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A Cultural Analysis of Twenty One Pilots

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Semiotic Analysis

Masks = Band is not to be defined by the members.

Hand signs = Representation of U.S., while also portraying that the band's music is not comfortable and should be approached with caution.



Photo Credit: The Odyssey

Colors = Red, Blue, and White colors link band with American identity

Summary

Twenty One Pilots, a popular band in the United States, has remained a subject of intrigue in popular culture, since it has challenged lyrical and musical themes through genre variation and themes of internal complexities requiring intricate listening among consumers.

Through close analysis of photos, songs, music videos, and interviews, this three-part paper and website project sought to uncover messages the band has promoted and advertised to its listeners.

- Image analysis revealed that the band positions itself as edgy yet quintessentially American.
- Discourse analysis of the band's song "Neon Gravestones" emphasized that suicide and depression are topics that should be spoken upon carefully, especially in light of frequent depression misrepresentation in mainstream media.
- Identity deconstruction showed that Twenty One Pilots promote inclusivity yet their message is gender and color blind.

Discourse Analysis

When viewed through the lens of Foucault's ideas of power, knowledge, and resistance, Twenty One Pilots' song "Neon Gravestones" can be understood as resisting popular depictions of depression and suicide in media.

Tyler Joseph himself experiences depression and suicidal thoughts, making him both credible and knowledgeable of the topic.

The song questions if we have begun to desensitize ourselves to the severity of mental illness because of the preponderance of messages that glorify suicide.

Deconstructing Identity



Photo Credit: Rock Sound

Through the songwriting interview, middle class values and privileges are centered.

The songs "Lane Boy" and "Fairly Local" contained dangerous generalizations for listeners of different racial or class backgrounds.

Mental struggles are compared to physical struggles.

There is also an ignorant assumption that those who are hurt or oppressed are not able to be further wounded, when the entire concept of intersectionality conveys the opposite meaning.

Twenty One Pilots tries to relate and generalize to audiences but fails to do so, because their message does not address how race and gender inequities moderate/change experiences of mental illness.

Photo Credit: Jennifer Manoban, Pinterest



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