

Article

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The Stereotype of American Bikers as reflected in Poison's "Ride the Wind" and Twisted Sister's "Ride to Live, Live to Ride"

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Abstract

Bikers are often considered as brutal, unlawful and unoccupied group of people disrupting the order of society. In some cases, they belong to certain gangs committing serious crime. Yet, there are also bikers riding their motorcycles in order to experience ultimate freedom; the freedom of chasing the wind and living outdoor close to nature. The idea of American Dream puts a solid basis on the two phenomena previously mentioned. The short article reveals the stereotype of American bikers by analyzing the lyrics of *Ride the Wind* and *Ride to live, Live to Ride*. The argumentative analysis is developed and elaborated through several elements of the lyrics, sociological point of view and historical perspectives. Hence, a comprehensive discussion can be developed and acquired.

Keywords: Stereotype, Bikers, American Dream, Gangs, Freedom

1. Introduction

Bikers are generally associated with those wearing sun glasses, leather jacket, chained wallet, *bandana*, and boots. They ride large engine motorcycles producing loud noises. Their attitudes lead to the assumption that bikers are frequently considered as intimidating and disturbing other road users, especially when they ride in group. Matthew Wills writes that "The stereotype of the motorcycle rider in the U.S. has been dominated by the figure of the outlaw biker since the late 1940s ("A History of Motor Cycle Communities", May 25, 2015, <https://daily.jstor.org/daily-author/matthew-wills/>). This stereotype is confirmed by a growing issue among American bikers that those who do not comply with the rules call themselves, "One Percent". ("What Is A One Percent Biker, & Why Does It Matter In Light Of The Waco Shootings?", P.1, Par 2. 21 May 2015. <https://www.bustle.com/articles/84812-what-is-a-one-percent-biker-why-does-it-matter-in-light-of-the-waco>). On the other hand, some bikers consider their way of life as part of enjoying and respecting life. Regardless of those difference assumptions, the life of a biker is a challenging object in the study of society and culture. Not only their lifestyle motivating the growing of business industries, but also their philosophical background creating a certain symbol of American freedom.

Despite the differing viewpoints of bikers, this group of people has created a sub culture coloring the pursuit of happiness in America. The life-style and way of life have also grown business opportunities in fashion and mass-media. At this point, bikers have constructed a new phenomenon in the society. In other words, Barker explains "representation is how the world is socially constructed and represented to and by us" (2000:8). Here, bikers represent a certain part of society in the main culture. When they eventually exist and survive in a society, they are socially constructed. Other members of society who do not belong to bikers' community may experience the spirit of being a

biker through thematic mass products of biker's life; such as T-shirt, jacket, hand-bag, sticker, *bandana*, boots and many others.

I am interested in discussing the myth of American bikers since American people believe in the idea of American Dream. The ideal life would be having personal happiness and individual freedom. Here, the need of an ideal community accepting individual freedom intertwines and it develops what is considered as the American people. Robert Nisbet in Robertson writes that "a sense of community is characterized by personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion, and continuity in time" (1981:224). Bikers also have strong personal and emotional intimacy among them. By analyzing the two song lyrics, I would like to explore the life of American bikers depicted in every line of the song lyrics of *Poison Ride the Wind* and *Twisted Sister Ride to live, Live to Ride*. *Poison* is a famous American rock band in the mid 1980s – 1990s, while *Twisted Sister* is a famous heavy metal band in 1980s-1990s.

Interestingly, the American economy was recorded to reach its peak. New technology changed the pattern of business and industries affecting the social and economic condition of the society. The U.S Department of State reported the prosperous American economy marked by strong market forces in many sectors,

The economy, meanwhile, turned in an increasingly healthy performance as the 1990s progressed...

...With the fall of the Soviet Union and Eastern European communism in the late 1980s, trade opportunities expanded greatly...

...The economy grew rapidly, and corporate earnings rose rapidly. Combined with low inflation and low unemployment, strong profits sent the stock market surging; the Dow Jones Industrial Average, which had stood at just 1,000 in the late 1970s, hit the 11,000 mark in 1999, adding substantially to the wealth of many -- though not all -- Americans (U.S. Department of State, "The 1990s and Beyond", Updated March 28, 2017, <https://www.thoughtco.com/us-economy-in-the-1990s-and-beyond-1148149>).

