

Extended Summary

Drug Subculture as a Way of Expression: Rap Music*

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Abstract

Drug addicts, being excluded from society, constitute their own sub-culture with its own distinctive way of dealing with specific problems, clothes, music, languages, and beliefs. The aim of this study is to examine Turkish rap songs that contain expressions related to alcohol and drug addiction, which are thought to encourage the drug subculture, and to view drug subculture as a way of expression using the qualitative research method. Songs reflecting drug subculture on YouTube have been selected using the purposive sampling method until data saturation is reached. The two researchers listened to 50 songs that reflect drug subculture in the content or meaning of the rap songs between February 20 and March 20, 2018. Music is said to influence youths' emotions, behaviors, and communication styles, with rap music being problematic. As a result of the analysis, under the main theme of expressions related to alcohol and substance use, four sub-themes have been formed: expressions demeaning women ($n = 18, 13.1\%$), desperate-pessimistic expressions ($n = 37, 27.0\%$), expressions supporting violence and crime ($n = 36, 26.3\%$), and slang and taboo expressions ($n = 46, 33.6\%$). The songs included in the study have been concluded to reflect and contain a great number of expressions on drug subculture.

Keywords

Rap music • Drug subculture • Violence • Slang • Delinquency

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The material and spiritual features (such as traditions, customs, religion) humans produce and transfer to individuals through social structures are called culture (Kalyoncu, 2012, p. 11; Köknel, 2001, p. 72). Subculture differs from the dominant culture in society and belongs to a certain community with its own way of thinking and living (Becker, 2013, p. 53; Biçer & Ertan, 2017, p. 98; Doğan, 1977, pp. 109–110; Kalyoncu, 2012, p.11; Köknel, 2001, p.72). This sub-community is said has its own way of life, dress, music, language, purpose, and behavior (Becker, 2013, p. 61; Köknel, 2001, p. 72).

Alcohol and drug addicts exclude themselves from society with their own way of coping with problems, their dress, music, language, and beliefs. Thus, they constitute their own subculture. Youths who become involved in drug subculture learn how to get and use alcohol and drugs, and then learn how this group lives (Kalyoncu; 2012, pp. 11–12; Köknel, 1983, p. 691; Köknel, 2001, p. 74; Ögel, 2010, p. 52).

Anxiety, hatred, despair, purposelessness, disbelief, pessimism, desire for unlimited freedom, and being against popular culture are dominant in the drug subculture which contains its own language, slang, and jargon in order to remain hidden from society (Biçer & Ertan, 2017, p. 110; Köknel, 2001, p. 75; Ögel, 2010, p. 52). For this reason they are not afraid of death. For them, using alcohol and drugs is a form of relaxation and happiness, a method of problem-solving, a desire to be accepted as they are, and a way of proving themselves (Doğan, 1977, pp. 126–128; Köknel, 2001, pp. 73–74; Ögel, 2010, p. 52).

Youths have been observed to be courageous and able to attempt criminal activity to comply with group norms (Biçer & Ertan, 2017, p. 112; Köknel, 1983, p. 85; Ogel, 2010, p. 55) and to think that criminal activity will provide them with a reputation (Biçer & Ertan, 2017, p.110). Some drug users are even said to have been dragged into various immoral and illegal ways of supplying drugs (Becker, 2013, p. 58; Köknel, 1983, p. 299; Köknel, 2001, p. 74).

Marginal hair styles, tattoos on their bodies, razor scars, efforts to dress fashionably using imitation products, and listening to rap music are expressions that intend to give the message “I am here, see me” (Biçer & Ertan, 2017, pp. 110–111; Yaman, 2012, pp. 378–379).

Renting and driving cars with women, using drugs, and listening to music are the most important sources of entertainment. Using drugs and listening to music are their methods for escaping from problems (Bicer & Ertan, 2017, pp. 111–112). According to the alcohol or drug used and the traditional structure, drug users are said to be able to prefer rock, arabesque, or rap music (Ögel, 2010, p. 55).

Drug Subculture and Rap Music

The music that is part of a culture creates mutual interactions between singers and listeners (Sağır & Öztürk, 2015, p. 127), and infuses the rhythm and words with emotions and behaviors (Gültekin, 2013, p. 3). Individuals' tastes in and preferences for music are affected by the family, social environment, economic level, moral structure, and cultural characteristics (Sağır & Öztürk, 2015, p. 151; Kamal & Temiz, 2017, p. 281).

Social media that allows for the same kind of music listeners or lifestyles to come together can create both local and universal music cultures that belong to a subculture (Çerezcioğlu, 2014, pp. 12–13; Sağır & Öztürk, 2015, p. 123). Youths who themselves have been alienated from popular culture through the influence of globalization and technology create their own identity and sense of belonging in a subculture through music (Biçer & Ertan, 2017, p. 101).

Throughout history, a mutual interaction has been shown to exist between music and drug use (such as ecstasy and techno music). Some artists use drugs to make music, and others make music to support drug use and enjoy it; these messages are given in the lyrics or videos. More aspects exist in common between music and drugs, such as being seen as a means of entertainment, a passion for youths, counter-authoritarian, an escape from problems, and relaxing (Biçer & Ertan, 2017, p. 116, Ögel et al., 2010, pp. 57–58).

