This Lonely View: A content analysis of The Red Hot Chili Peppers' lyrics

SOCI 4309 Qualitative Research Methods

Final Project: Unobtrusive Method/ Content Analysis

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Introduction

The 1990s and 2000s were times influenced greatly by music such as rock, rap, alternative and punk. This was due to the media glorification of being a musician, however, often through artist reflections in the media or autobiographies, we see how musicians experience their time in the music industry differently. Many artists often fall into depression and cope with either alcohol or drugs. Musicians use their music as a portrayal of emotions they either feel or reflect upon during their writing process. The topic for my final research project is portrayal of sadness in music. To be more accurate, I will analyze how the feeling of loneliness is portrayed through the Red Hot Chili Peppers greatest hits collection released in 2003. Socialization through media includes music, TV shows, movies and other forms of entertainment.

However, as music is the modern day poetry, it carries meanings and depictions we are exposed to when we listen to it. It is important to analyze the lyrics we hear over and over in our favorite songs for the deeper meanings they might carry especially when associated with feelings of sadness or depression cause by loneliness. The Red Hot Chili Peppers are a very successful, classic rock based, band whose albums have sold millions of copies worldwide. Because you can still here their music on websites like Pandora and Spotify or even the radio I chose to analyze them and the socialization their music carries with it. Music has been known to directly effect emotions in listeners, which can lead to different means of socialization for events in our lives.

Literature Review

Media is often studied for its content and the subtle things found in the images and sounds we experience every day of our lives. This type of analyzing is considered content analysis and is used to catch patterns through media most people would not normally see otherwise. Music is a big part of the media that is studied, often not only for its lyrics but the

effect it has on many listeners of artists or genres. In music, we often see patterns of emotions or themes represented all throughout genres--themes such as loneliness, escape, euphoria, and sometimes even Temperament. Because of the media's portrayal of emotions, content analysis can be used for certain lyrics or melodies of Musicians. Social research has found that music often affects socialization through words heard or exposed that cause certain emotions. The next section will discuss ideas in how loneliness is portrayed throughout music thus far.

Research on lyrics and emotion often represent how musicians themselves feel when creating their music. Kaufman (197, 2005) writes "…lyricism, musicality, and expression have been formally and historically have been formally bound together since well before the advent of romantic poetry." This quote is a representation how musicians write their creation or music as an expression of what they experience. The author, David Rice, (2013) agrees That "identity orchestration" is something many artists do throughout their work in order to represent who they are and what they feel. In Rice's work he is addressing hip hop and the struggles of Rappers portrayed through their lyrics (177, 2013), if this method could be applied to all genres we see how loneliness could be represented in the RHCP music and how they express experiences felt. Roy and Dowd (2010) address that this viewpoint is reinforced through many studies on lyrics, and they found, that differs from the last articles mentioned, is the chance that Lyric may be written by musicians but may be interpreted by listeners differently (2010). This viewpoint is good in showing how content analysis is used to find these differences in interpretation of emotions in music.

Sociologists also looked more into emotions portrayed through music; a common finding in the research was the affect music could play on someone's mood. Peltola and Eerola (87, 2016) state, "Recognition of music mimicking negative emotion may cause listeners to describe

experienced feelings as negative or the actual painful memories evoked by sad sounding music to lead to displeasure." This expresses a major point that lyrics portray emotions in a way where they almost project them onto who ever their listeners are. Other key authors agree with this point that sad sounding melodies led to negative affects and often a change in mood or viewpoint with how we portray objects or experiences happening during the time the music is playing (Gorn, Goldberg, Basu, 1993 and Franco et al. 2014). This shows existing theories that music affects mood and how that sociological research has supported this to be valid. The influence of music on someone's mood and also be manipulated for consumerism. For instance, stores that sell music devices will play certain music that automatically activates how we receive the device and whether we want it or not (Gorn, Goldberg, and Basu, 1993). Researchers Roy and Dowd agree that music shapes self-viewpoints of people, which lead to questions such as how interpretation might led to the differing of self-viewpoint in the same kind of music genre (2010). Loneliness in lyrics could very well increase the chances at which someone would experience sad and even depressing feelings.

Overall, through Content analysis we see that music can socialize based on how we interpret lyrics and melodies and that music is a portrayal of musicians own emotions. This theme is not unknown to social research, what does remain unaddressed is how certain emotions like loneliness in lyrics would affect greater concepts such as depression rates or even suicide rates. The Red Hot Chili Peppers are known as an alternative rock group and their music reflects themes such as escape, loneliness, and even love or lack of love. Through their lyrics we see portrayals of these themes and can examine to what extent is it portrayed onto the listener of these songs. The continued media analysis of music will lead to further discovery to the roll music plays in helping us determine which products we like and how we experience real world

situations maybe based on a type of music playing or a mood being portrayed. Through this kind of research we can break down major factors that play into socialization.

