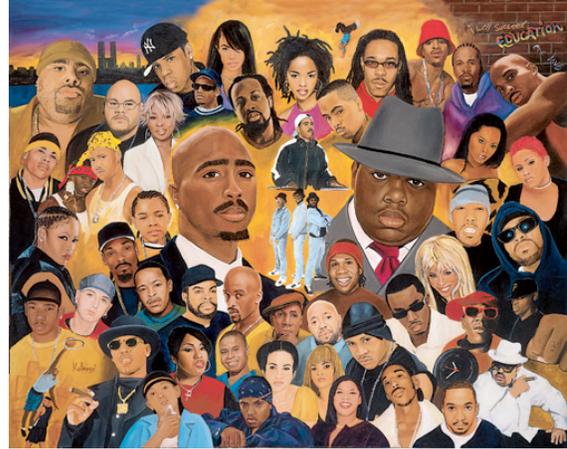


Scott Thode

Rap, Dogs, and Human Nature

The buzzer sounded in the district championship of my senior year in high school. As I walked off the court in defeat, I took a glance up at the scoreboard, and the clock read all zeroes. It was really over. The pain began to set in, for it would be the last basketball game I would ever play. A few weeks went by, and I was feeling a void in my life that desperately needed to be filled. I knew it was now time to face the difficult task of finding a replacement for what I loved most, so I began my search. Eventually, I found what I was looking for: rap music. Like



basketball, rap involves the combination of natural talent and acquired skill, but also a unique expression of identity and reality that allows me to explore the seemingly limitless capacity of my mind.

The transition from basketball to rap was more than just a change of hobby, but a change of thinking. When basketball was my pride and joy, I used the basketball court and my limited athletic ability to express my inner swagger. Being in the athletic spotlight was a great experience during that time in my life, but I respond to rap in a way that has allowed me to reach deeper into my inner self and express aspects of my swagger that I never knew I had. Using the combination of beats and rhyming words, rap challenges me to communicate raw thoughts, feelings, and emotions in a very creative way. In today's world, raw expressions are usually considered unacceptable and must be held in or else we will be punished. Because of rap, I can

release this energy without any social forces getting in the way or any penalizing consequences inhibiting me from speaking my mind.

In general, I am a normal guy that lives a fairly normal life. Like most, I say please and

“Humans have shared a longer and more intimate partnership with dogs than any domestic animal, starting before civilization existed” (Kerasote 10).

thank you and don't put my elbows on the table or chew with my mouth open. Many of the things I do on a daily basis conform to societal norms without me putting forth much thought. I like being normal and blending in for the most part, but abiding by norms all the time hinders various aspects of the personality. Rap is my way of eliminating those hindrances. When I put the headphones on and the beat begins to blare in my ears, my mind automatically races with thoughts resulting from raw emotion. I allow the sounds of the beat to take me to a world where there is no one but myself. I can say and do whatever I choose, and my instincts are allowed to run wild. I begin writing down words that express an enhanced level of pure truth and sincerity, and the confines of society, culture, and human domestication come crumbling down.

As with any animal, humans have instincts, and it seems that one of the functions of society is to contain these instinctive desires. To some extent this is a good thing, but for the

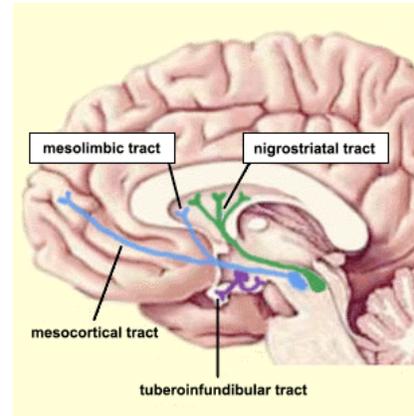
Domesticated dogs are taught to suppress many of their instinctive desires; however, when exposed to certain stimuli, they will still act in accordance to their primitive nature.

most part, the natural verbalization and expression of human nature has been severely restricted due to excessive societal norms. However, those norms do not seem to apply to music, specifically the subculture of rap. For obvious reasons, people expect rappers to say whatever they choose, no matter how vulgar or offensive it may be. This is typically referred to as “explicit content,” nevertheless I do not perceive the content of rap in this way. Instead, I view it

as the primitive verbalization of human nature. I am not implying that all aspects of human nature are necessarily good, just that our primitive impulses need to be released to some extent for one to be truly happy.

One of these primitive impulses is our desire to engage in pleasurable behaviors that are often considered taboo. The fact of the matter is that the physiology of our brains causes us to at the very least think about these forbidden behaviors.

According to psychological research, all animals, including humans, have a center in the brain called the mesolimbic dopamine pathway. This rewards system is what causes us to crave behavior that results in intense feelings of pleasure (McKim 78). In other words, we don't think about these



behaviors because we are devilish beings; we think about them because we are human. Many rappers, including myself, address these pleasure seeking topics in our songs by poetically communicating the natural human desire for hedonistic experiences.

