

Music videos and how they portray controversy



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Music Videos and How They Portray Controversy (#1593)

Knowledge question: To what extent is controversy portrayed through artistic mediums perceived as unethical?

“ I bet I have watched close to ten videos of others debating on the visuals, lyrics, and their opinions on what they are witnessing.” The controversial video “ This is America” which Thaggeid, a professor of African American studies at American University, is speaking about says that it covers topics such as “ gun violence, American racial culture, slowed progression in society, the oncoming youth generations, infatuation with electronic devices, black on black treatment/crime, the entertainment industry, greed, marijuana, even symbolisms of Jim Crowe, confederate loyalty, and the apocalypse,” all in three minutes and forty-five seconds, (Thaggeid). This abundance of topics stems from the racial bias against the Black population that still exists to this today in the twenty-first century.

This video has had a major impact in the status quo as hip hop and rap music has being increasingly popular among the younger generations and has spread awareness on issues such as those stated above. Rap music is the most popular genre, argues Hugh McIntyre, a music journalist from the Huffington Post. He quotes a study that found that twenty-nine percent of the country’s music consumption is hip hop and rap (McIntyre). This music has been used by many other artists to expose problems that different populations encounter such as “ This is America”, “ Self Destruction” which is a proponent of anti-violence, “ Fight The Power” which is a song against the racist right-wing politicians in the federal government, and “ Words I

Never Said” which is a song that speaks out against the problems in the education system, budget cuts, War on Terror and President Obama (Hope). Due to the popularity of the genre, all these songs were extremely successful at sending a message to citizens of this country that there are topics in the system that are not being addressed.

All of this begs the question as to whether or not this video is perceived as unethical. The “ This is America” music video uses images that display a fight for gun control, for racial equality, and is, overall, a constructive critique of society. This ties into shared versus personal knowledge. Shared knowledge is knowledge that a group of individuals believe is true whereas personal knowledge is subjective to one individual.

Music videos might be perceived as unethical; Madonna’s “ Like a Prayer” music video was a huge scandal. In the album 1989, she seems to address issues of racism and rape, which weren’t positively picked up by the public. The Vatican condemned the video, and families and religious groups protested against the broadcast of the video by burning CDs that contained Madonna’s music. The music video even boycotted Pepsi, who used it in one of their commercials, and therefore canceled their contract with Madonna. She was seen as the original rebellious artist. Her video had images that seemed in support of the Ku Klux Klan and sacrilegious practices against the Catholic Church. This ties into moral relativism, in which paradigms are determined by the society that each individual is brought up with, meaning there are no worldview as everything is subjective to an individual’s opinion. It depends who is watching the video.

In the video, Childish Gambino, the alter ego of Donald Glover, is seen smiling and dancing. That cheerfulness quickly switches to a much more serious tone as the music alters, and escalating gun violence and chaos fills the screen. At one point, he guns down a black gospel choir, reminiscent of the 2015 South Carolina church massacre. According to Bedour Alagraa, a professor in Africana studies at Brown University, the video goes too far by showing too much violence such as the 2015 Charleston massacre, as it is “still pretty fresh” in the minds of the victim’s. “If it had been me, or my own mother, or someone I knew that had survived this massacre,” she argued, “... what must it feel like for Donald Glover to take it upon himself to use it as an artistic cue?” Ricky Jones, head of the Pan-African Studies Department at the University of Louisville, disagreed that the piece was exploitative and “constructed to disrespect anybody.” He believes that it has an intent to shine the light on racial disparities and violence that exists now. He argues that there has been a normalization of black oppression through history, agency, and resistance of the oppressed. “You have some people who may have a strong reaction to this video,” he explains, “... but they don’t have a strong reaction to a 12-year-old child being killed by police in a Cleveland park,” because of the standardization of oppression versus the Black population (CBC).

The video places the Black Lives Matter movement on a greater social platform. It is a peaceful protest of how blacks are thought of in our society; The video is a representation of the climate in America, where people are asserting Black lives matter while combating police violence and where handguns are arguably treated with more respect than Black bodies. This

occurs in art made by mainly Black individuals and they are the mainstream voices of American culture. Gambino ties all of these ideas together with schoolchildren dancing, recording activity on their cellphones, a Black choir and police chaos. The gun control crisis is also an enormous point which this music video makes. It has an underlying intention of exposing racially driven issues such as police brutality against Black males and connects the previous ages of historical racism to modern day racism; The attitudes and practices of the Jim Crow era are still in existence. Anti-black racism demonstrates that it is not temporal or contingent upon shifting racial projects. All of this is a constructive critique versus the United States federal government and its violation of and inconsistency with its "freedom and liberty for all" ideology.

