and sociopolitical spheres of control and music preferences in a sample of 18-24 year old Americans (N=119). Paulhus’ survey for spheres of control was replicated and correlated against music genre preferences as well as a list of musicians that were deemed socially conscious and those musicians’ pop antonyms. The argument presented is that the sociopolitical sphere will correlate with the respondents’ identification with socially conscious musicians. The findings presented found correlations amongst both spheres and genre types. These correlations could imply the effect music has on this audience and general attitudes aligning with music consumed.
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“What’s Going On?”: Affinity of Millennials towards Socially Conscious Music

Music as Communication

Media is used to communicate a message to others, typically a group of peoples. Television, radio, social media sites, newspapers, magazines, etc. have been studied tirelessly for the messages they communicate. Music is the overlooked media in the studies found by the researcher (Belcher & Haridakis, 2011), although various studies have researched its ability to communicate (Shepard, 1986; Peterson, 1997; LeBlanc, Jin, Stamov & McCrany, 1999; Inskip, MacFarlane & Rafferty, 2007; Kopiez & Lehmann, 2008). Music is a fundamental form of art combining sounds, a form of communication and a set of psychological processes (Inskip, MacFarlane & Rafferty, 2007). The ambiguity of music may have been the cause of its neglect in the communication field. Music is dependent upon contextual factors that change the meaning of its content. This study looks to find a correlation between socially conscious music and millennials’ interpersonal and socio-political spheres of control. The correlation is believed to exist due to the music’s ability to reflect its views to its the listener.

The familiarity of music has a direct effect on music preferences. In six to eight hearings of a musical work, one’s preference of that musical work is likely to increase (Walker, 2006); so popular music remains popular due to repeated exposure. It is prudent to note that preference and taste is not the same thing. Preferences are typically short term and easily changed while taste is a stable entity (Kopiez and Lehmann, 2008). This paper will deal in terms of preference due to the deeper context needed to discover
Many attempts at models have been made (Shannon, 1949; Sperber & Wilson, 1987; King, 1989; Tagg, 1999; Brown, 2006; Gordon, 2005). The issues the researchers ran into in creating a model are similar. Music is contextual and reflective of the time it was produced in, creating a multivariate message that consistently changes. Some professionals make claims that in order to properly understand the true intended purpose of a piece of music one must play and perform it (Gordon, 2005).

In Brown’s model (Fig. 1.1), he focuses on the music semantics hierarchy and how it parallels social communication hierarchy (2006). Brown developed his model after discovering through his own research that music semiotics was too narrow of a study that focused on message interpretation. The interpretation does not consider the musical senders and social functions involved in music messages. This model considers the intrinsic emotional meanings and connotative linguistic meanings that exist in musicology theories and places them in a hierarchy that is inclusive of each lower level as the meaning rises in levels. Being that the highest level of the model encompasses the genres and cultural assumptions, the sections of musical works, motifs associated and structural features of the musical work.

King’s model considers both sources and receptors of a music message as active participants that bring their own experiences, needs and interests to the music event. The message is then subject to four channels consisting of the actual, generated music sound, linguistics, kinesic symbolism and the performers and participants that facilitate around the dynamics presented (King, 1989)
Gordon’s model is a combination of King’s 1989 music communication model (Fig. 1.2) (as cited by Gordon, 2005), relevance theory and code theory, creating a balance among all the ways music can communicate. Relevance theory was founded through Sperber and Wilson’s research when considering all utterances (1987). The
theory is applied with the concept that all utterances that are encountered by another source and in a particular context convey a certain number of implications and the basic act of uttering conveys something worth listening to. Shannon founded code theory in 1949 while working for Bell Technical Systems. This theory was the foundation set for the basic communication model used today that was credited to Schramm in 1963. The difference between Shannon’s model was the exclusion of feedback and encoding that is included in the Source, Message and Receiver Model (SMR) that is taught in communication classes today.

To employ Gordon’s model as a communication method, one can examine, “What’s Going On?” written by Marvin Gaye, Renaldo Benson and Alfred Cleveland and distributed by EMI Records. Gordon (2005) focuses on the blending of Sperber’s relevance theory, code theory and King’s 1989 model of music communication to create a well-rounded meaning of a musical work. “What’s Going On?” was performed by Marvin Gaye, recorded, and distributed to the public in February 1971. Initially Renalodo Benson wrote the song for Alfred Cleveland but when Cleveland passed on the project, Benson approached Gaye with the song. From there Gaye made it his own by overseeing the arrangement and adding topical references of war and racial strife, along with personal moments about his brother and father. Gaye also added musical styles of jazz infused rhythm tracks and him on cardboard box percussion, adding to the authenticity of the song (“500 Greatest Songs of All Time,” 2011). These details are congruent to the practice of relevance theory in describing the song qualities. Based on code theory the lyrics “only love can conquer hate,” “war is not the answer” and
“bring some lovin’” highlight the song’s intention as a plea for world peace. “Picket lines and picket signs” and “don’t punish me with brutality” refer to law enforcement trying to smother peaceful pleas for equality and peace. The last lyric we will decode is “got to find some understanding here,” in the context of the song it is implying that the cause to these wars is the lack of acceptance or understanding of those who differ from us, further stating that war is not the answer to these discrepancies. In order to apply King’s model a specific situation and receiver would have to be employed such as a live concert at a specific sized venue with a certain number of people and the movement of those people in the audience as well as those on stage. Many factors shape the concept of music communication, and these factors are situational and similar to those displayed in the established general communication models.

