

Hip-Hop and Social Development: Stereotypes and the Construction of Identity

Learning Objectives:

- To develop an understanding of how stereotypes are constructed and mediated, using Hip-Hop as an example
- To develop an awareness of how self-image derives from and contributes to stereotyping
- To challenge students to apply these concepts to their own experiences

My lesson will aim to build students' awareness of how stereotypes are constructed and permeate both individual and group identification. The tables will be arranged in a circle to facilitate group discussion. First, I will split the students into two groups depending on whether they actively consume Hip-Hop music (group A) or not (group B). Both groups are to then write down roughly ten words or phrases that they associate with Hip-Hop artists. One-by-one, each of group B will read out a phrase and say where they gained this association from – most, if not all, are likely to be loose stereotypes derived from media sources such as news reports, songs or music videos. As a class we shall watch Snoop Dogg's verses from his and Pharrell Williams' 'Drop It Like It's Hot', the highest selling rap single of the 2000s, and then examine the lyrics for evidence of the stereotypes that group B suggested. This text was incredibly successful, and Snoop Dogg's verses are almost entirely comprised of references to the damaging trinity of 'gangster', 'pimp', and 'ho' that Tricia Rose identifies.¹



¹ Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop – And Why It Matters* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2008)

I will give a brief contextualisation of how, ‘in the early 1990s, record companies began pressuring artists to focus upon gangsta-style lyrics that were largely devoid of the kinds of social or political commentary that many “golden age” rappers provided’, and how those who did not conform were marginalised.² As a class we shall then discuss how this corporate influence has shaped the content of rap lyrics and in turn the group identity of rap musicians and audiences. Here we shall address the associations made by group A at the start of class, and discuss which ones they support and which they object to. We shall read the lyrics of Jay Z and Eminem’s track ‘Renegade’, and the students will then perform an individual close reading to find ways in which the authors negotiate the hegemonic stereotypes that surround them (both artists criticise the constraining image of a rapper, but at times play up to it). Finally, I will ask the students what stereotypes they have been affected by and what impact these have had upon their lives – to what extent have they participated in identification or rejection of the stereotypical image, and whether they feel a responsibility to do either.

Discussion Questions:

- What image is Snoop Dogg projecting of himself? How does he represent success?
- Is your understanding of rap identity shaped more by the artists or the media that surrounds them? How do these overlap?
- How does stereotyping in Hip-Hop reinforce hegemony?
- In what ways do Jay Z and Eminem identify with or reject stereotyping?
- When have you identified with or rejected stereotypes?

²Charis E. Kubrin and Erik Nielson, ‘Rap on Trial’, *Race and Justice*, 4 (2014), 185-211 (p. 190)

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- Why do stereotypes become internalised?

Word Count: 503

Appendix:

Snoop Dogg ft. Pharrell Williams, 'Drop It Like It's Hot' (Snoop Dogg verses and hook)

I'm a gangsta, but y'all knew that
Da Big Bo\$\$ Dogg, yeah I had to do
that
I keep a blue flag hanging out my
backside
But only on the left side, yeah that's
the Crip side
Ain't no other way to play the game the
way I play
I cut so much you thought I was a D-J
"Two!" "one!" "yep, three!"
S-N double O-P, D-O double G
I can't fake it, just break it, and when I
take it
See I specialize in making all the girls
get naked
So bring your friends, all of y'all come
inside
We got a world premiere right here,
now get live!
So don't change the dizzle, turn it up a
little
I got a living room full of fine dime
brizzles
Waiting on the Pizzle, the Dizzle and
the Shizzle
G's to the bizzack, now ladies here we
gizzo

When the pimp's in the crib ma
Drop it like it's hot
Drop it like it's hot
Drop it like it's hot
When the pigs try to get at you
Park it like it's hot

Park it like it's hot
Park it like it's hot
And if a nigga get a attitude
Pop it like it's hot
Pop it like it's hot
Pop it like it's hot
I got the Rolly on my arm and I'm
pouring Chandon
And I roll the best weed cause I got it
going on

I'm a Bad Boy, with a lotta ho's
Drive my own cars, and wear my own
clothes
I hang out tough, I'm a real Bo\$\$
Big Snoop Dogg, yeah he's so sharp
On the TV screen and in the magazines
If you play me close, you're on a red
beam
Oh you got a gun so you want to pop
back?
AK47 now nigga, stop that!
Cement shoes, now I'm on the move
You're family's crying, now you on the
news
They can't find you, and now they miss
you
Must I remind you I'm only here to
twist you
Pistol whip you, dip you then flip you
Then dance to this motherfucking
music we crip to
Subscribe nigga, get yo issue
Baby come close, let me see how you
get loose

Lyrics taken from <<https://genius.com/Snoop-dogg-drop-it-like-its-hot-lyrics>>
[accessed 11 March 2017]

Jay Z ft. Eminem, 'Renegade' (Excerpt)

[Jay Z]