With the rapid growth of American economy, life style also changed. In an article, written by Paul V. Arnold, biker and motorcycle represent the freedom of routine life, "it's the motorcycle riding image - the lifestyle - that's embraced by customers and glorified in music, movies, advertisements and TV shows. Harley-Davidson is the off ramp from the same-old, punch-the-clock, 8-to-5, report-to-your-boss world" ("Harley-Davidson: Born to be... predictable", P1. Par 2, <https://www.reliableplant.com/Authors/Detail/321>). Being a biker, one experiences ultimate freedom of self-existence, the roaring sound of the engine along with the breeze of nature, in other word, one can unite with mother-nature.

2. Research Method

Lyrics and supporting data used in this article are collected by applying library research method. Books and sources from internet are vital to support the argumentative analysis of the article. Further, the analysis of *Ride the Wind* and *Ride to live, Live to Ride* applies several figurative devices and the Allusion. Here, allusion is used as a reference to a historical or literary figure, event, or object (Holman, 1985:12). Further, Baldick explains that

"Allusion, an indirect or passing reference to some event, person, place, or artistic work, the nature and relevance of which is not explained by the writer but relies on the reader's familiarity with what is thus mentioned" (2001:7).

Further, the analysis focuses on the metaphor implied in the song. Holman defines metaphor as "an implied analogy which imaginatively identifies on object with another and ascribes to the first object one or more of the qualities of the second or invest the first with emotional or imaginative qualities associated with the second" (1985:264).

3. Figurative Devices in *Poison Ride the Wind*

Song Lyric

- 1 Hearts of fire
 Streets of stone
 Modern warriors
 Saddle iron horses of chrome
- 5 Taste the wild
 Lick the wind
 Like something they never saw before
 Their jaws dropping to the floor
 Steel made of soul and sin
 Rebels born without a care
 And the day he listens
 Only to fly where eagles dare
 And the night she whispers
- 14 Ride the wind
 Never coming back until I touch the midnight sun
 Ride the wind
 Never coming back again
 Ride the wind
 Never coming back until I touch the midnight sun
 Painted flesh
- 21 Loyalty
 Humble pride
 Just as far as the eye can see
 Stories told
 Two old friends
 Of battle scars and lonely bars
 And nights the rain wouldn't end
 Here's to withered eyes wearing gypsy smiles
 And the day he listens
 Here's to lovely ladies and a million miles
 And the night she whispers
 Ride the wind
 I'm still the bravest soul in sin,
 Burning till the night is done.
- Solo
- 35 Of all the truths and lies
 And stories of riders in the sky
 They say only the bravest try
 Where eagles and angels dare to fly

In analyzing *Poison Ride the Wind* lyric, it is important to involve the references implied in the lyric. The work of uncovering the hidden messages in the lyric shall apply approaches used in analyzing poetry. Therefore, the references are discussed through symbols, metaphor and other figurative devices. Bergman and Epstein explain, "Poetry must attempt extraordinary leaps of both association and logic to achieve its heights of emotion and its provocative thoughts" (1992:635).

In every line of *Poison Ride the Wind*, the pride of being a biker is confronted with the facts of life that good and bad have a thin limit. Both are interrelated and complementary elements of life

influencing a person's life. Line 1-4 of *Ride the Wind* show us the use of 'fire', 'stone' and 'chrome' symbolizing the boldness of a biker. 'Fire' is hot and burning and it is used in the first line to give the idea that a biker has fervent spirit, the spirit of bravery. A biker has nothing to fear of since he/she is a 'modern warrior'. A warrior has no fear. Therefore, a biker can deal with any situation on the road. 'Saddle iron horses of chrome' shows us the grandeur of a ride. A chrome plated motorcycle with big engine really offers dignity and pride to go over 'street of stones'. 'Street of stones' refers to the many obstacles faced by bikers while riding on their motorcycle. Nothing is impossible for bikers.

Line 5-6, 'Taste the wild', 'Lick the wind' symbolizes the actualization of an individual freedom. It is the innermost passion of an individual of such ultimate freedom covered by norms and social convention. A person has to live with rules and social norms preventing him/her to explore his/her real existence. Line 5-6 tells the ultimate freedom experienced by bikers when the ride on their bikes. 'Taste the wild' illustrates human boredom of routine life. A biker has the moment to free his/her soul in the wild. This is something that is considered difficult to achieve when you have to work from 8 to 5. Further, 'lick the wind' illustrates the intimate feeling when we unite with mother nature. The wind blows in any direction, hence, 'lick the wind' depicts the feeling when a biker go everywhere the wind blows. The feeling of free from any burdens in life. It is confirmed with the next line "Like something they never saw before." When a person dares to leave his/her routine activities and embraces the calling of the wild, it is a new phase of alteration.