As stated earlier, music is contextual and reliant on locational, categorical and associational features (Shepard, 1986). There is no universal determinant of how music works. Music explains individual feelings, group feelings and creates moods allowing emotions to be expressed that may otherwise be voiceless. Music has multiple functions including emotional expression, aesthetic enjoyment, entertainment, communication, symbolic representation, physical responses, religious rituals, etc. (Inskip, MacFarlane & Rafferty, 2007). Within this list more than three functions stand out, validating music’s purpose of communicating. Music is chosen in films, television and other events to elicit a particular feeling and it is predetermined to bring about the desired emotional results. All media is an extension of our senses, going beyond language to express complex feelings such as love, compassion, forgiveness and creativity (Klisanin, 2010). Even the
gaps and silences in music are charged with meaning and an experience that speaks to the human sense of identity (Shepard, 1986).

Personality is a key factor in developing one’s sense of identity. One of the ways it is measured and perceived in easily explained terms is locus of control. Rotter founded locus of control in 1954 and throughout the years following while studying social-learning theory and personality. The concept of locus of control studies two types of expectancy outcomes situated in the belief that success or failure will be followed by a similar outcome or a dissimilar outcome. Simply put, a person’s feelings of no control in an internal locus of control relate to ability while in a situation of control relates to effort. For external locus the feeling of control relates to task difficulty and the feeling of no control relates to chance or luck (Rotter, 1966).

Stemming from Rotter and student’s study of locus of control, Paulhus created spheres of control (1983). His concept takes locus of control and specializes it for specific environments. Locus of control is broken down into the personal efficacy sphere, interpersonal sphere and the sociopolitical sphere. Personal efficacy is the control over the nonsocial environment towards personal achievement. Interpersonal control is concerned with control over other people in groups and dyads. Sociopolitical control elicits control over social and political events and institutions. Paulhus operationalizes these spheres in a 30-question survey with positive and negative sentiments towards each sphere. For this study we employed the interpersonal sphere and sociopolitical sphere due to the intended message content and music’s historical and functional group role.
The link between music and its communicative properties is essential, and like all forms of communication has the opportunity to transform perspectives, persuade, and create a general understanding of a time, place or event. Using this logic the researcher believes that there is a correlation with the genres that people listen to and their general attitudes about themselves and their environment. Thus, the researcher questions the concept, specifically towards an individuals’ spheres of control since they are environmental and situational based, as is the way music is enjoyed. By using social consciousness as the subject matter it allows for a highly discursive subject to be tested on its ability to communicate through a platform that may be considered less serious. Looking on the individual level coincides with the current trends of big data being used to create highly specified and targeted communication methods towards consumers. Understanding music’s effects on this group will help lead to a greater understanding of millennials’ core values.

The researcher’s personal interest in the subject of music is rooted in the belief that music communicates deeply and constructs individual personalities and values. A desired result of transcending specific music messages would be taking that belief and creating something greater to benefit the masses. Socially conscious music, as defined by the researcher, is music that has socially conscious themes dealing with factors outside the individual and that is not a product of philanthropic public relations attempts, but an important aspect to the artist’s musical career. These themes include the environment, human rights, justice, government, etc. Environments include physical locations of where people live, work and go for socialization; human rights
include, but are not limited to, equality for race, gender and sexual preferences; justice entails specific cases the artist believes are unjust and looking to raise awareness of; and government references what type of government is in office and the actions coming from that office. From personal experiences among friends and colleagues, the researcher found that many individuals identified themselves through the music they listen to, sparking interest in this subject matter.

**Literature Review**

Understanding of the functions of music as a source of communication the messages it communicates will be necessary to follow the focus of this study. To enhance that understanding we will focus on music preferences and identification, genres affiliated with activism and general self-identity. Within these categories characteristics of those who identify with particular music genres will be discussed, genre definitions and cultural connotations as well as self identity in relation to locus and spheres of control. Previous research has taken different approaches towards understanding individuals in relation to their environment and music preference, which will be highlighted in the following sections.

**Music and Identification**

Music is used as an identity badge to represent the empirical self. People try to find congruency with their self-concept and the image of the things they consume, but music also has the ability to present multiple selves (Larsen, Lawson & Todd, 2010). Music represents whom a person is in terms of their opinion, values and lifestyles (Rentfrow, McDonald & Oldmeadow, 2009), making the study of music important to
understanding self-identity. Genre categorization is inconsistent with no clear definition for each sub genre (Dunn, 2012). Genre definitions are constructed by individual’s perceptions whose meaning may change, depending on the individual (Larsen, Lawson & Todd, 2010; Lena & Peterson, 2008).

For the purposes of this study, genre will be used in the social construct definition, abiding by generalizations, which will be assumed to correlate with the general survey population’s knowledge of music complexity. When it comes to music preference it is determined by social circumstance of the environment and the listener (LeBlanc, Jin, Stamov & McCrary, 1999). Genres essentially serve as generalizable group analysis that may show the ability to observe a group ideology on a broad social spectrum without assuming the world is universal (Shepard, 1986). Genre labels are unable to fully describe someone’s music preference or any type of preference (Langmeyer et al., 2012), but the stereotypes associated with them have a kernel of truth (Rentfrow, 2007).

Pop music generally reflects the music that is popular during a specific time. Rock music, on the other hand, is a subset of pop music with its major differences being in attitude, rather than sound. All music genres in this research are categorized under the umbrella of pop music. Due to blurred lines, massification has been an issue discussed within genre categories, more diverse audiences than before are enjoying these “audience specific” music categories (Grabe, 1997) and confusing the labels in place. The growing popularity of a genre such as hip-hop or country (Grabe, 1997) does not mean that music is homogenizing. As popularity grows specific sub groups for
each genre have emerged giving birth to genres such as pop punk, thrasher metal, surf reggae, etc.

