

Analysis of Social Conflicts in Foster the People's Song *Pumped Up Kicks*

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ABSTRACT

The song of *Pumped Up Kicks*, released by Foster the People in 2010 draws public attention, both because of its melody and dark lyrical theme. This song creates discussions about social isolation, mental health, and violence among teenagers. This paper aims to analyze the song through the qualitative approach and the perspective of social conflicts. By interpreting the lyrics and their deeper implications, this research explores the effects of neglect, bullying, depression, economic disparity, and mental health issues in this song. It highlights how the widening gap between the rich and the poor, along with broken relationships between parents and children, can push youth toward destructive behavior. In conclusion, this analysis suggests that *Pumped Up Kicks* serves as a powerful social commentary and reminder of the pressing societal issues people face today, emphasizing the urgent need for awareness and intervention.

Keywords: Foster the People, Pumped Up Kicks, Social Conflict

INTRODUCTION

Released by Foster the People in 2010, the song of *Pumped Up Kicks* highlights the reality of individuals who feel marginalized in society and struggle with dark thoughts, ultimately leading to acts of violence. This theme remains relevant to modern social issues, particularly in cases of teen violence and the lack of attention to mental health. The narrative focuses on a troubled young man named Robert, symbolizing isolation and anger (Dyck, 2023; Foster the People, 2010; Salsabila et al., 2023). The lyrics symbolizes potential violence, reflecting the increasing frequency of school shootings in America. The song critiques a culture of neglect, where factors such as lack of family support, bullying, and mental health issues are left unaddressed, leading some teenagers to harmful actions.

This paper aspires to conduct an in-depth examination of the complex matter of social conflict represented within the lyrical composition of the song under consideration. By undertaking a thorough analysis of the song, this study has the potential to significantly broaden the interdisciplinary scope of literary studies, which may encompass a diverse array of indications related to pressing social issues that color contemporary society. Consequently, it is essential to recognize that the song, when evaluated through the lens of literary work, cannot be regarded as a neutral entity, devoid of bias or perspective (Dyck, 2023; Foster the People, 2010; Salsabila et al., 2023). Indeed, there are numerous instances in which such literary works actively engage with and reflect the dynamics of power, domination, and subordination, particularly when viewed through the political dimensions inherent in the broader field of cultural studies.

METHOD

To analyze the song of *Pumped Up Kicks*, the researchers use qualitative method through descriptive and explorative research. By emphasizing interpretations, this method underlines every day and problematic moments and meanings in people's lives, such as experiential experiences, introspection, life stories, interviews, observations, histories, interactive, and visual texts. Main data of this article is taken from the lyrics of the song of *Pumped Up Kicks* by Foster the People. The data is collected by doing observation, documentation, and literature studies. The researchers listened to the song and read the lyrics. Furthermore, the documentation is using the lyrics as the main object while social conflict theory is used as the primary tools used to interpret the data. Then literature study is done to collect secondary data. In this case, the researchers read books and journals to find references and to complete data into how social conflict is shown in the lyrics of the song.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Pumped Up Kicks and Its Significance

This song is nothing but a great song with meaningful lyrics. It involves melodic beats in its music alongside such lyrics that reflect today's reality. Somehow, the reality between the music and the lyrics are quite the opposite. The melodic music tends to make people follow the song happily. However, the meanings of the song are quite eerie since they are bringing forward the senses of inequalities that attract violence to come forward (Dyck, 2023; Foster the People, 2010; Salsabila et al., 2023). The full lyrics of the song is following;

[Verse 1]

*Robert's got a quick hand
He'll look around the room, he won't tell you his Plan
He's got a rolled cigarette
Hanging out his mouth, he's a cowboy kid
Yeah, he found a six-shooter gun
In his dad's closet with a box of fun things
I don't even know what
But he's come coming for you, yeah, he's coming for you, wait*

[Chorus]

*All the other kids with the pumped-up kicks
You better run, better run, outrun my gun
All the other kids with the pumped-up kicks
You better run, better run faster than my bullet
All the other kids with the pumped-up kicks
You better run, better run, outrun my gun
All the other kids with the pumped-up kicks
You better run, better run faster than my bullet*

