Zuzanna Sury
Katarzyna Smoter
Karolina Kołodziejczak

Paradoxical manners of understanding anti--discrimination education. Content analysis of hip-hop music lyrics from the album "Hip-Hop racism stop! #1"[1]

Abstract: The aim of the study presented in this article was to verify the presence of the assumptions of anti-discrimination education in the lyrics of songs featured on the album "Hip-Hop racism stop! #1", a project launched as part of a Polish campaign called "Music Against Racism". The study involved using the content analysis method in an interpretative paradigm according to the contextual theory of meaning. The main conclusion is that the use of songs as a form of educational support can be a valuable element in the anti-discrimination education, but it is crucial to call for "negotiating with young people the content of existing culture", which may provoke discussion with students about the ways in which words are used to form a specific image of the world. Another important conclusion is the "paradox of violence" referring to a tendency to appeal for the rejection of violence, while at the same time using violence-provoking words.

Keywords: anti-discrimination education, hip-hop, lyrics, racism

Introduction

The article presents the results of research conducted using the content analysis method in an interpretative paradigm. The subject of the analysis was the lyrics of songs featured on the album "Hip-Hop racism stop! #1" (Various Artists, 2002). The purpose of the study was to verify the presence of the assumptions of anti-discrimination education in the lyrics. The key research question concerned the possibility of using song lyrics in the

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[1]   In this article, the English version of the album „Hip-Hop rasizm stop! # title is used.

anti-discrimination education, understood by the Polish Anti-Discrimination Education Association as education which "strengthens groups and individuals experiencing discrimination and exclusion through inclusion and empowerment" (Branka et al., 2011). Although the album was released in 2002, it is important to analyse the lyrics due to the fact that it is an example of a specific attempt at implementing the assumptions of anti-discrimination education in youth culture. In the conclusions, significant threats are emphasized that may emerge when trying to implement hip-hop culture projects into educational courses. These issues should be taken into account in the process of designing future activities in the field of anti-discrimination education. In addition, it is recognised that hip-hop projects are popular with teenagers (Domański et al., 2020; Mazur et al., 2020), so attempts are made to create curricula including hip-hop songs now and in the future. It is therefore worth considering the potential benefits and threats of running projects of this type by analysing an already existing one according to the assumptions of anti-discrimination education.

Theoretical background

Diversity, equality, social solidarity –
the dawn of anti-discrimination education

Modern Western society is characterised by heterogeneity, complexity, and variability (Nowicka and Łodziński, 2001). Intensifying diversity in the sphere of language, religion or tradition, as well as customs, is a challenge for education. It is evident that representatives of minority groups in various contexts are still exposed to discrimination, defined by UNESCO as "any distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference which, being based on colour, sex, language, political or other opinion, race, religion, social or national origin, economic condition or birth, has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing equality of treatment in education" (UNESCO, 1960; Müller, 2021). Developing an attitude of acceptance OF otherness is emphasised, among other things, in the aims and objectives of anti-discrimination education, which is defined by the Polish Anti-Discrimination Education Association as "conscious action of increasing knowledge and skills, as well as influencing attitudes to counteract discrimination and bias-motivated violence, and to promote equality and diversity" (Branka et al., 2011).

Music in education

Music can be described as a phenomenon which "has a fundamentally social life" (Field, 1984). Not only because music accompanies many tasks undertaken in everyday life, but also because it asks the listeners for "something more", aiming to introduce them to the world of values (Herndon and McLeod, 1982; Golka, 1996; Jabłońska, 2014; Mateos Casado et al., 2015; Garrido and González, 2018: p. 134; Kaca, 2014). Research reveals an important role of music education in the context of the development of diverse competences (Lesser, 2014; McClough and Heinfeldt, 2013; Paquette and Rieg, 2008). There are arguments for using lyrics as value transmitters (Chao-Fernández et al., 2020; Levy and Byrd, 2011). The cultural role of hip-hop music has been developing in Poland since the mid-1990s. It is a bottom-up art culture (Miszczyński, 2014; Rabiański, 2015).