Many studies have examined correlations between music preferences and self-identities, specifically among the college age demographic (Ginocchio, 2009; Rentfrow, McDonald & Oldmeadow, 2009; Dunn 2012; Langmeyer et al., 2012; Conrad, Dixon & Zhang, 2007). Rock music is the favorite genre across most age groups (Kopiez & Lehmann, 2008; Ginocchio, 2009). Where rock differs from pop music is attitude. Common themes in rock music are: fighting the power, questioning authority, trying to make change and not caring what the current social constructs are. Music with this type of attitude is preferred among individuals that exhibit openness and extraversion (Rentfrow, McDonald & Oldmeadow, 2009; Langmeyer et al., 2012), as well as excitement seeking personalities (Dunn 2012), moderate levels of agreeableness and low levels for conscientiousness and emotional stability (Rentfrow, McDonald & Oldmeadow, 2009). Similar patterns to rock were found in those who preferred electronica music in Rentfrow, McDonald and Oldmeadow’s study (2009).

An individual’s self-brand or image congruency leads to the presentational self-concept (Larsen, Lawson & Todd, 2010), which is one of the reasons why genres continue to hold up stereotypes. Another reason for this are the musicians who are emerging, they continue to fall into the social groups that are constructed by society. Hip-hop is one of the genres consistently associated with the urban African American. In its historical context hip-hop was born in the South Bronx, New York City stemming from the economic hardship that faced communities in this area. Hip-hop was first
applied to artistic outlets of breakdancing, graffiti writing, MC-ing and deejaying. Today, hip-hop embraces many forms of culture including fashion, language and lifestyle (Mikayawa, 2012).

Individuals who prefer hip-hop music rate significantly higher in social recognition for personal achievement and self-respect than their other genre counterparts (Rentfrow, McDonald & Oldmeadow, 2009). Those who like hip-hop are also extraverts, similar to their rock peers, but also prefer the upbeat and conventional rhythmic patterns that are often found in hip-hop music. In Conrad, Dixon & Zhang’s study of hip-hop and R&B music video influence on African American self-identity (2007), they found that African Americans are more susceptible to the negative representation of females in music videos. The representations in the music videos led to increasing negative attitude towards women for the respondents. Although the researchers stated that the videos could be used to overcome oppression in certain circumstances, individuals cannot dis-identify with the negative images of women in particular (Conrad, Dixon & Zhang, 2007).

Individuals who rank highest for extraversion and openness but have a low level of conscientiousness tended to prefer jazz and classical music (Rentfrow, McDonald & Oldmeadow, 2009). These individuals also exhibited a preference of aesthetics and ideas when showing interest in the jazz genre (Dunn, 2012). Classical music fans tended to be self conscious in Dunn’s study of relating music preferences with listening and personality. Self-consciousness is the specific awareness of what other people think of you; typically it is an uncomfortable feeling of nervousness of what others think of you.
Dunn had participants listen to their choice of 100 songs representing 16 genres and analyze each piece. He also measured the number of times a participant listened to a song and how long each song was played. All of these genre and identity correlations should be taken as a place to begin understanding, with many exceptions. Although, in one study large consensus coefficients were found for stereotypes concerning fans of classical, hip-hop and rock music (Rentfrow, McDonald & Oldmeadow, 2009).

The most important factors of genre preference are gender (Shepard, 1986), race, education, church attendance, what type of community the individual lives in, region (Grabe, 1997) and the amount of musical training received (Ginocchio, 2009). The ability to understand the complexities of music has a large influence over preferences, Grabe’s study of country music pointed out that many children in the United States do not receive music class after their middle school years, which is effecting student’s listening interests. Music is everywhere and used to elicit feelings, it’s categorization in the arts causes it to fall on the societal list of priorities leaving students to grow up not knowing why they like something or how to explain their opinion of music, due to lack of foundational knowledge. This fractures people’s ability to communicate extensively through music as a medium.

Genres and Activism

Rock, hip-hop and reggae are genres that stand out and have a history of activism. This is not to say that music within other genres does not have socially conscious themes, but they are less frequent than rock, hip-hop and reggae. Social semiotics references to genres show that individuals identify with a music group as
they do to their social groups (Inskip, MacFarlane & Rafferty, 2007), demonstrating the need to understand the characteristics attributed to each genre category. Musical meaning is socially constructed, not in language (Larsen, Lawson & Todd, 2010), but in feelings grounded by social and historical factors (Hutnyk & Shama, 2000). Even when defining genre by musical characteristics the practiced labels and their meanings are relative to the individual (Lena & Peterson, 2008). The ranges of different genres follow common lives that are influenced by where that music originated (Dowd & Janssen, 2011). Where a genre originates has a large influence on its creation and final form. For example, reggae music created in the United States will focus on the issues and themes of American culture. Specifically location of a genre’s origins matter if a particular reggae musician grew up and created music in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania last year, the content and general attitude of the song will differ from the reggae music created in Jamaica in the 1960s. Genres continue to be blurred in high constructs as well. Libraries do not categorize using pop music as a genre, due to cultural differences it cannot be standardized (Inskip, MacFarlane & Rafferty, 2007).

Media’s influence on social capital is noted and researched among newspapers, television and Internet but it is lacking for music (Belcher & Haridakis, 2011), one of the oldest forms of media. Music is an international language that has the ability to transcend social and political divisions and to inspire and influence political behavior among its listeners (Belcher & Haridakis, 2011; Oumano, 1996). Using music to communicate a message of social capital, defined as civic participation and interpersonal trust by Putnam in 2001 (as cited by Belcher & Haridakis, 2011), is a
problem because it usually reflects rather than leads (Oumano, 1996). Music is no longer reflective of a special place or occasion, but pays special attention to a sound in a particular moment (Firth, 2013). The music that has been popularized, or pop music is primarily music for play rather than social consciousness, work or worship purposes. Meanwhile music has a powerful role to shape society and accelerate change, along with other media outlets (Klisanin, 2010).