[Verse 2]

*Daddy works a long day
He be coming home late, and he's coming home late*

*And he's bringing me a surprise
'Cause dinner's in the kitchen, and it's packed in ice
I've waited for a long time
Yeah, the sleight of my hands is now a quick-pull trigger
I reason with my cigarette
And say, "Your hair's on fire, you must've lost your wits," yeah*

[Chorus]

[Bridge]

*Run, run, run, run
Ru, run, run, run, run, run
Ru, run, run, run, run, run, run, run*

[Chorus]

Social Conflict and Its Continuances

Social Conflict Theory, developed by Karl Marx, focuses on the tension and struggle between groups with different interests in society. This theory highlights how social and economic inequalities create conflicts that lead individuals or groups to resist the system or society (Fitriani et al., 2023; Prayogi, 2023; Shuvaev et al., 2023). There are several types of social conflict and their characteristics. The first is Class Conflict. This conflict occurs between two main classes in society: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The bourgeoisie exploits the proletariat to maximize profits, which creates tension. Then, the dissatisfaction of the proletariat with working conditions and low wages often triggers social movements or revolutions to demand their rights.

In contemporary circumstances, the concept extends beyond the dichotomy of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The stratification encompasses a multitude of societal divisions that are both intrinsic and constructed by human agency. Individuals endeavor to liberate themselves from these constraints by actively resisting class hegemony (Fitriani et al., 2023; Prayogi, 2023; Shuvaev et al., 2023). This phenomenon further illustrates that disparities are, to some extent, perceived as inherent and necessitate confrontation to facilitate the emergence of a more equitable society.

The second is Economic Conflict. This occurs due to competition to control limited resources. The stronger class strives to maintain their economic power, while the weaker class struggles to gain access. Inequality in wealth distribution and economic opportunities creates tension that can lead to open conflict. This is related to the significance of economic and political issue in Marxian senses (Mishra, 2013; Orsini, 2024; Saroj & Danhju, 2019). He proposes that any issue is never neutral, but power-related. He rejects perspectives of given statuses and pushes people to go against any inequality, involving revolution in its process.

This particular category of economic issues encompasses far more than merely the exchange of money; rather, it extends to a multitude of factors and aspects that encompass the broader context surrounding such financial transactions and interactions. For instance, this complex matter may very well include the pervasive phenomenon of salary disparities that exist within the labor market as well as the pronounced and often troubling inequalities that manifest in the distribution of wealth among various social classes and demographics (Mishra, 2013; Orsini, 2024; Saroj & Danhju, 2019).

Consequently, it is imperative to recognize that these economic issues are intrinsically linked to and interconnected with a plethora of social concepts and ideologies, which in turn play a significant role in shaping the trajectory of life and societal progression as a whole. In his critical analyses, Marx articulates the notion that no economic condition ever simply exists in isolation or remains static; instead, there is invariably a dominant force at play that relentlessly pursues its insatiable appetite for resources (Mishra, 2013; Orsini, 2024; Putriana et al., 2024). It is often at the expense of those individuals and groups who are less fortunate or who find themselves in a state of economic deprivation.

The third concept that warrants attention is that of Cultural Conflict, which emerges as a consequence of the stark and often profound discrepancies in the interests and aspirations that exist between various groups within society, and this phenomenon is frequently intertwined with the complex dynamics of social status and the distribution of power among those groups. This multifaceted conflict has the potential to encompass a wide array of complex issues, including but not limited to the pervasive and insidious problems of racial or gender discrimination, which in turn serve to widen and deepen the divisions that already exist within the intertwinements of society (Mishra, 2013; Orsini, 2024; Putriana et al., 2024).

On numerous occasions, this notion also takes on a distinctly political dimension, as it pertains to the opposition and rivalry that can arise between groups possessing divergent political interests and ideologies. The underlying reason for this tension often stems from the entrenched injustices and inequities that are prevalent within the political system. Indeed, it frequently gives rise to significant friction and animosity between the ruling elite and the marginalized populations who find themselves disenfranchised (Mishra, 2013; Orsini, 2024; Putriana et al., 2024).