Those who listen to rap music, which comes to the foreground through its lyrics and fast rhythm, are said to be those who are unable to integrate with society, who are poor, excluded, and try to express themselves through its subculture. People who make rap music are also said to belong to the same subculture and to affect their listeners by writing cultural songs about where they come from (Biçer & Ertan, 2017, p. 97; Yurga, 2017, p. 16). The behaviors of youths who listen to rap music are considered inappropriate by society, and thus they rebel against their families, poverty, and the system. Therefore, rap music contains negative messages about things such as violence, defamation, sexuality, love, and disagreements (Biçer & Ertan, 2017, p. 115; Bozkurt et al., 2015, p. 562; Taşal & Vural, 2011, p. 256; Yurga, 2017, p. 17).

Rap music is thought to have become popular because of its overt presence in the media; it facilitates memorizing words that rhyme and thus makes rap music listened to more (Sağır & Öztürk, 2015, p. 138; Taşal & Vural, 2011, p. 257). Technological developments allow youths to make albums at home (Biçer & Ertan, 2017, p. 97). They want to become famous by sharing their songs on the Internet and to have the opportunity to express and be appreciated through music (Biçer & Ertan, 2017, p. 112; Erdem, 2011, p. 20). For this reason, many emcees are found who make a lot of amateur rap music on their Internet sites and make clips on their own (Üçer, 2013, p. 257). Disheveled buildings; alcohol and drug use; and similar dress, hair,

and behavior styles attract attention in the videos. The songs have expressions about pain, love, death or killing, rebelliousness, heartache, and alcohol/drug use (Sağır & Öztürk, 2015, pp. 128–129). The phrase *diss*, which means to tease or have a spat with other singers, is frequently used in rap music (Biçer & Ertan, 2017, p. 113).

Method

Study group

Qualitative research is an inductive method that allows a group of samples to be handled in their natural environment to detect the causes of events or behaviors and to gather data about perceptions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016, p. 41; Neuman, 2006, p. 662; Şahin, 2010, p. 183). Therefore, the qualitative research method has been used in this study to enable us to evaluate the items in rap music that belong to the drug subculture in its natural environment in detail and to reveal the perceptions of rap singers about drug subculture. The study group consists of Turkish rap songs with the purposive sampling method being chosen. Songs that reflect the drug subculture have been selected from YouTube and then listened to until saturation was reached. Fifty songs that reflect drug subculture in the content or meaning of the rap songs have been transcribed verbatim between February 20 and March 20, 2018 by the first author. Five songs have professional videos, while 45 songs have amateur videos. Songs with higher numbers of views were selected, and 23 of these songs have over a million views.

Process

Document analysis, being less costly, providing access to a large sample, and allowing for the opportunity to reconsider the sample in its natural environment, has been used as the study's data-collection technique (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016, pp. 190–192). The primary researcher gathered the data and transcribed the audio files verbatim for the data analysis. The answer has been sought for question, "Which themes are emphasized in rap songs that reflect drug subculture?"

Data analysis

This study has been carried out using a qualitative approach through content analysis. Content analysis is a form of data analysis using the categorization of documents (Geray, 2006, p. 147). The following six-step method belonging to Berg and Lune (2015, pp. 383–384) has been used in the content analysis:

- i. The songs are listened to and transcribed verbatim for data analysis with the singer's and song's names added.
- ii. The created text is read many times, and then codes are created.

- iii. Codes are converted to categorical tags or themes.
- iv. Song lyrics are classified according to the themes.
- v. Song lyrics that have been classified are reevaluated in terms of theme fit.
- vi. The obtained data are theoretically interpreted with some generalizations being made.

Data analyses have been carried out by the primary author, with the codes and themes then being approved by the second author. In order to increase the reliability of the study, peer and external checks have been used (Alaee, Shahboulaghi, Khankeh, & Kermanshahi, 2015). Some transcripts have been reviewed by two faculty members from Selcuk University's Faculty of Health Sciences who are familiar with qualitative research (peer check). Another way to enhance reliability is to have two experts perform an external check by evaluating the findings, analysis method, and data. Therefore, in order to increase the data reliability, the number of songs was increased, with songs having a higher number of views being selected.

Findings and Discussion

Fifty Turkish rap songs that are thought to reflect alcohol and drug subculture have been listened to and their videos watched. The reviewed lyrics have been transcribed verbatim onto the computer. The data obtained in the study have been analyzed under four headings: (i) Insulting expressions toward women, (ii) desperate-pessimistic expressions, (iii) violent and criminal expressions, and (iv) slang and profane expressions.

Expressions on Alcohol and Drug Use

Among the songs that have been included in our research that contain expressions on alcohol and drug use, only one song attracts attention by saying "No to Drugs." That song does have slang and profanity, insulting expressions toward women, and desperate and pessimistic expressions; furthermore, drug dealers appear in its amateur video. Other songs explain how alcohol and drugs make them feel good and why they are used.

