

POPULAR MUSIC AND HIP-HOP CULTURE:

A Sociological Study

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ABSTRACT

There is nothing as exhilarating than the new hip-hop culture than ever before. The paper will focus on how the rap and hip-hop are coupling with sociology. Linking it with some sociological concept rap and hip-hop will have their own identity. The dissemination of this style has been seen in all over the world. The style whose origin is considered to be from the South Bronx district of New York has now be seen all over the world, that too in their local cultural forms. The origin and history of rap will be taken into consideration. And how this style is being proliferated in the world in all the societies. The concept of postmodernism and symbolic interactionism will explain its significance. The sociologists like Lyotard, Toynbee, W.F.Whyte, and Lipsitz will explain how hip-hop brings a community into being. How hip-hop is linked with the politics. And also, how different regions, cultures and languages make their own symbols of identity. The paper talks about the popular music and hip-hop culture and how it influences the society.

Introduction:

Rap music is one of the most censored music and mostly taken in a pejorative form because it precisely shows the obvious truth of eventualities of youth violence and crime.

Since Rap music is considered to be one of the most ‘panic’ music as it gives a threat to the physical and moral well-being of the young. Many campaigns were encouraged against this music, Washington DC-based PMRC (Parents Music Resource Centre) was the center for such actions. The PMRC began a censorship campaign as they believed that the lyrics of popular music progressively stimulate drugs, violence, sex and commodification of women.

However, some Cultural theorists and Sociologists propose that these defaming values of Rap music cannot be credited to the ‘panic’ value or the shock, as these music appeals and please young people. When in fact Rap Music is one of the foremost music to express. The Rap’s appeal young because of its main feature to engage in and express- (The Love, The Hate, The Sufferings, The Dissatisfaction of everyday life) in globally diffuse social settings. This paper examines the popular culture, especially Rap Music and Hip-Hop culture. It’s Origin, continuity and global aspects.

Popular Music:

In general terms, popular music is considered to be the industry which creates popularity, or which is easily available to everyone. Most of the people consider popular music to be the one which is liked by a huge audience or some believe it to be the music which is easily available on the internet or has an easy commercial access. Some belief popular music to be liked by those who are young, which is more popular to the young generation or simply which is ‘IN’.

According to Andrew Lloyd Webber, “music is popular with another audience- some of whom experience it only as part of the spectacle of theatrical performances. The spectacle is an inseparable part of the experience of most popular music performances.”

The Origin of Rap Music:

Rap is a style of popular music in a narrative form of vocal delivery which is spoken in a rhythmic jargon over a continuous ‘break-beat’. It is chanted in a variety of ways. **RAP** stands for “**Rhythm and Poetry**”. There are many abbreviations which many believe RAP has i.e. “Rhythmic African Poetry, Revolution American People.

Keyes has suggested that the distinctive vocal technique employed in rapping ‘can be traced from African bardic traditions to rural southern-based expressions of African Americans- tales, game songs all of which are recited in a chanted rhyme or poetic fashion’ (*Keyes 1991:40*). While mixing the records, beats are provided. [Rap] music is dependent on the rearranging of musical fragments intermixed by the DJ. This is called ‘break-beat’ music. The DJ is close to what **Levi-Strauss** called a ‘bricoleur’ or craftsman who create music by mixing musical fragments.

The Savage Mind (1962), Levi-Strauss's first formulation mentioned the concept of Bricolage. It describes the pattern of an analogy of mythical thoughts. Bricolage is the concept of recombining or we can say to create something new by intermixing the selected fragments. The concept has travelled towards the sciences i.e. molecular biology and evolutionary theory, conflict theory. He compares the Bricoleur and the engineer. It is a new way of making something new by putting all together in hands. Levi-Strauss concept was criticized by Derrida. Derrida mentioned that it is not possible for anyone to be the 'absolute origin of his own discourse'.

Back (1996), suggested that although the 'cut and mix' in musical terms are fragments of music. The new is made by recombining the old or the original. This intermixing for creating something new is claimed by many theorists to be a 'Postmodern music'. Now exactly does postmodern means?

Postmodernism: Postmodernism is a reaction against modernism. It can be defined as an era of the modern or the condition of society which exist after modernity. These can be the aspect that emerged or developed after the modern era. Some thinkers believe postmodern to be the actual reality and some believe it to be a condition. It is believed for something which is happening for the good or betterment of the society. '**Toynbee**' in one of his work "Study of History", used the word 'Postmodernism'. The term 'postmodernism' became fashionable by '**Lyotard**' in his book 'Report on knowledge: the Postmodern Condition'. He implied that postmodern is the actual reality. It covers every aspect of our life, be it the postmodern fashion, postmodern classrooms, etc. art and architectures made postmodernism more famous. Lyotard gave a negative picture of modernity. He says that post-modern condition is nothing new. People have been living in the postmodern world since the 1960s. He said it is not just a condition but a universal condition. Postmodernity puts two myths of modernity.

1. The myth of liberation, which implies that every bad thing happens in society is because of science and modernity.
2. The myth of truth.

It is still not clear that what exactly postmodern is? There is no conceptual clarity. Postmodernism is going forward or it is going back, is still a controversy. There is a problem of periodization i.e. when did it start, does it imply to the earlier societies or the advanced societies.