Harnessing the power of music has lead to the creation of socially conscious events such as Product RED, Amnesty International’s “Instant Karma,” Live 8 and Live Earth. Although these benefit concerts exist and raise awareness of socially damaging events they are more reactive than trying to combat the issues. There is a pattern of musicians, media representatives in general, of being unwilling to risk their career and income to voice and fight for any vision of Utopia (Oumano, 1996). Socially consciousness as defined by Ervin Laszlo:

“...The knowing, as well as the feeling of the vital interdependence and essential oneness of humankind and the conscious adoption of ethics and the ethos that it entails.” (as cited by Klisanin, 2010).

This socially consciousness is becoming more difficult to find in music, especially pop music. Rock, hip-hop, country, alternative, heavy metal, soundtracks, pop, alternative, electronic and dance musicians all have exceptions to the genre category they are put under, but the general characteristics of each have a piece of truth (Rentfrow, 2007). Similarly to the musicians, society has made both groups scared to speak up, in fear of losing career and income (Oumano, 1996).
Fans of each genre have distinctive personality characteristics with some that define the genre and themselves by it. Hip-hop has been used as a barometer of the black struggle in the United States (Oumano, 1996); its content brings to light the racism and hurt of general stereotypes that African Americans are still fighting against. Rap, the lyrical element of hip-hop music culture, involves the dynamic relationship of vocal and instrumental tasks. Declamation is essential to rap, it imparts the form and direction of the music through rhythmic patterns and rhyme patterns that interact with the instrumental track. Hip-hop originated in the economically depressed South Bronx, which was predominately inhabited by African Americans in the 1980s (Mikayawa, 2012). It is associated with minority race, urban society, untrustworthy people of society, government and liberal individuals (Shevy, 2008). Liberal individuals are typically associated with change and attempting to bring about change in society. This idea directly conflicts with conservative agendas that are typically associated with maintaining the status quo and upholding predated morals and ethics. Belcher & Haridakis (2011) found a significant, positive correlation of activism with hip-hop, alternative and trance music.

Reggae is another genre that is perceived as the voice of the oppressed, originally in Jamaica and then internationally. The term “reggae” was first used by Frederick Hibbert, singer of Maytal, and defined as:

“Comin’ from the people, an everyday thing...when you say reggae you mean regular/majority and when you say reggae you say poverty, suffering, Rastafari...It is music from the rebels, people who don’t have what they want.”
Stemming from the 1960s, reggae is an eclectic musical form drawn from African religious music and cult drum music of the Rastafarian sect. The music typically relates to news, social gossip and political content. Reggae was commercialized through jazz, becoming known as “rudie blues,” then “ska,” then “blue beat” and finally by “rock steady” (Davis, 2014). Reggae musical characteristics include a 4/4-shuffle rhythm that is close to classic rhythm and blues incorporating an after beat and accompanying ensembles of horns and reeds to emphasize the choral beat of the guitar. The turbulence of the 1960s led to the Jamaican Rude Boy Movement that pushed the genre further by incorporating more up-tempo, ska-like songs with themes of caution, judgment and incarceration.

Rock was initially created as a subset to popular music. It encompasses three definitions involving it’s role in sociological, musical and ideological fields. Sociologically, rock is defined by commercially produced music aimed at exclusionary youth or late-capitalist societies. Musically, rock is defined as highly amplified with a strong beat and rhythmic patterns. Rock is typically considered erotic and draws heavily on prototypical folk sources. Ideologically, rock is associated with aesthetic authenticity and develops around the world of folk revival and art music. A key difference between rock and pop is the contrast of themes. Rock themes usually entail critical and historical discourse of society (Middleton, 2014). Depending on the definition of social consciousness or political orientation rock falls on all sides of being politically oriented according to the masses. Belcher and Haridakis’ study (2011)
exhibited results of people with strong personalities, who trust others, do not feel the pressure of time and listen to alternative and Christian rock are more politically oriented. This study further showed those who were more politically oriented and listened to alternative and Christian rock did not listen to pop or rock music. Meanwhile in Langmeyer, Guglhor-Rudan and Tarnai’s study (2012), rock, alternative and heavy metal were determined to have listeners who prefer intense sounds and are rebellious. For the purposes of this study, alternative will be considered rock, which also has positive correlations with activism (Belcher & Haridakis, 2011; Langmeyer et. al., 2012). Other genres that have been found to have a positive correlation with political group membership are alternative, classical, electronic, techno and trance. (Blecher & Haridakis, 2011).

Country music is associated with upbeat sounds and conventional messages, along with the majority ethnicity, rural societies, trustworthiness, and conservative ideology (Langmeyer et al., 2012; Shevy, 2008). In the United States, country music is the musical antonym of hip-hop for the characteristics associated with it, with few commonalities. Hip-hop and country overlap in who finds them attractive when described by age and music expertise; those belonging to younger audiences and relatively low musical expertise enjoy both genres (Shevy, 2008). Since country is defined as being conventional and holding conservative ideologies it is not considered one of the socially conscious genres for this study, although there are country songs with socially conscious messages.

Pop is also has been found to have a negative correlation with activism (Blecher
Pop music often refers to a range of American media and culture products within the song structure. The stylistic difference of pop and rock is that pop is often softer and more arranged. Pop also draws on older popular music with commercial and entertainment purposes. As a genre, pop is a hybrid of all genre categories and is classified based on sonic qualities, expressive themes, expected fan base, assumptions about artistic integrity rather than empirical popularity (Warwick, 2014). In this sense, pop music is a planned media vehicle for record companies to “advertise” themselves and gain recognition as a company. For the purposes of this study pop music has been defined as music with ranking on the Billboard charts with little or no deeper meaning beyond that of music of play. Popular music has been selected as the control genre to compare socially conscious genres due to its ability to encompass these genres through its definition and having proper antonyms of similar sounding music with meaning that is primarily outside of social consciousness.