Research material

The Polish project "Music Against Racism" (*Muzyka przeciwko rasizmowi*) is a social initiative, modelled on the British "Rock Against Racism" (Goodyer, 2003) campaign created by T. Robinson (Pankowski, 2003, p. 179). It was initiated in Poland in 1997. It involves the promotion of tolerance, multiculturalism, and the elimination of racist and chauvinistic behaviours (Pankowski, 2003, p. 179). The project was a response to the music of extreme nationalist music groups popular in the late 1990s (Pankowski, 2003, p. 183). As part of the 2002 campaign, two hip-hop music albums were released: Hip-Hop racism stop! #1 and #2. Due to the extensive range of research material, the research project discussed in the article examined lyrics only from the first released album.

Methods

The method used in the study was text analysis in the interpretive paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). The concept that inspired the research is the contextual theory of meaning (Frith, 2011). The main assumption of the project was to capture the function of particular words in a statement, as well as entire sentences or paragraphs, which are the means of communicating significant problems, depending on the manner of interpretation of the context. To accomplish this goal, the following analysis steps were taken: listening to the songs on the "Hip-Hop racism stop #1" album several times; transcription of the lyrics; creation of a code tree with the key elements of

anti-discrimination education: **discrimination, violence, prejudices, stereotypes, promoting equality and diversity;** preparation of notes on the "global meaning" present in each song (Piekot, 2006); encoding texts with descriptive and holistic codes to capture the general themes of particular songs (Saldaña, 2021); creation of notes for specific portions of text and generation of a new code; analysis and formulation of conclusions.

The content analysis included 18 out of 20 song lyrics from the album. The remaining two are instrumental compositions.

Results

Discrimination

There are three roles distinguished depending on the given activity in the process of discrimination: the victim, the perpetrator, and the witness (Branka et al., 2011). On the basis of the analysis, the performers usually identify with the role of the **victim**, and they frequently refer to their own, often traumatic experiences. These experiences are used as the basis for giving advice to the listeners. The artists recommend ignoring negative comments and adopting the attitude of winners, not victims, to survive the attack: "Blow – dodge – smile is the correct pattern"[2][2]. The song authors direct words of support to people who have experienced discrimination. They promote the "carpe diem" attitude, enjoying life, despite the adversities. What seems to be important in the texts are values such as good and truth, enabling people to live their lives on their own terms: "Separate good from evil, lies from the truth, listen to words, and choose what you think is best" [8].

The **perpetrators** are presented as people guided by bias. There is hypocrisy in their "slogans", as they are in fact guided by prejudices: "Why do you swear to love your neighbour as yourself? When you see him, you spit in his face, you do not trust, you do not help" [12].

There were also suggestions addressed to "enemy" rappers, who use hate speech: "Relax for a moment. So many words were spoken and not even a gram of sense" [4]. The artists recommend ignoring the opinions that come with evaluating their accomplishments. They do not give any advice to **witnesses** of discrimination.

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[2]   The numbers in square brackets refer to the songs from the album's track list.

Stereotypes

The lyrics contain examples of situations in which the song authors fell victim to stereotypes. Wealth and poverty become a frequent reason for stereotypes: "I heard that my wallet is not slim, but swollen" [1]. The content of the analysed lyrics shows disagreement in the face of the stereotypical image of rappers basking in luxury, intoxicated with expensive drugs. The artists encourage their audience to resist hate speech. They suggest not to follow stereotypes: "Confused by appearances, you're gonna make mistakes" [2].

However, even the artists themselves seem to be unable to avoid stereotyping. An example of a stereotype they follow is one based on the premise that the aspirations of contemporary young people are very low. The artists denounce the "empty doll" [7] lifestyle, which can be described as a way of living with the acceptance of a very poor quality of life. One might wonder whether the song authors using the category do not fall into the trap of stereotyping themselves.