Poison Ride the wind tends to explore the freedom and self-existence of a biker. A biker is someone with determination, strong characteristics and high pride. The lines "Steel made of soul and sin" and "Rebels born without a care" would like to tell how hard life is for a biker. It is in line with the economic condition of the 1990's America. As economy grew rapidly in 1990, life style also changed. The market niche was widely open for motorcycle industry. The condition led to the increasing number of motorcycles purchased by American people. At this point, new cultural representation was created.

The stereotype of a biker as the figure of an outlaw can be seen on these lines; "Steel made of soul and sin" and "Rebels born without a care". The determination towards the bike is symbolized in "steel made of soul and sin". 'Steel' refers to the bike itself or the biker himself, while 'soul' is the determination of a biker in living a life. Further, 'sin' refers to negative actions conducted by a biker. Here, the stereotype of a biker as being brutal and unlawful is exposed. The life style of being a biker tends to accentuate individual freedom. The line "I'm still the bravest soul in sin, burning till the night is done" emphasizes the life that might be considered by common people as chaotic. That line tries to confirm the pride of conducting night life which might be associated with negative actions and style.

4. Figurative Devices in *Twisted Sister Ride to Live, Live to Ride*

Song Lyric

- 1 Hard roads and endless lines flow through his veins
Cold steel and hot fuel injected 's the dream that fills his brain
But no, not slow, the speed fever grows
- 4 He rides, he sees, he knows
You've got to ride to live, live to ride
Feel the flames burn inside
And though you know, you ride to hide
You ride to live to ride
Life's short and goes too fast, most pages burn
Don't wait, the end's too near, some people never learn
You all won't fall, the road fever calls
So run or fly, don't crawl
- 13 You've got to ride to live, live to ride
Feel the flames burn inside

And though you know, you ride to hide
You ride to live to ride

Solo - Jay Jay

18 Ride on and don't look back, you can't change what's done
Drive hard for greater glories, you all must be someone
So win, don't show, let the life fever go
The world is yours you know
You've got to ride to live, live to ride
Feel the flames burn inside
And though you know, you ride to hide
24 You ride to live to
You've got to ride to live, live to ride
Feel the flames burn inside
And though you know, you ride to hide
You ride to live to ride

Twisted Sister Ride to Live, Live to Ride is also a song depicting the life of a biker. Here, every line depicts the spirit of proving self-existence. The first line of the song "Hard roads and endless lines flow through his veins" illustrates the way of life of a biker is tough and severe since a biker has to endure and survive from street-life. The challenge of living outdoor and mingling with other bikers requires not only strength, but also determination and persistence. Therefore, the next lines of the song illustrates the pride of being a biker. A biker is someone blessed with bravery and skills to live in the wild world. In the next lines "He rides, he sees, he knows. You've got to ride to live, live to ride. Feel the flames burn inside", a biker with his motorcycle needs to explore the world. *Twisted Sister* in this song really exposes the real characteristics of a biker. The pride of a real bikers lies on the lines "Drive hard for greater glories, you all must be someone. So win, don't show, let the life fever go" provoking a biker to be a non-conformist. A biker needs to explore his/her self existence in order to gain success in any aspects of life.

The song "Ride to Live, Live to Ride" ignites the spirit of a biker to go farther "the endless line" to reach his/her true existence. The optimistic messages are clearly conveyed in each line of "Ride to Live, Live to Ride". They build the personality of a biker as being independent, persistent and loyal.

5. Conclusion

Both *Poison* and *Twisted Sister* are famous American rock bands. The two songs analyzed here reflect the life of an American biker. The first song, "Ride the Wind", depicts the hard life of a biker which is in line with the stereotype of American bikers. The stereotype of being brutal, unlawful and unoccupied group of people has been attached to bikers. It can be seen in every line of the song illustrating the dark life of a biker.

Meanwhile, *Twisted Sister* Ride to Live, Live to Ride begins with a strong message of the hard life of a biker. Yet, the song explores the individual freedom of being a biker. The sense of optimistic spirit to live a life is clearly depicted in every line of the song. *Twisted Sister* focuses more on the positive achievement of personal integrity of a biker.

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