Ögel et al. (2010, p. 57), pointed out that rap songs encourage alcohol and drug use. Using drugs and listening to music together are indispensable for running away from suffering as well as being entertainment's greatest tools (Biçer & Ertan, 2017, p. 112).

The appearance of slang in songs about drug subculture draws attention. *Harman olmak* [to be a blend] is a term for marijuana, *weed* for marijuana, *kubar* for powdered marijuana, *torbacı* for dealer, and *çarşaf* for rolling papers (Köknel, 2001, pp. 78–79).

Expressions humiliating women. In rap songs, women are featured as sexual objects and insulted ($n = 18$, 9.7%). Women are identified as people who turn men on, chase men, and change partners constantly.

Female drug users are known to be more stigmatized than male users, and traditional gender roles influence this stigmatization. When considering the idea that Turkish society acts as if morals and honor only relate to women, prejudicing female drug users as having more sex and prostituting themselves in order to buy drugs is reflected in the lyrics (Ögel, 2010, pp. 15–29).

The fact that insulting women in songs and perceiving them as sex objects leads to a gender gap is worth noting (Taşal & Vural, 2011, p. 257).

Desperate-pessimistic expressions. Rap music is known to be comprised of negative and pessimistic themes such as rebellion, protests, lust, murder, aggression, absence, trouble, and pain (Sağır & Öztürk, 2015, pp. 128–129; Yurga, 2017, p. 16). In our study, the number and percentage of desperate-pessimistic expressions ($n = 37$, 19.9%) substantiates this. Rebellion and opposing the system are known to be the building blocks of both protest music and alcohol/drug addiction (Ögel et al., 2010, p. 61).

The songs dominated with aimlessness and pessimism describe death as an expected, desired, and non-frightening end (Güner, 2008, p. 17; Ögel, 2010, p. 54).

Youths who do not integrate with society culturally or economically attempt to express themselves through rap music, especially the rap music youths from poorer communities listen to, and they emphasize poverty and despair for the future in their songs (Biçer & Ertan, 2017, p. 97).

Not only the lyrics but also names of these songs are observed to reflect the same themes, such as *My Dreams Came to Nothing*, *My Psychology Is Ruined*, *Daughter of the Cruel*, and *I Was Born in the Wrong Place*.

Expressions supporting violence and crime. It is stated that Rap music has been said to incentivize disservices such as being asocial, using alcohol and drugs, and encouraging crime and suicide (Biçer & Ertan, 2017, p. 116; Şenel, 2014, p. 211). The songs in our study are also seen to incentivize violence and crime and normalize and praise these behaviors. Lyrics about violence and crime occur in 19.4% of the songs ($n = 36$). Drug users are also said to possibly get involved in crimes like theft, embezzlement, and prostitution in order to obtain drugs (Köknel, 2001, p. 74).

Another important issue is the display of dealers, guns, suicide, alcohol and drug in the amateur videos. Displays of violence have been indicated to normalize violence and give rise to increases in violent behaviors (Ersöz, 2002). Rap music producers and listeners have been said to behave in a non-conformist manner because of the impact of their subculture and to want to attract attention, be recognized and prove themselves by behaving in a way that society does not approve (Biçer & Ertan, 2017, p. 115).

Drug subculture is known to create a culture for criminal activities, and drug use provides courage and confidence in criminal activities (Kızmaz, 2006, pp. 340–347).

Slang and profanity. Taşal and Vural (2011) stated that secondary school students listen to rap music the most and that songs include heavy profanity. The percentage of slang and profanity being 24.7% ($n = 46$) is remarkable, especially with regard to dissing, which means to have words with somebody in the rap song, where profanity is used a lot, as can be understood from Cash Ömer's *Fake MCs* song about dissing (Biçer & Ertan, 2017, p. 113).

Rap songs are arguably a great risk for youths when considering that these songs contain a considerable amount of heavy profanity and insults and that the age group that identifies themselves with their favorite artists is youths.

Result

This study, which has been done with reference to music's influence on young people's emotions, behaviors, and communication styles and that rap music is a problematic type of music that incentivizes drug subculture, has detected several expressions about drug subculture in the songs that have been included in our research. Our study has shown that rap songs reflect drug subculture through their lyrics that incentivize and encourage drug use, their videos that display drug use, and the songs' desperate, pessimistic, slang, profane, violent, and criminal expressions.

Youths who are involved in a subculture take that culture's slang, clothing styles, hairstyles, music, customs and everything else as examples and role models. Youths are likely to use drugs because their role model does. This is because identification is one of the most fundamental factors that create subculture. Therefore, rap music is ranked among the types of music youths listen to the most and poses a great risk for youths' involvement in drug subculture. Heijan's song *Let the Nights Burn*, with its more than 166 million views, reveals the magnitude of the problem. Furthermore, rap music can be said to be a communal threat in terms of not only incentivizing drug subculture but also by incentivizing criminal culture and reinforcing gender discrimination.

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