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English 101.A01

Oct. 11, 2013

Rhetorical Essay

In 2010, Katy Perry released *Teenage Dream*, an album of glossy pop. Most songs on the album are about empowerment through independence (such as “Firework,” “Pearl,” and “Circle the Drain”) or empowerment through sexual expression (e.g. “Teenage Dream,” “Last Friday Night,” and “California Gurls”). However, there is one song on the album that, at first, seems to be about the opposite, about giving up power and depending on someone else. On the surface, “Who Am I Living For?” is about living for a lover, but a fuller understanding of Katy Perry and her background [author] shows that the song is really about another kind of empowerment.

Katy Perry, whose given name is Katherine Hudson, grew up in a conservative Christian home. Her parents were both pastors and shielded her from “secular” music, songs that did not contain religious messages. Katy Hudson embraced religious music and sang at church. In time, she even recorded her own Christian music, contemporary-styled pop songs about life as a Christian and her religious views. In time, Katy Hudson changed her professional name to “Katy Perry” and recorded the secular music once forbidden to her. However, she did not leave all of her religious ideas behind.

If considered against Perry and her religious background, the lyrics of “Who Am I Living For?” take on a deeper meaning. Perry recalls common religious expressions, such as “my own cross to bear,” “the writing on the wall,” and “so I pray for favor like Esther.” Many of these lyrics are references to biblical stories about overcoming conflict. For example, the “favor like

Esther” lyric alludes to Queen Esther and her actions to save the Jewish people from slaughter. Furthermore, in the song, Perry sees herself as being in the middle of a war in which she is “chosen” and “called,” both common religious terms for being selected by God for a purpose. When these lyrics and Perry’s religious background are considered together, the full meaning of “Who Am I Living For?” becomes clear. Perry is suggesting that power can come in living sacrificially or living for God.

“Who Am I Living For?” and its religious imagery provide the third part of Katy Perry’s personal and musical career. Perry has embraced the sexual teen glamour image (with blue doll hair and cupcake braziers). She has taken on the mature “older sister” role, offering advice for teens on how to live. But she also maintains a connection with “Katherine Hudson,” the young religious girl who believed true power came from living for God, for something larger than self-expression. By remembering “Katherine Hudson” and this religious background, listeners can fully understand “Who Am I Living For?” as a song that remains consistent with empowerment theme stretching throughout Katy Perry’s *Teenage Dream*.

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South Park's latest episode, "Raising The Bar," highlights the obesity epidemic in the United States and spoofs the degrading values of the American society. As with many *South Park* episodes, the creators, Matt Stone and Trey Parker, use satire and exaggeration to ridicule aspects of American culture. In *Raising The Bar*, the main idea Stone and Parker want to express is clear: that the people of the United States have lowered their standards for human life [purpose]. An understanding of the purpose is essential to understanding the meaning behind the crazy events that take place throughout the episode.

One of the main characters, Cartman, who is the fat one among his group of friends, decides to use a mobility chair because he is overweight. Cartman completely embraces his newfound connection to the "fat people" culture, and partakes in various activities to show how obese people are given special treatment because of their "handicap." He goes to an amusement park and is excited to be ushered to the front of the line, and he goes to public places only to use the special bathrooms that were made for him. Through Cartman's enthusiasm, Stone and Parker are portraying the idea that obese people have become content with their quality of life and comfortable with their state of being. Likewise, by demonstrating that the nation considers obesity a handicap, they show how the people of the United States have also lowered their standards. It shows our nation has accepted obesity as a normal part of society and enable an unhealthy and sedentary lifestyle through special privileges.

Later in the episode, two other main characters, Kyle and Stan, have a conversation about how the bar for society seems to be an actual, physical thing. James Cameron, the director of *Avatar* and a deep-sea explorer, is brought into the mix, and his mission is clear: to travel into the depths of the ocean, find the bar and raise it. Of course, this proves to be easier said than done because the bar happens to be very, very deep underwater. The amount of time it takes to find the drastically low bar is an effective and humorous way to blatantly point out our society has lowered their standards.

Overall, *South Park* is a television show that receives a lot of criticism for its obnoxious and crude humor. However, an understanding of the purpose of an episode is the most helpful tool toward gaining an appreciation and understanding of the meaning behind the humor, as many episodes focus on matters prevalent in American society.