Motherfuckers say that I'm foolish, I
only talk about jewels
Do you fools listen to music or do you
just skim through it?
See, I'm influenced by the ghetto you
ruined
That same dude you gave nothing, I
made something doin'
What I do, through and through, and
I give you the news with a twist
It's just his ghetto point of view
The renegade, you been afraid, I
penetrate pop culture
Bring 'em a lot closer to the block
where they pop toasters
And they live with they moms, got
dropped roadsters
From botched robberies, niggas
crouched over
Mami's knocked up 'cause she wasn't
watched over
Knocked down by some clown
When child support knocked; no, he's
not around
Now, how that sound to ya? Jot it
down
I bring it through the ghetto without
riding round
Hiding down, ducking strays
From frustrated youths stuck in they
ways
Just read a magazine that fucked up my
day
How you rate music that thugs with
nothing relate to it?
I help them see they way through it –
not you
Can't step in my pants, can't walk in
my shoes
Bet everything you're worth, you'll lose
your tie and your shirt

[Eminem]

Since I'm in a position to talk to these
kids and they listen
I ain't no politician, but I'll kick it with
'em a minute

'Cause, see, they call me a menace
And if the shoe fits I'll wear it
But if it don't, then y'all will swallow
the truth, grin and bear it
Now, who's the king of these rude,
ludicrous, lucrative lyrics?
Who could inherit the title, put the
youth in hysterics
Usin' his music to steer it, sharin' his
views and his merits?
But there's a huge interference
They're saying you shouldn't hear it
Maybe it's hatred I spew, maybe it's
food for the spirit
Maybe it's beautiful music I made for
you to just cherish
But I'm debated, disputed, hated
And viewed in America as a
motherfuckin' drug addict
Like you didn't experiment? Nah, nah
That's when you start to stare at who's
in the mirror
And see yourself as a kid again, and
you get embarrassed
And I got nothing to do but make you
look stupid as parents
You fucking do-gooders
Too bad you couldn't do good at
marriage
And do you have any clue what I had
to do to get here?
I don't think you do
So stay tuned and keep your ears glued
to the stereo
'Cause here we go, he's {*Jigga j-
Jigga*}
And I'm the sinister Mr. Kiss-My-Ass,
it's just a...

[Eminem + Jay Z]

Renegade! Never been afraid to say
What's on my mind at any given time
of day
'Cause I'm a renegade! Never been
afraid to talk
About anything, anything, anything,
anything!
Renegade! Never been afraid to say

What's on my mind at any given time
of day
'Cause I'm a renegade! Never been
afraid to holler
About anything, anything, anything,
anything!

[Jay Z]

I had to hustle, my back to the wall,
ashy knuckles
Pockets filled with a lot of lint, not a
cent
Gotta vent, lot of innocent lives lost on
the project bench
What you hollerin'? Gotta pay rent,
bring dollars in
By the bodega, iron under my coat,
feeling braver
Durag wrapping my waves up, pockets
full of hope
Do not step to me, I'm awkward, I box
lefty
An orphan my pops left me
And often, my mamma wasn't home
Could not stress to me, I wasn't grown
Especially on nights I brought
something home
To quiet the stomach rumblings
My demeanor, 30 years my senior
My childhood didn't mean much, only
raising green up
Raising my fingers to critics
Raising my head to the sky, B.I.G. I
did it, multi before I die
No lie, just know I chose my own fate
I drove by the fork in the road and
went straight

[Eminem]

See, I'm a poet to some, a regular
modern-day Shakespeare
Jesus Christ, the King of these Latter-
Day Saints here
To shatter the picture in which of that
as they paint me as
A monger of hate, satanist, scatter-
brained atheist
But that ain't the case, see, it's a matter
of taste
We as a people decide if Shady's as
bad as they say he is
Or is he the latter, a gateway to
escape?
Media scapegoat, who they can be mad
at today
See, it's easy as cake, simple as
whistling Dixie
While I'm waving the pistol at sixty
Christians against me
Go to war with the Mormons, take a
bath with the Catholics
In holy water, no wonder they tried to
hold me under longer
I'm a motherfucking spiteful, delightful
eyeful
The new Ice Cube, motherfuckers hate
to like you
What did I do? I'm just a kid from the
gutter making this butter off these
bloodsuckers, 'cause I'm a
muh'fuckin'...

Lyrics taken from <<https://genius.com/Jay-z-renegade-lyrics>> [accessed 11 March 2017]



Bibliography:

- Dogg, Snoop, and Pharrell Williams, 'Drop It Like It's Hot' in *R&G (Rhythm and Gangsta): The Masterpiece* (New York: Insomniac/Interscope Records, 2004), <<https://genius.com/Snoop-dogg-drop-it-like-its-hot-lyrics>> [accessed 11 March 2017]
- Z, Jay, and Eminem, 'Renegade' in *The Blueprint* (New York: Roc-A-Fella Records, 2001), <<https://genius.com/Jay-z-renegade-lyrics>> [accessed 11 March 2017]
- Kubrin, Charis E., and Erik Nielson, 'Rap on Trial', *Race and Justice*, 4 (2014), 185-211
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