Popular music is not always void of political meaning; sometimes that meaning is injected into it. In China, and other countries, musicians receive financial support from the government or oppositional groups to insert ideological content into their music. In the late 1980s the Chinese government created rock for the anti status quo. When the music began to take on a life of it’s own and broke national borders the government forced it back underground (Lena & Peterson, 2011). China supported musicians to create music that would get the public on board with socialism and encouraged factory workers, peasants, soldiers and students to write music according to Ho in 2006 (as cited by Lena & Peterson, 2011). Once that music was influenced by
western rock and the music transcended national boundaries it gave rise to Chinese rock and the student democracy movement (Lena & Peterson, 2011).

A direct example of music’s ability to communicate beyond itself was when Chinese revolutionist music began breaking boundaries, going outside of it’s intended context and gaining ground as explained by Shepard (1986). Chinese students were the leaders of the revolutionary music movement, in China, and they perpetuated its message. The music dominated its initial intentions to take on the needs, beliefs and values of the individuals in society. Since it was the music being promoted by the government, it is safe to assume that it was being played frequently on the radio and various media outlets. The power of music truly has no boundaries, in the United States the genres and music produced caters to all different types of cultures. Some countries need a different lens when analyzing their musical content. A totalitarian government like China would find the United States wide ranged popular music more self actualizing and empowering than those in the United States. Where in the United States the democratic government, and specifically the first amendment, protects musician’s and all citizen’s rights to express their opinions.

Self Identity

Western societies characterize themselves by their cultural contexts with emphasis on its citizens’ personal identities and individual achievement (Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 2002), a reiteration of the American dream. Cultures similar to the United States focus on the individual, each person develops a part of their perceived control, and where they fall on the spectrum of the American dream defines them.
In terms of the self-categorization theory, social perception is context sensitive emphasizing contextual relevance and sense making for the individual (Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 2002). Self-categorization theory works in practice by creating non-unique individuals in ways of depersonalizing them. The change in the self-concept and foundation of how the individual perceives others creates uniformity among what has been accepted (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Where an individual categorizes him/herself is reflective of their self-interpretation, defining what is most important to individual values and personal commitments (Brinkman, 2008). An individual’s self esteem directly compares to these self-categorizations and self-interpretations that individuals make to place themselves in society. In order to articulate where an individuals place in society is, when categorizing themselves, they use the same group identities others use to categorize them.

Self-identity is more descriptive of group norms than occasionally harsh or incorrect generalizations made about individuals that fall into these groups. It helps researchers and those that look at big data to have a clearer understanding of the collective self. Individuals typically prioritize the individual self over the collective self, making the collective self-subservient to the individual self (Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 2002). Although the individual self caters to the collective self, the social categorizations create an individual’s identity and define it in relation to their place in society (Hogg & Terry, 2000). This creates a vicious cycle similar to the omnipresent, “Which came first the chicken or the egg?” People may feel strong commitments to the groups in which their collective self identifies reside due to their place in society, even if that group
harbors a negative identity upon the individual (Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 2002). Individual identity becomes grounded when in-group categorizations and the individual chooses what society has been deemed as the higher identity. This case is particularly evident in terms of race and other minority characteristics (Conrad, Dixon & Zhang, 2007).

Locus of control influences the degree individuals feel they have the ability to control the events that are affecting them. The feeling of control goes beyond what happens to the individual, getting them to talk about others, but is most reflective of the self and the perceptions that learned inhibitions affect them (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2012). Stemming from the idea of Julian Rotter’s locus of control scale is Delroy Paulhus’ spheres of control. Paulhus (1983) developed a spheres of control scale that covers interpersonal, social-political and personal spheres of reference as factors of control. One’s ability to control their environment is context specific and has been found to have a significant impact on an individual’s sense of control (Paulhus, 1983; Bowling, Eschlemen & Wang, 2010). A person’s general locus of control has a strong relation to that person’s feeling of life satisfaction and problem-focused coping (Bowling, Eschlemen & Wang, 2010). People with an internal locus of control believe that they can create change in their circumstances, while the opposite is said of externals (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2012). These characteristics are some of the many themes in music, particularly when comparing pop music and sociopolitical music. Although, the power of music has no boundaries and caters to all different types of people in the United States, breaking genre stereotypes that can conform to standards set by society while
others challenge them. That is the focus and the differing point used between pop music and sociopolitical music used in this study, with pop conforming and sociopolitical music challenging standards set by society. Studies about music and identity yield to the thought that those within one group with similar themes (Lena & Peterson, 2008; Rentfrow, McDonald & Oldmeadow, 2012; Dunn, 2012; Langmeyer et al., 2012), such as sociopolitical music lovers having a high feeling of control in the sociopolitical sphere.

RQ: “Is there a correlation between music preferences and an individual’s interpersonal and sociopolitical spheres of control?”

Method

Finding a correlation between spheres of control and music preferences focused on specific musicians due to other research showing the ambiguity of genre. This informed the researcher that the results from a study that focused only on genre may conform to stereotypes or accepted characteristics that individuals identify with, within each group. After creation of the survey it was distributed online and in person to insure a diverse audience, that primarily came from the Rochester Institute of Technology campus. Individual interpersonal and sociopolitical spheres of control scores were correlated against individual musician affinity scores to find if there was indeed a positive or negative correlation with the two.