Data And Methods

This study utilizes unobtrusive method to analyze the greatest hits collection of the RHCP released in 2003. These songs include Under the Bridge (1991), Give it Away (1991), Californication (1999), Scar tissue (1999), Soul to Squeeze (1993), Otherside (1999), Suck My Kiss (1991), By the Way (2002), Parallel Universe (1999), Breaking The Girl (1991), My Friends (1995), Higher Ground (1989), Universally speaking (2002), Road Trippin (1999), Fortune Faded (2003), Save the Population (2003), I currently own this album and have heard all the songs many times so I will not have any issues acquiring access to my sample.

The Red Hot Chili Peppers are known as a classic rock band using instruments such as drums, lead guitars, keyboards, and bass guitars. To gather my data I will use content analysis to examine the non- interactive data. Focus will be on looking at each song individually for keywords such as lonely, myself, sadness, dreams, thoughts, alone, and other words representing feelings, and take count of how many times we are exposed to these words (almost if they're imprinting a certain point into our heads). After analyzing each song I will take the whole album and listen to the acoustic versions of each song in order to properly categorize the melodies. After I have completed both of those tasks I will look at the whole album and analyze it for themes that stay mostly consistent throughout. If other themes are present that do not contribute to the portrayal of loneliness I will also mention those for the contrast they show. These themes will allow me to analyze how exactly we have been socialized to feel by listening to this music.

Because my focus was primarily on loneliness in the lyrics of The Red Hot Chili Peppers' Greatest Hits album, content analysis was the most appropriate methodology for my

research question: How is loneliness portrayed through the lyrics in the Red Hot Chili Peppers' Greatest Hits album.

Data Analysis

After completing my data analysis of the album, three overarching themes seemed to be portraying loneliness consistently throughout the music. The first, loneliness is shown, as an overwhelming state of mind, the second, loneliness is a choice, and the third, loneliness does not only pertain to lovers. Below I analyze each theme individually to help demonstrate the Greatest Hits album through an Analytical Lens.

Theme 1: Loneliness is shown as an overwhelming state of mind

The first primary theme I found in the Red Hot Chili Peppers songs, was probably the most generalized about the concept of loneliness; The idea that loneliness is an overwhelming state of mind to anyone who is a victim of feeling lonely. This is shown through loneliness as a disease, which causes the afflicted to constantly search for "peace of mind", referenced in Soul to Squeeze (1993) four times. Also in the song Scar tissue (1999) through the wishing of sharing the "scar tissue", which is a metaphor for the past experiences, that still affect the mental health of those with the scar tissue. Considering it a disease is a way of saying it can be treated through a self-analyzing process the musicians often express through lyrics. In the song Fortune Faded (2003), the RDHP ask " come on, God, Do I seem bulletproof?" this is a prime example of the self- analyzing the RDHP are doing through their music, and dealing with their own wonders of "why me?". This concept becomes difficult to grasp often after we have been socialized to believe musicians live the high-life and often are surrounded by fun activities, what we truly see is the effect loneliness can have, which unfortunately even fame can't hide. Throughout the above examples, we see many clear-cut ways the overwhelming disease of loneliness is

portrayed as a stage that requires self-analysis and wishing the expression onto others for sympathy. However, because with all music there is also interpretive meaning, other songs such as Otherside (1999), portray the effects loneliness play through the description of death. This concept is associated with this song through how the phrase "slit my throat" is used 5 times throughout the song, or how the "otherside" referred to is a place the musician wants to go to because of the loneliness he feels "hearing her voice through a photograph". These phrases are metaphors and can be interpreted in different ways but in the context of the song it is associated with death and the loneliness felt. Another interpretive song on the album, By the Way (2002), mentions a "heavy glow" which is a metaphor for the waiting the subject of the song is doing during the lyrics, he waits for a mystery girl and the heavy glow is doubt that she will show up. This reflects how loneliness could be portrayed as a storm cloud that wont go away, almost equitable with depression.

Theme 2: Loneliness is often shown as a choice

The second theme I found was a little harder to explain, this theme is almost entirely displayed through metaphorical concepts or images in the lyrics. However with attention to detail it is apparent that the Red Hot Chili Peppers show loneliness as not a permanent mindset, or rather, the escape of loneliness is possible. In the song Breaking the Girl (1991), the RHCP use their lyrics to tell a love story gone wrong, with words such as " she meant you no harm, Think you're so clever, but now you must sever, You're breaking the girl, He loves no one else". This demonstrates a common concept in their songs that love is chosen as well as the rejection of love. To better explain this concept I examined specific examples in other songs, such as the song Road Trippin' (1999), where the following lyrics are stated, "Its time to steal away, Lets go get lost, anywhere in the USA". This ties into the concept of rejecting emotional ties in general

