

The Mediated Myth of Rock and Roll

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Abstract

This study deconstructs the cultural myth (Barthes, 1957) of rock and roll as constructed by television and film (forms) and negotiated through musicians' experiences and personal understandings (concepts). It does so through textual analyses of five films and eight televisual forms and forty-one in-depth interviews with a maximum variation sample of rock and roll musicians to examine how individuals negotiated concepts about the rock and roll myth. The myth of rock and roll is simultaneously simple and complex, discussed openly and mired in code, and contains both surface level and deep structures. It is at once a rejection of American capitalism through its insistence on the existence "pure" rock and roll outside of industry while being the very embodiment of it through its meritocratic and agentic views of rock and roll success, where the best product sells the most records. The myth of rock and roll contains promises of openness and equality to "anyone" who wishes to "do it" while disguising "averageness" as white, male, and heterosexual. As with the function of all myths, each of these dualistic statements contains a degree of truth to allow its circulation throughout culture (Dyer, 1982). However, musicians negotiate what constitutes "truth" through the lens of the myth throughout the various stages of their careers. Additionally, the cultural forms and individual concepts of rock and roll are not inherently good or bad, or true or false, rather, they serve different cultural and individual functions, which this study critically examines.