

Sociology

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The sociological perspective is described as seeing the general in the particular. In this essay I will attempt to apply the sociological perspective to analyze song lyrics from the first verse of the song My Block by Tupac Shakur (see appendix for lyrics). Tupac (1971-1996) is the most famous gangster rap artist of all times. He was well known for his lyrics and their ability to express the grief of the Black community. He was an advocate for Black rights and very much against the societal system and class societies.

Many say he exaggerated the conditions under which the Black community and the lower class were in because he was a wealthy man rapping about suppression. To other's he was part of the petite-bourgeoisie, but he was consistent in attempting to better the conditions under which the lower class were in. > Initially intended for the lower class Black communities, his songs were appreciated by members of all races and classes. In the essay I will try to explain the concepts of authority, sub-culture, roles, social-class and class-consciousness; I will then apply these concepts to the lyrics of My Block.

Tupac's position in the Black community was a highly regarded one in that it constituted the responsibility of representing Blacks in the media. Also, being from the lower class himself he had knowledge of the conditions in which the lower class were living in, specifically the Black community, and was able to relate to and comment on them. I chose to analyze his lyrics because I feel they apply to many societies. The song My Block is a song about Black struggles, and the way of life Blacks are made to lead.

However when this song is applied to the Marxian ideology, it can relate to the conditions of the proletariat, in the bourgeoisie capitalist society. > Because I said so > Max Weber defined a form of authority known as <https://assignbuster.com/sociology-essay-samples-8/>

rational-legal authority, which is “ power legitimized by legally enacted rules and regulations” (Macionis and Gerber 424). This authority can be enacted through the law, legislations and governing bodies such as the government. All these forms of authority are controlled by the bourgeoisie.

If we relate this concept back to Marx’s class society, we can see that this is the type of authority that was used to suppress the proletariat, which would then be transformed into power that would benefit the upper class and bourgeoisie. In the lyrics of Tupac Shakur, we can see an indirect reference to this type of authority in modern day usage. In one particular line he says:
> “ The three strikes law is drastic, And certain death for us ghetto bastards.
” > Here Tupac is commenting on the California three strikes law and the effect it had on the lower classes.

The three strikes law is a law which came into effect in California, March 1994. It said that an individual committing a misdemeanour up to three times could be charged twenty-five years to life in prison; no matter what the offence may have been . The law was implemented in an attempt to answer the call of California’s rising crime rate. The implicit message, however, was for it to act as a form of social control, and to put the lower class in a position where they would be forced to either commit more large scale crimes, which in turn would result in death or life in prison, or to become part of the social system as proletarians.

Tupac uses the term “ ghetto bastards” to highlight the point that the audience he is targeting are members of the poor-low class. This group hustles to stay alive; they choose not to sell their labour. Taking this factor into consideration, one might say that the group does not fall into the
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category of proletarians, who do sell their labour. Referring this back to the three strikes law, a law like this would definitely have an effect on Tupac's target audience because it would restrain them from finding their means of survival.

As mentioned, authority is a tool used by the bourgeoisie to suppress the proletariat, however, if we take into consideration that the group Tupac is referring to are illegitimate proletarians, then the use of rational-legal authority may be justified. If this form of authority is not applied, society may be forced into a state of anarchy, which is a result of anomie in individuals. Anomie as described by Emile Durkheim as a feeling of normlessness which is a result of detachment from the rest of society.

Therefore, the application of authority in the form of laws and legislations is perceived as a norm, and it is the societal norm to abide by the authority. However, if we consider that authority is a construct of the bourgeois class then we can see how authority, though a tool meant to keep society from a state of anarchy, is just a way of keeping individuals in a state of silence. > Different ideas-One people > Tupac's main target audience is a sub-culture of the larger Black community.

" Subcultures are distinct from the larger culture but borrow (and often distort, exaggerate, or invert) its symbols, values, and beliefs" (Concise Oxford 650). In Tupac's subculture, they distort the belief that all the members of the larger Black community are negatively affected by the use of authority and other forms of social control; therefore creating a misrepresentation. However, one may argue that this sub-culture arose from

the Black community to serve as an ambassador on the radical level of the social tug of war.

The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology states that: > subcultures can arise as forms of symbolic resistance within social institutions which reflect aspects of the social organization of wider society [...] or can provide wider networks for those seeking to assert the sense of difference they feel. (650) > Thus, thugs, gangsters and inner city street kids, who make up the majority of Tupac's listeners, fall into the category of those seeking to assert their sense of difference.

These individuals feel they are alienated from the larger Black community, hence forth, forming a subculture of alienated beings who share the same common bond. This bond of community, Marx claimed, could be built through work (Macionis and Gerber 98). > In this sense, subcultures would appear to be a negative addition to the social sphere because they alienate individuals who are already separated from the values and beliefs of their communities; therefore acting as a barrier to social change because it is promoting division amongst societies.

On the positives of subcultures are their ability to create an awareness to a community or a condition of a group; in this case it would divert attention towards the exploitation and segregation of various groups. > The subculture that Tupac's lyrics are targeted to, act as a negative for the large scale Black community because it reinforces the stereotype that Blacks are unable to be united, as Tupac refers to in one of his lines: > " Shit is scary, how Black on Black crime legendary. " > If we look at this line in depth we can see a division of the Black community through violence.