and choosing to be lonely or at least in an environment where glorification of relationships is not a priority. Now to claim loneliness is a choice and love can be rejected is to also claim that you can choose not to reject love. Ironically enough in the song Give it Away (1991) this is portrayed through the authors expressing of "realizing he doesn't wanna be a miser", which is a lonely person. In the same song the phrase "love is free love me say hell yes", this is also an example of lyrics expressing reflexivity of concepts; the lyrics portray the ability to choose not to be lonely. Of course as mentioned in the first theme there is more metaphorical ways this idea is represented as well, in Universally Speaking (2002), the song is about the chase of a woman, as expressed in the line " go and get her I've got her on my mind", this doesn't necessarily explain whether he wants to get whomever the song refers to for love but rather the choice he is making to pursue is enough to express autonomy over loneliness.

Theme 3: Loneliness does not only pertain to significant others

The Third and Final theme prevalent in the Data or lyrics was that Loneliness is portrayed as not only a feeling associated or felt because of a lover, It could be experienced through location, among friends, or because of memories. In one of the heavier melody songs, Suck My Kiss (1991), the following lyrics are used "Look at me cant you see, all I really want to be, is free from a world, that hurts me" we can analyze this statement for how it is not a physical connection that is controlling the mood of the musicians or the loneliness felt but rather the conditions of the world, and the inability to feel apart of the world leads to the loneliness. In the song My Friends (1995) the use of people in the songs is utilized instead of self-portrayal, throughout the song reference to friends being depressed and the question of loneliness that arises is used to portray a comforting tone to a friend. This is not because of a lover that loneliness arises, the song in fact does not clarify why the loneliness is caused, instead it uses

friends feeling lonely to bring about the idea that understanding what people are really going through cannot be achieved just by images or assumptions. The Two Most Popular songs on the album also help portray this theme within their lyrics. In the song Californication (1999), a reflective mood is set up that the lyricist uses to describe tons of details about the State of California, however the Mood of the song is rather critizing of details of California, such as how the whole city and perhaps in application, the whole world, is becoming plastic and fake. In this imagery the idea of Californication as a dream of achievement is used as well, but this leads to sad emotions when you realize these dreams are mainly just that, dreams. This ties into loneliness by the display of a location being able to reflect a whole culture, a fake plastic culture. In which people find loneliness in themselves not based on lovers but based on ideas of what they need to feel like they belong in this culture the media is so quick to glorify. In the song Under the Bridge (1991), as seen in the appendix figure 1, the whole song is an embodiment of How Los Angeles or the "City of Angels" is just as lonely as the RHCP in this song. Again we see the reflection of loneliness as a location and not pertaining to a lover as a significant other.

Conclusions

In conclusion, after the analysis of the portrayal of loneliness in the Red Hot Chili Peppers lyrics on their Greatest Hits Album, three themes were prevalent. The idea that loneliness is an overwhelming state of mind often portrayed as a disease causing other afflictions such as depression, the trend that loneliness is a choice and can be promoted or rejected in the pursuit of life, and the pattern that loneliness is not only pertaining to a romantic idea, but rather can be experienced through places, associations, and even among friends.

Although most of the research supported these ideas, there was a couple of songs on the album with no meaning in reference to loneliness, these outliers are the following songs, Save

the population (2003), Higher Ground (1989) , and Parallel Universe (1999). This is a normal concept when working with content analysis based on the fact that the data forms its own theories from patterns, not all patterns are followed to the letter every time. Some limitations of this study were the use of the specific album leaving out other songs by the RHCP that would help portray these themes, however with the patterns the analyzing of other songs for similarities would be achievable.

Some further research that could be done with this research is how these socializations of the word loneliness and the feelings associated with it are affecting people in everyday lives or moments. For example, if sociologists took the concept that music shapes our perspectives and apply it to the music we hear as children, questions could be answered such as are children exposed to saddening music at a young age more succeptible to depression? I believe this concept could be greatly expanded into a sub category of pop culture and the way socialization of different genres could affect us as a society.

Figure 1.

"Under The Bridge"

Sometimes I feel
Like I don't have a partner
Sometimes I feel
Like my only friend
Is the city I live in
The city of angels
Lonely as I am
Together we cry

I drive on her streets
'Cause she's my companion
I walk through her hills
'Cause she knows who I am
She sees my good deeds
And she kisses me windy
I never worry
Now that is a lie

[2x]
I don't ever want to feel
Like I did that day
Take me to the place I love
Take me all the way

It's hard to believe
That there's nobody out there
It's hard to believe
That I'm all alone
At least I have her love
The city she loves me
Lonely as I am
Together we cry

[2x]
I don't ever want to feel
Like I did that day
Take me to the place I love
Take me all the way

Under the bridge downtown

Is where I drew some blood
Under the bridge downtown
I could not get enough
Under the bridge downtown
Forgot about my love
Under the bridge downtown
I gave my life away

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