The History of Rap:

Several writers explain the significance of rap and the history of the race of African Americans. It explains the ideology of racial inequality. **W.F. Whyte** explains in the 'Street Corner Society' about the communities and groups, same is with these rappers, they have their own groups and communities. The very famous is the named- 'The BLOODS' and 'The CRIPS'. They are the two group rivalries of the rap world. As Whyte in his book explains about the local gangs and differentiated between 'Corner boys' and 'College boys'. Same is with the rappers, they are the 'Blood' and the 'Crips', the two rivalries. The lives of the 'Corner Boys' moves around particular street corners and the 'College Boys' were more interested in good education. The Bloods are identified by the 'red' worn by its members and particular gang symbols. The origin of 'Bloods' was in the 1970s. Known rappers that are the Bloods: The Game, Gucci Mane and many more. The CRIPS (Community Restoration in Progress) on the other hand are the African Americans gang that can be identified by the 'Blue' worn by its members. The Crips had its origin in California in 1971 mainly by Raymond and Williams. These are also known as Original Crip Homies (OCH). These are in an open war with the Bloods. Most of the members are of around 17 years of age. They associate themselves as 'Blue' crips. The members of the group are typically young African American men. Many letters were altered because of their symbolic meaning. As the letter, 'B' in Blood would be disrespected because of their rivalries. The letters 'CK' were avoided as it indicates 'Crip Killer'. These were the general practices of Crips including Graffiti. They have their own slangs, words and symbols. The known rappers that are Crips: Snoop Dogg, Ice Cube, Nate Dogg, and many more. These symbols and interactions which these rappers have are the concepts which are known as Symbolic Interactionism.

Symbolic Interactionism: Symbolic Interactionism is an American branch of Sociology. John Dewey, William I. Thomas and George Herbert Mead are some of the American philosophers who are known as the developers of symbolic interactionism. According to George Herbert Mead, human beings interact in terms of symbols, the most important he says, is the language. These are man-made, they have their own meaning, and it is the way in which men perceive them. These are the shared meanings, or the common symbols, their meanings and intentions.

Herbert Blumer, a student of Mead, talks of three premises. First, human beings act on the basis of meanings which they give to objects and events. Secondly, meaning arises from interaction. Third, meanings are derived from the interaction by the actors.

Decker (1994), talked about Afrocentricism. Afrocentricism is the struggle of the Black working class in the US. He maintained rap as postmodern, which uses modern technology. He suggests that Hip-hop nationalism is a form of movement of the Blacks and is involved in the cultural politics. According to Decker, Afrocentricism is an attempt 'to reverse a history of western economic dependency and cultural imperialism by placing a distinctly African value system'.

There is a dilemma in the innovation of rap and hip-hop. As for example, Mitchell (1998) believed it to be the involvement of White, it evolved out of New York ghettos.

According to Lipsitz: "[Hip hop] brings a community into being through performance, and it maps out real and imagined relations between people that speak to the realities of displacement, disillusion, and despair created by the austerity economy of post-industrial capitalism".

Rap and hip-hop remain a form of New York and African American culture, hip-hop remains central. However, rap and hip-hop have further proliferated by the youth of non-African descent in different parts of the world. The commercial availability and easy access to self-recordable technology, self-production and distribution and the ecumenical feature of becoming a voice for a range of issues, made rap and hip hop the most popular of all. More specifically, the local construction of rap and hip-hop enunciates the local issues at the global level. The form of music which is believed to be the origin of African American culture has now been globalized all over the world, and that too in different forms, versions, and languages. This cultural mobility has given new meanings, ways, and symbols to interpret and understand all in a particular local construct. According to Mitchell, Rap is a subcultural movement to criticize unemployment, political corruption, poverty, mass media and all the social and political ills.

According to Huq (1999), political parties such as Front Nationals (FN) were pejorative and expunge the culture, especially linked with ethnic minority groups in France. They had a very negative attitude towards these. An aspect of such radical cultural policy has been 'the removal of articles on [rap] from library and copies of magazine in FN-governed towns', this could be because of the transparency included in the rap music which could show the problems of society such as unemployment, or it could expose the corrupt politics, social and political ills, which these governments did not want to come out.

A central assumption in much sociological work examining while British appropriations of Black musical styles is that black population serve as a reference of continual point. The white youth makes use of this black style but in their own particular way, this difference develops a particular local status symbol. This difference becomes even stronger if it meets a negative reaction from the other side.

Different cultures and different regions have their own symbols of identity. For example, in New Zealand, a group named Maori had their own style of identity as break-dancers, this became their symbol of identity. But the failure of gaining recognition by the media the Maori youth found some other ways to gain recognition and status through African American clothes, programs, television, films, music, rap, etc. with this Maori youth started gaining recognition. The first Maori rap was a commercial success which came in 1990, which centered on traditional Maori community, it talks about their traditions, but not just their own rap, they started supporting US rap groups as well. Same is the case with the people of underground/ struggling artists they try to gain recognition with what they have, their rap, hip hop which centers on their traditions, customs, and lifestyles. While considers recognition to be more important and other considers their tradition, identity and customs to be alive.

Conclusion:

The paper considers rap and hip hop as the central musical form of all in the youth culture. The origin of rap and the views of some thinkers and sociologists were taken into being. The paper focuses on how sociology is linked with the rap and hip-hop culture. Some theories and concepts were used for explaining this association. Rap and hip hop are coming to a wider level. However, the commercial availability at the global level and the access to it, just at a click made rap and hip-hop no longer just the black cultural form. The birth of self-recordable technology, self-production and easy access to the distribution made it the most popular music of all the time and the easy access and postmodern music by mixing and recreating, made it more exhilarating to the youth.

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115

115

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