Also this subculture directs negative attention to the larger Black community. > What shall we do today? > When one listens to the lyrics of Tupac Shakur they will notice his consistency in reinforcing the role in which the subculture he directs his message to is expected to follow. One's role is "the social expectation attached to their particular status or social position [...]" (Concise Oxford 570). Tupac's subculture is expected to be deviant and disobey authority, while at the same time doing whatever it can to survive.

He highlights the point that without the subculture following their role, society will not notice them. This is evident in one of the lines where he says: > " And who cares if we survive, the only time they notice a nigga is when he's clutchin on a four-five. " > The " they" in this line is referring to the rest of society and a " four-five" is referring to a 45 calibre gun. > Individuals, who fall into the subculture Tupac's songs are directed towards, and who fulfill their roles maintain a high status amongst their peers.

This subculture places a high value emphasis on non-conformity and deviant behaviour, as well as a lack for authority. Tupac shows evidence of this when he says: > " It's all good when I go back. Hoes show me love, niggaz give me props. " > The subculture, consisting of individuals who have been alienated from their larger communities, need to be able to feel a sense of belonging or they may self-destruct. Specifically a form of self destruction in which Durkheim described as anomic suicide. Therefore these individuals strive to fulfill their roles so as to be apart of the subculture.

If we maintain this relationship between the concept of roles and subcultures, we can see where it may have a negative impact on the larger Black community. Using the subculture as its ambassador to the rest of

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society, the larger Black community may begin to confuse its own roles with that of the subculture's; also sending the message that the deviance and non-conformist attitude that the subculture displays is the same throughout the Black community. > It's a poor man's world > Throughout the song, Tupac makes direct and indirect references to the social class of his target audience.

As sad as it is to state, we live in a society where race and ethnicity are tools used to identify a person's social class. Shakur highlights this fact in his song with words like "nigga" and "welfare"; he makes it evident that his audience are members of the lower class. > The lower class is made up of individuals who have little to no income as a result of lack of work; some are supported by social welfare payments, are functionally illiterate and find themselves segregated into specific, less-desirable neighbourhoods which may be ethnically or racially distinct (Macionis and Gerber 279).

Tupac makes direct reference to this in the line where he states: > "I wonder if the Lord still cares for us niggaz on welfare." > In this line we can also see a stigma attached to the lower class. The belief that the lower class is not included in the rest of society; when Tupac makes a direct reference to "the Lord," a symbol associated with guidance and companionship, he is stressing the conditions that he and his target audience are living in and implying that the almighty does not care for the lower class.

The indirect reference Tupac makes to his audience comes in the form of a word; throughout the song the word "nigga" appears. This word has been associated with suppression and slavery since the days of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Tupac's bold usage of the word gives his audience a feeling of

resurrection from the days of slavery. However, as an analyst of his lyrics one might say that he uses the word to reinforce the idea that Blacks and the lower class are still living in slavery and under suppression.

Let my people think Joanne Naimann defines the term class consciousness in her book, *How Societies Work* as “ a person’s understanding of his or her place in the class structure and of shared interests with others in the same class” (335). In Marx’s ideology, the class consciousness of the proletarians is what would perpetuate into a revolt against the bourgeoisie; the class who owned the means of production and in this situation the class who controlled authority and the other forms of social control.

In the case of Tupac Shakur, his whole intention was to rouse the Black subculture to identify this class consciousness with lyrics like: > “ And I swear it’s like a trap” and “ don’t cry through your despair” > In the title of the song, *My Block* , we see Tupac making reference to personal ownership of one’s own property in a capitalist society, where members of the lower class do not own property. > Throughout the lyrics we see hints of anger and violent intentions; and example of this is the line where he states: > “ What can we do when we’re arrested, but open fire.

Life in the pen ain’t for me, cause I’d rather die. ” > The notion of violent intentions combined with the class consciousness parallels with the Marxian concept of class consciousness, in which the revolt of the proletarian against the bourgeoisie would be a violent affair. As the definition states, with class consciousness a person gains understanding of their place in the class structure and of shared interest with others in the same class.

Relating this back to subcultures, the class consciousness is the one tool in which the proletariat and the lower class use to identify themselves. Therefore, in the subculture Tupac's songs are directed towards, though not following the values and beliefs of the larger community, they can identify themselves as a result of the class consciousness. The class consciousness, however, does not put the proletariat on the same playing field as the bourgeois.

Rather it gives the proletariat a sense of power in the numbers they have and the solidarity. > Class consciousness is a tool used by the proletariat but it does not mean that it is solely that of the proletarians. The bourgeoisie also have a class consciousness and are well aware of their position in the social class system and use various tactics, so as to drive the proletarians conscience from the idea of being exploited and suppressed.

The modern day usage of these tactics can be found in the form of media, leisure time, raises for the working proletarian, etc. This example raises the question of whether the bourgeois are also aware of the inevitable revolt of the proletarian. > As a result of its ability to appeal to all classes, consciousness should be transferred with great care, so as to not be abused. Class consciousness of the proletariat should be transferred amongst proletarians, so that the main message is not distorted or confused with that of any other class.