Violence

Violence means "actions or words that are intended to hurt people" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021c). The artists suggest that music helps to overcome anger, because it enables people not to react to "evil with evil". They argue that a person who uses violence paradoxically loses themselves: "You'd better slow down like a car on a bridge. Because you might go too far and people will despise you" [3]. There are multiple examples of violent behaviours mentioned in the lyrics: "Every object in my hands, just like a bomb, falls to the ground" [3]. It describes situations of violence that seem to be justified by weakness of character. Violence seems to be perpetrated by everyone, even by those who try to behave in a non-violent manner: "Although I try very hard, I usually fail. (…) I'm on a roll again, hundreds of insults right in your face" [3].

Violence is often caused and justified by stress or by the economic situation: "No words, no new ideas. Stagnation. No change, mind occupied by excessive stress" [18]. What seems to be important in the process of anger rising is helplessness in the face of unfavourable circumstances of life. The rappers expressly declare their condemnation of physical violence: "Saying it is just a pretext. I don't get it. I wouldn't call it bravery. I call the superiority of reason over bodily force victory" [16].

A careful analysis of the lyrics, however, made it possible to notice a paradox: in a few cases, the phrases which encourage rejection of physical vio-

lence are accompanied by phrases promoting psychological violence: "There will be sharp words, like Tyson's blows, from hardened steel. For all to be afraid of me" [14], as well as verbal violence: "Obscenities fly like splinters fly from wood. They get stuck like nails, like a rapid-fire mortar" [3].

The "paradox of violence" is calling for the cessation of its use, at the same time using language that encourages violent behaviours. It seems that it is very difficult to break the impasse of appealing for the rejection of violence, while simultaneously using violence-provoking words. The listener may get the impression that violence is irremovable from social discourse (Deditius, 2014).

Promoting equality and diversity

Promoting equality and diversity is a crucial task of anti-discrimination education (Branka et al., 2011). The concept of equality can be understood as the right of different groups of people to receive the same treatment (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021b). The concept of diversity is defined as the fact of many different types of things or people being included in something – a range of different things or people (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021a).

The authors of the lyrics point to the diversity of the world more often than to equality. Showing examples of diversity, they refer, among other things, to personality traits, the occupation, and financial position: "One person likes boogie, while the other likes peace and quiet. One has merit, the other one is tried for debts. I put together these lines and rhymes, while someone lays out goods onto shelves at the store. One has cash, the other one lives from hand to mouth" [5]. Diversity also denotes differences in perceiving reality: "Not everyone thinks about being what their parents would like them to be. Some dream about a colourful future, others want it to be only in black and white" [12].

It is important to emphasise the possibility of "cooperation despite differences", which is evident, for example, in projects involving joint recording of songs. The hip-hop culture in which it is possible to promote collaboration can also be considered as one that integrates people with different characteristics: "Hip-hop does not divide us so much as connect us" [9].

Discussion

According to N. Karvelis (2018), hip-hop lyrics and culture can be taught in a manner that augments education, particularly in areas related to race, gender, and class in society (Stovall, 2006). Similar interpretations are presented by E. Petchauer (2017), who says that hip-hop has become relevant to the field of education because of its implications for understanding language, learning, identity or the curriculum. I. Pulido (2009) presents the results of interviews with Mexican and Puerto Rican youth from Chicago. Her research shows how they use hip-hop music, in particular as an interpretive lens, to negotiate and challenge their racialisation in schools and society. In our opinion, hip-hop projects in anti-discrimination and intercultural education can be transmitters of the principles of anti-discrimination education, but some dangers can be seen that should be taken into account when designing educational activities.

Firstly, it is important to examine the **content of the lyrics** carefully before using them in the educational course. In the texts analysed here, lines on discrimination based on colour and ethnicity constitute a marginal part of the discussion and the lyrics refer, more broadly, to various types of exclusion. However, the term "racism" or any other similar terms related to it do not appear at all. It is worth noting the intention noticeable in the majority of the analysed lyrics, which is the prevention of hate speech. It is important to distinguish two categories of hate speech. The first one is based "on the grounds of legally protected characteristics" such as gender, age, disability, race, religion, nationality, political beliefs, etc. (Nijakowski, 2008). The second one – hate speech based on other grounds – means speaking to or about someone in a disrespectful and often aggressive manner. In song lyrics, performers are more likely to refer to the second type. Therefore, it can be assumed that the artists' intention is to combat social and other divisions. They warn listeners of making declarations of tolerance while practising exclusionary behaviours.