When I first began to rap, nothing was ever written. Instead, everything I said would



come off the top of my head. All I would do is listen to a beat, take what I was feeling at that particular moment, and translate those feelings into rhyming words that went along with the beat. This is what many know as “free styling.” Free styling is not like improvising on an instrument. When one improvises on an instrument they are playing in a particular octave or key in order to make the sounds appropriately

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A curious Labrador is in an open field exploring the contents of nature. The improvisational nature of her actions causes her mind to be completely absorbed in the present. No worries of the past or future, only the preoccupation of each unique moment.

accompany the original melody. With free style rap the emphasis is on your words rather than actual musical notes. Free styling challenges the rapper to think rapidly without rehearsal. In other words, the whole idea of free styling goes against the common childhood lesson think before you speak.

Nearly every time I free style, I say something that catches me completely off guard. It is almost as if my mind has a mind its own. Much like the idea that rap is a verbalization of human nature, I feel that free styling plays an interesting role in this expression. When taking part in this activity, I feel like the speech centers in my brain are subconsciously reacting in response to a specific stimulus. If I am in the kitchen, I will free style about food. If I am walking around campus, I will free style (in my head) about the various people I see. This creative way of keeping my mind active causes me to experience what is normally considered a conscious cognitive function (speech) in a way that is relative to my instinctive reactions to the environment around me.

Dogs are social animals that need to belong to a pack, which typically consists of humans. They instinctively know when one of their human pack members are in trouble and in need of help (“Extraordinary Dogs”).

One of the most common topics in rap is “representing,” whether it be your family, friends, city, gang, or girlfriend. As a rapper, I am no different. I love representing the people

The pack is the basic unit of both dogs’ and wolves’ social life. In nature, it is made up of wolves of the same bloodline. Each member shows strong affection to their family and will risk their lives for one another (“Wolf Facts”).

that have helped make me who I am today, and you will not hear one of my songs that does not mention these important people. Without a doubt, this is the most passionate topic in all of rap.

When writing a verse, I think as vividly as possible what it would be like to lose a loved one.

These thoughts evoke some of the most powerful emotions I have ever incorporated into my songs. This mindset allows me to have a different level of appreciation for these individuals. I write about the amount of love and respect I have for them and what I would do to defend their human dignity. In real life, I could never harm another human being unless they were to actually harm or attempt to harm myself or the people I represent. Through rap, I confront these feelings and communicate one of the most important evolutionary necessities for all humanity, the need to form strong social alliances.

As a young kid, I had trouble controlling my anger. I saw multiple psychologists throughout my life, and they all told me ways to bottle up my anger. The problem was that

A Siberian Husky is wondering aimlessly in the neighborhood; meanwhile, a young, strong Labrador Retriever is monitoring every move. Her territory is marked, yet the Husky courageously approaches. As the Husky crosses enemy lines, the young Lab forgets its domestication into the human world and bolts for the perpetrator. No constraint, just pure instinct. Both dogs viciously rise to their hind legs clashing all at once. The Lab clamps its jaws on the neck of the challenger, while the Husky claws in defense. The Husky breaks free, but the damage is done. As she scampers down the street as a sign of surrender, the Lab watches until she disappears over the hill. The battle is over, and the Lab returns to her loving family.

bottling it up only led to impulsive episodes of pure rage. My approach had to change, so I adopted an alternative philosophy. I had to figure out ways to release these negative emotions in

a way that would keep me out of trouble. Over the years, I have used numerous strategies but none work better than rap. I am not indicating that I am some sort of crazy, angry man, but I will say that I have had my issues. Rap has helped me deal with these issues and this characteristic of my personality.

When I rap from rage, I get a get an adrenaline rush that is hard for me to experience in any other situation. Adrenaline is the hormone that creates a primitive reaction in all animals called the fight or flight response (“Fight or Flight Receptor Revealed”). In other areas of my life, it seems like I am viewed as a fairly laid back guy, but when I step behind the mic, the

Dogs that are not easily trained are usually smarter than the ones that will endlessly perform tricks for a simple reward. The lack of trainability is usually indicative of the dog being able to think for itself and its preference to do things in an independent manner (Butler).

chemistry in my brain changes and that hidden fight lashes out. My lyrics become the fangs that I use to bite back at the world, and the people I represent become the territory I feel obligated to protect. As soon as the song is done, and my verse is complete, I walk out of the studio stress free, and return home to my loving family.

I would be lying if I said that I am not a product of society. I believe to some extent we all are. As babies we are domesticated, appropriately trained and adapted to live in a human environment. Some habits we will never unlearn and many of those simple rewards will never lose a dime of value. However, a human being is still going to be a human being no matter how hard we try to resist it. In order to pursue happiness to its fullest, we all need to express our raw emotions and our instinctive desires in some form. Through rap music, I can experience this release of human nature and an enhanced sense of freedom that allows me to express all aspects of my being.

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