Moreover, such cultural conflicts are frequently manifested in situations where the values, beliefs, and norms espoused by one cultural group come into direct confrontation with those upheld by another group, and these clashes are often deeply rooted in the complexities of class distinctions or ethnic disparities. The variations in lifestyle, belief systems, and traditional practices can serve as catalysts for escalating tensions and conflicts between disparate groups (Fitriani et al., 2023; Prayogi, 2023; Shuvaev et al., 2023). It is important to understand that the issue at hand is not merely a simplistic binary of difference that is of consequence; rather, it is the intricate dualism that underpins the hierarchical disparities that perpetuate such injustices and contribute to the ongoing strife between cultural factions.

Analysis of *Pumped Up Kicks* through Social Conflict Theory

In the context of the song *Pumped Up Kicks*, Social Conflict theory helps explain the background and behavior of the character Robert and his surroundings. The term “Pumped Up Kicks” in the song refers to expensive shoes considered a symbol of social status. Children with these “expensive shoes” represent a group with privilege, both materially and socially. Robert feels marginalized because he lacks this status (Foster the People, 2010; Prayogi, 2023; Shuvaev et al., 2023). This creates feelings of envy and anger, which become the basis of Robert's conflict.

In Verse 1, the song introduces the main character, Robert, a troubled teenager. The lyrics describe Robert as a “cowboy kid” with a quick and mysterious demeanor. He is seen smoking and finding a gun in his father's closet. The lyrics of “*Robert's got a quick hand... something you'll never have.*” portray Robert as a character planning something dangerous. He feels envious of other children who have better lives than he does. Moreover, this lyric also reminds audience that social inequality between individuals can make someone feel oppressed, often

leading them to seek 'justice' by their own means (Foster the People, 2010; Prayogi, 2023; Shuvaev et al., 2023). Furthermore, audience can also see that Robert's father is not a very supportive figure, which only worsens Robert's situation. The lack of emotional support and care from those closest to him can drive a person to take extreme actions, feeling as though they have no other choice, or even developing a deep distrust toward the system meant to protect them.

In the Chorus section, the lyrics of *"All the other kids with the pumped up kicks you better run, better run, outrun my gun"* serve as a direct threat to Robert's peers. The term "Pumped Up Kicks" symbolizes popular kids with higher social status. Although presented with an upbeat melody, the lyrics reveal the dark reality of teen violence and the consequences of bullying. It reminds audience of the potential dangers of untreated mental health issues. Unfortunately, many people continue to overlook the importance of listening to others who are struggling alone (Foster the People, 2010; Prayogi, 2023; Shuvaev et al., 2023). This is especially true for instructors and parents who are uneducated or unconcerned about teenagers' mental health difficulties.

Teenagers frequently feel confused, lonely, and unwilling to talk about their problems as a result of their ignorance or lack of concern. In actuality, emotional support from their surroundings can be critical in keeping them from making decisions that would injure themselves, the others, or even jeopardize their future (Foster the People, 2010; Prayogi, 2023; Shuvaev et al., 2023). Therefore, this Chorus becomes the most famous part and serves as a warning, not only to the audience, but also to those who feel being unwell treated by their surroundings.

In Verse 2, the lyric of *"Daddy works a long day... coming home late."* is crucial. Robert's father is described as a hard worker who always comes home late, and because of this, he does not provide emotional attention to Robert. This shows neglect that contributes to Robert's mental condition. Parents must accept that their children are human beings with feelings and emotional needs. Being busy is entirely normal, but it should never be an excuse for neglecting their children. No matter how stressful life becomes, parents should always make time to chat, listen to their children's worries, and give them the attention they require (Foster the People, 2010; Prayogi, 2023; Shuvaev et al., 2023). Simple interactions, such as asking about their day, providing emotional support, or spending quality time together, can have a big impact on a child's emotional and mental development while building the parent-child link.