Secondly, before incorporating hip-hop into an educational project, it is worth reflecting on the **way of expression** present in the texts. It is surprising that anti-violence statements are often expressed, paradoxically, in the language of violence. This kind of message is reinforced by the use of military metaphors, "ordering" listeners to adopt an attitude of fight. Expressions such as *failure, blows, assault* may indicate that the world is perceived as a space in

which (despite the declared support for diversity) not everyone may be able to find their own place. The reality resembles a battlefield where the victory of one person means the defeat of the other.

Another problem is posed by obscenities in the lyrics. For many educators, the presence of vulgar language is a disqualifying element in the process of education. This type of language may not always be correct and worthy of replicating, but it is authentic, often close to the reality in which adolescents function. Hence the use of the analysed excerpts from the lyrics during class may be effective because of the lack of "intrusive didactics". On the other hand, in the analysed texts, vulgar language appears directly in reference to the "Other", ingrained in social divisions.

Netcoh (2013) claims that diverse racial discourses can be made the point of direct and critical inquiries in the classroom to maximise its democratic potential. The possibility of using lyrics containing vulgar language depends on characteristics such as the age of the students, the openness of both the teacher and the students, and the level of reflective and critical thinking skills of the students and the teacher.

Conclusions

Trying to understand the content of the songs from the album with students may be a good point of departure for reflection on some key values in education, such as acceptance, respect or recognition of human dignity. The use of these works as a form of educational support can be a valuable element in both curricular and extracurricular anti-discrimination education, although a considerable part of them do not seem to be the best educational tools due to the risks mentioned above. The role of a teacher, perceived as a transformative intellectual (Giroux, 1988), is to encourage young people to interpret the lyrics in detail. In this regard, it is crucial to call for "negotiating with young people the content of the existing culture", as proposed by Z. Melosik (2014, pp. 90–91). It may provoke discussion about the ways in which words are used to form a specific image of the world. Openness may help to discuss logically incoherent, paradoxical or simply ethically questionable messages with the students. Taking into account the popularity of this genre among young people, it is important to identify works that raise important educational issues, shaping positive attitudes towards "others". This becomes particularly relevant with regard to the growing popularity of songs promoting xenophobic attitudes towards, for example, refugees (Żuk and Żuk, 2021).

The songs that young people listen to are texts of culture and as such can be the subject of pedagogical consideration.

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Track list:
1 – Ascetoholix – Ile? [How Much?]
2 – Credo – Szyderczy Uśmiech [Mocking Smile]
3 – Owal/emcedwa – Różnie [Differently]
4 – Neon – Mów Mi Jeszcze [Tell Me More]
5 – Lajner – Świat Jeden [One World]
6 – Gorzki – Solo [Solo]
7 – Acer – Metodyka [Methodology]
8 – Acer – Daremne Sugestie [Futile Suggestions]
9 – Dho – Międzymiastowa [Intercity]

10 – Wwd – Projekt W.W.D. [Designed by W.W.D.]
11 – Sza-V Feat. Kali – To w sercach żyje [It Lives in the Hearts]
12 – DJ. Teraz Polska – Sprawy Takie [Such Things]
13 – Tzw – Teraz Zapomniałeś Wszystko [Now You've Forgotten Everything]
14 – Kapli – Czego Może Chcieć [What Can He Want]
15 – Lista Chorych – Monotonia [Monotony]
16 – G.I.M. Eldzw – Po Zawodach [All Over]
17 – Viza – Sens Nie W Gotowce [Sense Not in Cash]
18 – Asp – To Nie Rap Popisów [It's Not a Rap Show]