Musician’s Chosen

To create a list of socially conscious musicians, the researcher found websites and blogs of individuals who self reported socially conscious musicians and found commonalities amongst the musicians listed. Initially the decided source was to be
Billboard to inform what musicians should be tested to insure general recognition of musicians among the research audience. In a pilot survey the researcher distributed on personal social media networks, 43 respondents were asked to rate 30 artists found on Billboard’s Hot 100 lists from 2000-2013 on a scale of social and political consciousness to pure pop. The results from this survey were deemed unsatisfactory in developing a strong list of socially conscious musicians. The researcher proceeded to make queries about socially conscious, activist musicians and found articles addressing singular groups or artists including Michael Franti, Foo Fighters and Lupe Fiasco (Oumano, 1996; “The Protest Movement”, n.d.; “Uplifting and Socially Conscious,” n.d.). After these searches the researcher asked her peers, who fall into the demographic of the study, what artists they listen to that would qualify as socially conscious by this study’s definition.

To develop the final list of musicians to be tested the researcher held a panel of experts as a focus group to brainstorm and decided on known socially conscious musicians who fall under the genres that are characterized as being socially conscious, rock, reggae and rap. The panel of experts consisted of the researcher, two communication professors with backgrounds in music research and a music professor who teaches a course in sounds of protest. Each expert shared musicians they thought were socially conscious and the researcher served as the filter to determine if millennials would be able to identify and report on them. Beyond identifying socially conscious musicians the expert panel also identified each musician’s pop antonym (Appendix A).
Artifacts and Distribution

The survey used to collect the data in this research was Paulhus’ Spheres of Control survey (1983). The survey employed by this study consisted of likert scales to measure individual genre preferences, agreement of identification of the musician’s messages and frequency of listening to the musicians. This survey was distributed online through the researcher’s personal social media account as well as by sharing a link with peers in her courses. The survey was also distributed in a paper version; these were distributed in low and mid level communication classes on the Rochester Institute of Technology campus. When distributing in class the researcher gave a general description of the study without saying she was looking for socially conscious leanings and asked that those who may have taken it online not participate again.

Of 160 responses, 41 were excluded from the study, due to technical faults in some online responses, lack of completeness of vital sections, not being within the 18-24-age range or not permanently residing in the United States or its territories. Out of the 119 respondents 48.74% were female, 51.26% were male, 37.82% fell into the 18-20 year old age range, and 62.18% were in the 21-24 year old age range.

Collection and Calculations

Frequency of listening is an important factor for preferences, as well as being able to report that one identifies with the message of the musicians. For this study, music preferences were represented in the identification and listening of the musicians provided in the survey, each of which were scored based on likert scales. Message identification was traditionally scored from 1-7 with strongly disagree as the lowest
value and strongly agree as the highest value. In order to relate the listening frequency to these scores the likert scale served as a multiplier. The message identification scores were multiplied on a scale of 1 to 1.4 with “never” and “I don’t know” multiplying the identification by one and increasing each multiplier by 0.1 as frequency of listening increases. Meaning, respondents who answered “rarely” had their likert score of 0-7 towards identity with the message multiplied by 1.1, those who responded “occasionally” were multiplied by 1.2 and so on. For message identity 0 represented the “I don’t know/I don’t listen to this artist” response. This made the range of identity with the musicians 0-9.8, with 0 reflecting a lack of identification for not knowing the artist. The scale for genre preference was summed by the answers towards affinity of the social political genres discussed and the remaining genres.

The researcher calculated responses for the spheres of control questions individually to reflect the final social-political sphere and interpersonal sphere scores. A high score in these categories reflect a strong internal locus of control, while a low score indicates a weak internal locus of control. These scores were then correlated to respondents answers to genre preferences, musician responses, music training, average listening amount and the two spheres of control using Pearson’s test for correlation. Further Pearson correlations were run against the musicians and the spheres of control and against each musician. Respondents’ results were also tabulated for descriptive statistics, primarily looking for the means of all response categories.

**Results**

Distribution of the respondents was calculated to reflect the true means and to keep in
mind that preferences are dependent upon cultural identities. Correlations were run against musicians individually, as well as grouped into socially conscious and pop against the interpersonal and sociopolitical spheres of control. Many correlations were found amongst the musicians, and few were found between specific musicians and the spheres of control.

**Demographics**

Of the 119 respondents, 76.4% identified as Caucasian, 6.7% as multiracial, 5.9% as Hispanic, 5% as African American and 4.2% as Asian (Appendix B, fig. 1). Respondents were primarily from the Northeast United States, with 64.7% permanently residing in New York, 8.4% from New Jersey, 6.7% from Pennsylvania and 4.2% from Maryland. The remaining percentages were divided amongst Texas, Puerto Rico, California, District of Columbia, Florida, Massachusetts, Maine, Michigan, New Hampshire, Ohio, Virginia and Washington. Respondents had the strongest genre preference for rock with 68.07% either liking the genre moderately or liking the genre strongly. Pop was the next strongest preference at 57.98%, hip hop at 47.06%, R&B at 37.82%, jazz at 37.82%, electronic at 36.13%, dance at 34.45%, country at 25.21%, reggae at 22.69% and gospel was the lowest at 10.01% of respondents having a strong preference for the genre (Appendix B, fig. 2).

Twenty-nine respondents received one to three years of musical training, twenty-two received nine or more years, nineteen received none, fifteen received three to five years, thirteen five to seven years, ten received seven to nine years and 10 others received less than a year of musical training (Appendix B, fig. 3). Majority
of respondents listen to 2.1-6 hours of music per day, making up 67.23% of response (Appendix B fig. 4). The distribution of respondents who had a sociopolitical sphere score of 20 of less was 0.84%, while 47.9% of respondents received a score of 40 or greater in this sphere. Distributions for the interpersonal sphere were 6.7% with an interpersonal sphere score of 40 or more and no respondents had a score of less than 20 for this sphere.