This relates to shared knowledge claim; Shared knowledge is knowledge of the world that is believed as true by a group of individuals. This is shared knowledge as the fact that racism still exists and is prevalent today is shared between many. "This is America" aims to make these issues shared knowledge between all of America as the only way to fight something is to know what that something is and believe it is true. Many deny the presence of racism and its effects on minority populations. These individuals deny that Tywanza Sanders, Susie Jackson, Clementa Pickney, Cynthia Graham Hurd, Ethel Lee Lance, Daniel Simmons, Sharonda Coleman-Sington, and Myra Thompson were murdered by Dylann Roof, a white supremacist who murdered nine African Americans during the 2015 South Carolina shooting, because of lax gun reforms and racism. These individuals who deny racism and believe that there truly is equality are blind to these issues that are happening in the status quo that must be addressed. These individuals are

the ones who this video is targeted at. This connects to the following question: to what extent do our paradigms influence the way art is interpreted? Gambino clearly believes that there are inequities that are happening that must be combated.

In contrast, music videos can be perceived as unethical. "Like a Prayer", a music video by Madonna in the album 1989, Madonna's video considered sacrilegious. It is sexploitation, or "the exploitation of sex in the media and especially in film" (Miriam Webster dictionary). In the video, Madonna is pictured dressed in a provocative red dress singing and dancing in a church about wanting to have relations with the St. Martin de Porres, the patron saint of interracial harmony and a Dominican clergyman. Having sexual relations with a clergymen is a violation of the Council of Trent decision to not allow priests to marry, or celibacy. It is also a violation of chastity on Madonna's part as she and the saint are not married. Many of the Catholic and religious population backlashed against this video because of this.

Additionally, the video was perceived as anti-black; there are images of the burning crosses, which are connoted to the KKK (Ku Klux Klan), an anti-black racist white supremacist group who were known for committing crimes such as lynching, massacring, and instilling violence to people of color. The KKK used the burning crosses to mark which black people were targets for murder by placing a burning cross in the front of the target's homes. Even though they are a sensitive subject for people of color, they are featured many times during the video, which creates a sense that Madonna glorifies the KKK. Madonna's video was produced by two white individuals whereas Childish Gambino's work is by a black male. This is a key difference as they

<https://assignbuster.com/music-videos-and-how-they-portray-controversy/>

both seem to address the same issue, but “ Like a Prayer” insults an entire race whereas “ This is America” directly addresses the same topics and more without insulting anyone. This relates to moral relativism as your viewpoint depends on your upbringing and identity. Gambino has had to deal with these injustices whereas Madonna, being white, has never had to face those injustices.

Artistic mediums attempting to communicate controversies can be found perceived as unethical. The video “ This is America” is ethical because it did not exploit controversies as it only showed what truly happened. Madonna’s “ Like a Prayer” was exploitative as it was offensive to an entire race and religion. In my opinion, I believe that there is a limit as to how far a video or art in general should picture a controversy. The “ This is America” video does not exceed that limit whereas the Like a Prayer video does. There should not be anything that is offensive to an entire race and population.

Works Cited

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYOjWnS4cMY>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79fzeNUqQbQ>
3. <https://www.vibe.com/2014/08/ferguson-protests-11-great-hip-hop-protest-songs>
4. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hughmcintyre/2017/07/17/hip-hoprb-has-now-become-the-dominant-genre-in-the-u-s-for-the-first-time/#74945abf5383>
5. <https://thadeusamadeus.com.wordpress.com/2018/05/13/this-is-america-is-art/>

6. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/america-donald-glover-s-shocking-new-video-tackles-race-violence-n872126>
7. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-may-8-2018-1.4652073/does-childish-gambino-s-this-is-america-risk-traumatizing-victims-of-gun-violence-1.4652177>
8. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sexploitation?scrllybrkr>