Another lyric of *"And he's bringing me a surprise."* indicates that when his father comes home, he brings an unclear "surprise." This creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and shows that Robert may not receive enough attention from his parents. The lack of clarity and communication within his family may make Robert feel unloved or even mistreated (Dyck, 2023; Foster the People, 2010; Prayogi, 2023). Such an environment causes a severe impact on his emotional well-being, making it difficult for him to feel safe or trust his family. If a youngster frequently feels unnoticed, they may seek acceptance or comfort elsewhere, which can lead to poor judgments or harmful conduct.

Such lyric of *"Cause dinner's in the kitchen, and it's packed in ice."* could be interpreted as a symbol of neglect and abnormality of Robert's daily life. It reflects his surroundings' failure to offer the care, structure, and emotional support he needs (Dyck, 2023; Foster the People, 2010; Prayogi, 2023). This lack of consistency may lead to feelings of loneliness, irritation, or even resentment. Over time, such an environment alters his behavior, influencing his choices and interactions. Without sufficient supervision, he struggles to have a sense of

belonging or develop maladaptive coping methods to deal with his feelings, and thus violence is his destination.

The lyric of *"I've waited for a long time"* then reflects Robert's frustration and longing for attention or affection that never comes. He feels neglected, which worsens his emotional condition. Without the assistance he needs, his feelings develop into resentment, despair, or even fury (Dyck, 2023; Foster the People, 2010; Prayogi, 2023). This extended neglect may cause him to question his own worth, making it difficult for him to trust people or develop meaningful connections. Over time, the lack of care and empathy and lead him to develop harmful coping techniques.

Such lyric of *"Yeah the sleight of my hands is now a quick-pull trigger"* symbolizes violence being enacted. This shows the transition from ordinary actions to violent ones. Robert realizes that his desperation has brought him to a point where he is ready to do something extreme. Teenagers are more prone to do violence due to their progressing nature. As a parent and teacher, it is important to realize that the actions taken by teenagers stem from their context (Dyck, 2023; Foster the People, 2010; Prayogi, 2023). The attitude, care, and service given to them goes a long way in their psychological and emotional growth.

For example, if a child has been nurtured in a supportive environment, there are high chances of them becoming emotionally balanced and confident children. However, being cornered by indifference, pressure, or abuse will lead a child to feel neglected, lonely, or suffer mental health issues (Foster the People, 2010; Prayogi, 2023; Shuvaev et al., 2023). Adults need to become more responsible with their actions and understand that people from the younger generation are prone to much more sensitive issues than they were.

Then, the lyric of *"I reason with my cigarette and say, 'your hair's on fire, you must've lost your wits?'"* describes Robert's internal conversation with himself. He tries to understand his situation, but it also shows that he is in a confused and pressured state. The phrase *"your hair's on fire"* can be interpreted as a metaphor for the dangerous situation he faces. In this part, Robert is also described to be internally fighting with his own (Dyck, 2023; Foster the People, 2010; Prayogi, 2023). The phrase *"You must've lost your wits"* could also mean that Robert realized what he had done, but he could not turn everything back because it is already too late.

In Bridge section of *"Run, run, run, faster than my bullet."*, the audience is taken into a tense atmosphere that portrays the peak of Robert's destructive thoughts. The bridge emphasizes the threat and creates a sense of urgency where it directly speaks about Robert's crime victim (Dyck, 2023; Foster the People, 2010; Prayogi, 2023; Salsabila et al., 2023). The phrase *"Faster than my bullet"* could be interpreted as a situation of life and death, where Robert with his current destructive state chases over his victim who is also his classmates or friends.

CONCLUSION

Pumped Up Kicks is an interesting example of the contrast between cheerful music and dark lyrics. The song is not just a pop song with a catchy melody. It is a social commentary on mental health and the impact of bullying. The song successfully draws public attention to serious issues like mental health and teen violence. The lyrics contains social conflict that reflects such prolonging injustice. It also shows how Robert must deal with everyday life issues that make him insignificant in everyone's eyes, including his parents. The lyrics then also convey indications of violence being done especially in the term of shooting.

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