Correlations

In an 8x8 matrix of Pearson correlations for sociopolitical genres, other genres, socially conscious musicians, pop musicians, musical training, frequency of music consumption, sociopolitical sphere and interpersonal sphere, resulted in 64 potential correlations. Of the 64 results, 9 significant correlations were found. The correlations were based on a 0.01 level of significance and 0.05 level of significance conducted using a 2-tailed Person test. There is a significant correlation between sociopolitical genres ($\mu=15.56$, $SD=2.962$) and other genres tested ($\mu=31.471$, $SD=6.001$), $r(119)=0.503$, $p \leq 0$. Correlations were found amongst each musician’s category towards each genre group. Although the genre results were significant they did not apply to the research question and failed to serve as a check for self-report on musician identification.

Other significant correlations were found between pop musicians ($\mu=35.92$, $SD=15.58$) and socially conscious musicians ($\mu=33.033$, $SD=6.001$), $r(119)=0.719$, $p \leq 0$. This correlation may indicate that the musicians were either not contrasting enough or were related, this could be due to the socially conscious artists and pop antonyms being within the same genre categories and outlying genre categories were not included in
the list of musicians. The last outlying correlation found was a significant correlation between the interpersonal sphere ($\mu=50.65$, $SD=7.078$) and the sociopolitical sphere ($\mu=40.08$, $SD=7.984$), $r(119)=0.284$, $p=0.002$. This correlation was found in Paulhus’ research (1983) and other research using his scale, signifying consistency and validity of correlations with the spheres of control measured.

The data showed a significant correlation between the sociopolitical sphere ($\mu=40.08$, $SD=7.984$) and socially conscious musicians ($\mu=33.033$, $SD=6.001$), $r(119)=0.210$. Each with a large standard deviation showed significance at the 0.05 level of a 2-tailed Pearson’s correlation test. From this result we can assume that there is a correlation between the sociopolitical sphere and preferences of socially conscious musicians. The opposing correlation was also significant using at the 0.05 level of a 2-tailed Pearson’s test. There is a significant correlation between the interpersonal sphere ($\mu=50.65$, $SD=7.078$) and the other genres tested ($\mu=31.471$, $SD=6.001$), $r(119)=0.221$, $p=0.016$.

The individual musician correlations that were run against the interpersonal and sociopolitical sphere scores resulted in six significant correlations. Correlations that were significant on the 0.01 level included Green Day with the sociopolitical sphere, Run DMC with the sociopolitical sphere, Dave Matthews Band with the interpersonal sphere and Bruce Springsteen with the sociopolitical sphere. There was a significant correlation between Green Day ($\mu=4.62$, $SD=2.314$) and the sociopolitical sphere of control ($\mu=40.08$, $SD=7.984$), $r(119)=0.237$, $p=0.10$. There was a significant correlation between Run DMC and the sociopolitical sphere ($\mu=40.08$, $SD=7.984$), $r(119)=0.289$,
p=0.001. The significant correlation between Dave Matthews Band ($\mu=3.75$, $SD=3.072$) and the interpersonal sphere ($\mu=50.65$, $SD=7.078$) was $r(119)=0.247$, $p=0.007$. And the significant correlation between Bruce Springsteen ($\mu=3.69$, $SD=2.752$) and the sociopolitical sphere of control ($\mu=40.08$, $SD=7.984$) was $r(119)=0.296$, $p=0.001$. At the 0.05 level of significance correlations were found between Run DMC ($\mu=3.12$, $SD=2.889$) and the interpersonal sphere ($\mu=50.65$, $SD=7.078$), $r(119)=0.203$, $p=0.027$; as well as between Pharrell and the sociopolitical sphere of control ($\mu=40.08$, $SD=7.984$), $r(119)=0.205$, $p=0.025$.

When analyzing the musician’s individually 122 independent significant correlations were found on the 0.01 and 0.05 level of significance. Of these correlations, 35 were on the 0.05 level of significance and 87 were on the 0.01 level of significance. Nineteen of these correlations were deemed extremely significant by the study having a Pearson correlation value of 0.4 or higher. The musicians with the highest correlation were Public Enemy ($\mu=2.13$, $SD=2.938$) and Run DMC ($\mu=3.12$, $SD=2.889$), $r(119)=0.622$, $p \leq 0$. There was a significant correlation between Rage Against the Machine ($\mu=3.49$, $SD=2.973$) and Metallica ($\mu=3.44$, $SD=2.708$), $r(119)=0.522$, $p \leq 0$. There was a significant correlation between Green Day ($\mu=4.62$, $SD=2.314$) and Blink-182 ($\mu=4.38$, $SD=2.749$), $r(119)=0.5$, $p \leq 0$. There was a significant correlation found between Lupe Fiasco ($\mu=3.06$, $SD=3.059$) and Sammy Adams ($\mu=1.85$, $SD=2.558$), $r(119)=0.44$, $p \leq 0$. There was a significant correlation between Bruce Springsteen ($\mu=3.69$, $SD=2.752$) and Bon Jovi ($\mu=3.98$, $SD=2.630$), $r(119)=0.435$, $p \leq 0$. The other correlations were between musicians who were in the same category of either socially conscious or the pop antonyms.
Discussion & Conclusion

The study was specifically looking for correlations amongst the spheres of control and the socially conscious musicians and their pop antonyms to answer the research question.

RQ: “Is there a correlation between music preferences and an individual’s interpersonal and sociopolitical spheres of control?”

Both spheres of control tested, yielded significant correlations with music genre preference and spheres of control. Showing music’s ability to communicate and/or align with personal beliefs and values. Socially conscious musicians correlated with the sociopolitical sphere of control and the genres that are not traditionally sociopolitical, correlated with the interpersonal sphere of control. There is a significant correlation between the sociopolitical sphere (μ=40.08, SD=7.984) and socially conscious musicians (μ=33.033, SD=6.001), r(119)=0.210. As the individual’s sociopolitical sphere of control increased their internal locus of control increased as well as their preference for socially conscious musicians. Socially conscious music, as defined by the study, is music that has socially conscious themes dealing with factors outside the individual and is not a product of philanthropic public relations attempts but an important aspect to the artist’s music career. These themes include the environment, human rights, justice, government, etc. This definition entails that millennials with a high sociopolitical sphere of control are involved in group dynamics that are unified by these musicians. This identification is important, stemming from the collective-self being subservient to the individual self. Respondents knowing that this study will be looked over and representative of
their demographic may have lead to skewed self-reports with higher identity in the sociopolitical sphere. This directly relates to the self-categorization theory stating that social perception is context sensitive and comparative (Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 2002).

Here it is important to note that individuals of all age groups have ethnic leniencies in music preference, preferring genres where their social category continues to emerge (Rentfrow, McDonald & Oldmeadow, 2009). The musician list tested was an approximately even sample of Caucasian and African American artists, although this list consisted of 22 artists, only 2 were female. Musicians tested in this study were representative of the predominant United States racial stratus. Although the respondent sample was more than three-quarters Caucasian, the age range studied was able to make correlations with the socially conscious artists who were evenly distributed in terms of artist demographics. Meanwhile the pop antonym artists consisted of primarily white musicians but a correlation with identification and the musician list was not found. These results may indicate that the millennials are less likely to identify by a social construct, like race, but more towards the person and what they contribute to the world. Showing that there is a correlation between the sociopolitical sphere of control and identification with socially conscious musicians provides insight to what is important to millennials and lays a foundation for future research in this category.

Extremely significant correlations were found between, Public Enemy and Run DMC, Rage Against the Machine and Metallica, Lupe Fiasco and Sammy Adams, Bruce Springsteen and Bon Jovi and Green Day and Blink-182 show that the expert panels decision to make these pairs as socially conscious and pop antonyms aligned
with the respondents’ understanding of the genres they are categorized by. For those with significant correlations these could be due to all the artists falling within the same three genres of rock, reggae and hip hop. Correlations would be made based on genre association, beyond that of affinity towards the musician or message the music is conveying.

Further identifying the correlation between musician and spheres of control were the significant correlation results of Green Day, Run DMC, Pharrell and Bruce Springsteen and the sociopolitical sphere and Dave Matthews Band and Run DMC with the interpersonal sphere. Green Day and Bruce Springsteen’s affiliation with the sociopolitical sphere highlights the affinity of the respondents towards their message and it lining up with their core values. The same instance occurs for Dave Matthews Band and Run DMC’s correlation with the interpersonal sphere. Run DMC’s overlap of both spheres may constitute that the musician fits both categories or that the respondents are generally unsure about this artists’ message.

Overall, strong affiliations were found between the socially conscious musicians that were deemed by the research by those who held strong feelings of control in the sociopolitical sphere of control. This shows that millennials will identify with those messages and adopt them or use them to create stronger foundations of their beliefs and core values. The creation of more socially conscious music could help music sales and encourage millennials to get more involved in social causes.

For Future Research

When using this study for further research, a content (lyric) analysis of artists
on a current list of top songs in the United States would be needed to clearly define a
socially conscious artist against the pure pop musicians. When the researcher received
feedback from random respondents they felt that the musicians were very specific,
although that was their intention, and a large number of respondents did not know
many or all of the musicians tested. Insuring that there is a representative sample of
musicians with socially conscious roots of various genres, rather than the subgenres
of traditionally sociopolitical genres, would illuminate truer tendencies within this
audience.

By taking a qualitative approach towards collecting this type of data set, future
research could have respondents listen to a set of songs and have them give feedback
about the message content, identification with the message and preference followed
by the spheres of control survey. Another qualitative approach that could illuminate
the subject would be having respondents write the first 3 artists that come to mind
and describe their musical content. With that data set the researcher can find the most
popular artists among the demographic and analyze those artist’s message content.
Social context in which the music is enjoyed was not studied and is a determinant of
and evaluative data for group membership, which shapes motivational implications of
consuming the media (Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 2002).

Important factors that should have been asked when conducting the study,
giving insight to where the messages come from would be the mode of discovering
music and how individuals listen to the music. Both of these factors communicate
different things about the message the artist is trying to relay and would reflect
identification with the message. Future research can use what was found in this study towards a greater understanding of this age demographic and properly target them in marketing attempts through music choices.
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### Appendix A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socially Conscious Musicians</th>
<th>Pop Antonym Musicians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U2</td>
<td>Coldplay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Day</td>
<td>Blink 182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ani DiFranco</td>
<td>Tegan and Sara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Franti</td>
<td>Trombone Shorty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispatch</td>
<td>Dave Matthews Band</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob Marley</td>
<td>Sean Paul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce Springsteen</td>
<td>Bon Jovi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rage Against the Machine</td>
<td>Metallica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marvin Gaye</td>
<td>Pharrell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Enemy</td>
<td>Run DMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lupe Fiasco</td>
<td>Sammy Adams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the purposes of this study socially conscious musicians entails philanthropic roots towards environmental, justice and human rights efforts within musical content and practice prior to commercial popularity.

For the purposes of this study the pop antonym musicians entail a primarily playful or personal musical content, they may observe philanthropic efforts but it does not reflect heavily in musical content.
Appendix B

Race/Ethnicity in 2009

% by generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen X</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All groups (other than Hispanic) are non-Hispanic.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations from the March 2009 Current Population Survey for the civilian, non-institutional population

Figure 1

Racial Distribution of Respondents

Figure 2