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**FROM FAN TO FAM:
THE BONDING 'COUNTERS' IN THE JUGGALO CULTURE**

UDC 316.723

Historically, emerging music and music-engendered forms of youth expression and aggregation have been considered a threat to mainstream culture, due to the belief that they can corrupt it at a societal level. Expanding on these insights, this article examines how one of these music-inspired youth cultures transforms oft stigmatized traits and behaviors (e.g., clothing, slang, tattoos) into communicational and bonding elements of an "alternative family." Conducting a multimodal analysis of video documentaries, this study explores how the Juggalo community (a fan culture initially associated with the band *Insane Clown Posse*) socially constructs its identity as a countercultural family that embraces outcasts, rejects, and people who feel unfit for society. Specifically, this study looks into how the participants of this culture implement and negotiate multimodal forms of representation and communication at the "Gathering of the Juggalos," a kaleidoscopic music/arts festival that functions as an annual "family reunion" for Juggalos from around the world.

Keywords: *youth culture, cultural studies, counterculture, Juggalo culture, fandom, multimodal analysis.*



Fig. 1. A "converted" school bus at the Gathering of the Juggalos. (AJ 19:37)

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1. Introduction

Throughout history, emerging music and music-engendered forms of youth expression and aggregation have recursively been considered a threat to dominant culture. By 1955 Bill Haley and The Comets were stirring the youth of America into a frenzy with chart toppers such as "Rock Around the Clock" (Clark 1994), provoking fears that rock and roll would inspire an undermining of the moral and ethical uniformity of dominant American culture. This led to attempts to stifle the perceived rebellion through censorship of mass media in the 1950s (Cohen 1997). Yet, mainstream concern did not end with Haley hysteria. Outrage over Elvis Presley's hip gyrations, The Doors' drug laced lyrics, Bob Dylan's songs of protest, and John Lennon's claim of being more popular than Jesus drove a further wedge between the adults and youth of America through the 1970s. Likewise, when Britain's punk movement landed in the ears of American youth, bands such as The Sex Pistols introduced anarchist sentiment into adolescents' discourse causing adults to question nothing less than the future of democracy in the United States (Cohen 1997; Jones 1991; Tillman 1980; Timmons 2011). The onset and popularization of controversial genres such as hip hop and heavy metal in the 1980s led to Ozzy Osborne and Judas Priests being blamed for incidents of youth suicide (Wright 2000), while albums by 2 Live Crew and N.W.A. sparked outrage over their violent and sexual content (Lynxwiler & Gay 2000). In the 1990s, shock rock bands such as Marilyn Manson came under attack, as grieving families cited their music as an underlying cause for the massacre at Columbine High School (Frymer 2009). More recently, electronic dance music has been associated with spikes in the abuse of drugs such as Ecstasy and LSD by youth (Anderson 2009; McCaughan et al. 2005).

Modern history has been ripe with condemnation against countercultural music genres due to the presupposition they encourage deviation from mainstream morality and culture, corrupting not only adolescents, but society at large (Wortham 2011). One spillover from this attack on music genres is that youth cultures are organized around musical preferences or artists (Blair 1993; Miranda & Claes 2004; Nayak 2003). Thus, when music is perceived as deviant, corresponding youth cultures are often stereotyped on the content of the music, lyrics, and imagery of such artists (Rentfrow & Gosling 2007), which can result in the stigmatization of individuals only on the basis of their affiliation to a specific artist or scene (Taylor 1981). Crocker and Major (1989) contend that stigmatized individuals in American society are often disadvantaged socially and economically when compared to their peers.

This article expands on these insights to suggest that those who are stigmatized by society due to their alignment with situated youth cultures may find new forms of non-traditional families in which those oft stigmatizing characteristics (e.g., clothing, language, behaviors) can become a foundation of unity.

2. The Juggalo Culture

There is a strong relationship between music preferences and youth cultures (Miranda & Claes 2004). While some genres, such as classical music, lend themselves to positive social perceptions (Kanazawa & Perina 2012), others (e.g., hip hop, punk, heavy metal) are oftentimes considered deviant by mainstream culture, due to their content, oft perceived as explicit and controversial (Lynxwiler & Gay 2000; Selfhout et al. 2008). It is not uncommon for those who have been stigmatized as *personae non gratae* of any mainstream culture to seek out relationships with other "outcasts" to celebrate their stigmatized status and construct a communal identity (Jones et al. 1984; Wortham 2011). One such music-inspired community is the Juggalo culture.



Fig. 2. A Juggalette in the sun at the Gathering of the Juggalos. (AJ 06:33)

Associated with Detroit based rappers Insane Clown Posse and other artists signed with independent record label Psychopathic Records, Juggalos (feminine form: Juggalettes) have found unity through enjoyment of bands in the "horrorcore" subgenre, which features explicit horror-inspired lyrics and imagery (Halnon 2004; 2006). Although it originated in the United States, the Juggalo culture has become a worldwide phenomenon spreading as far as Australia (Bevin). Despite its status as one of the most "socio-economically,

disenfranchised, and marginalized" (Halnon 2004: 755) of music fan bases, the Juggalo culture prides itself as a welcoming community for those who feel they do not belong anywhere else within society.

3. Exploring the Juggalo Culture Through Multimodal Analysis

Multimodal analysis is a methodological approach used to make sense of different, and oftentimes intertwined, forms of representation, communication, and interaction that include, but are not limited to, language, images, sound, posture, and gestures (Jewitt 2014; Kress & Van Leeuwen 2001). In multimodal analysis, the role of language is not overshadowed by other modes of communication, but rather complemented by them, since all modes have an equal potential to contribute to meaning-making (Jewitt 2014; Norris 2004). In other words, in multimodal analysis language is not considered a "privileged mode," but rather one of the building blocks of the multimodal spectrum, each having "equal rights" to represent, communicate, and contribute to the construction of meaning. Further, multimodality cannot be considered merely a study of non-verbal communication, since it does not exclude language; on the contrary, it looks at its role in communication, in relation to other modes and their interconnections. Multimodal communication is socially negotiated, historically constructed, and culturally situated (Jewitt 2014b; Kress 2001). Any culture is a multimodal culture, because there is no such thing as a "monomodal culture" and "social, cultural and historical factors influence and mediate how modes are taken up and used for practices of meaning making and the convections that stabilize around these practices" (Jewitt 2014a: 4-5).

Multimodality is becoming increasingly relevant in research that deals with human communication, due to the popularization of audiovisual technologies (e.g. compact cameras and smartphones) and the diffusion of user-generated content on social media such as *YouTube*, *Vimeo*, and *Vine*. In this context, Jewitt (2014a) argues that "speech and writing no longer appear adequate in understanding representation and communication in a variety of fields and the need to understand the complex ways in which speech and writing interact with 'non-verbal' modes can no longer be avoided" (3). From a sociological and anthropological perspective, this study examines how the Juggalo community implements and negotiates multimodal conventions that include language, food, and clothing (Kress 2014) to socially construct their identity as a family in their annual reunion, a kaleidoscopic music/arts festival that attracts thousands of fans, called the "Gathering of the Juggalos" (GOTJ).

In the framework of multimodal analysis applied to the examination of videos and films (Iedema 2001; Mondada 2008; O'Halloran 2004), this study is focused on three video documentaries dedicated to the GOTJ festival and accessed on the social website *YouTube* (<http://www.youtube.com>). After searching for the term "Juggalo" on the website, the first three video documentaries dedicated to the "Gathering of the Juggalos" have been selected for the analysis: "American Juggalo" (The Documentary Network 2013; 23:22 min; henceforth referred to as AJ); "I've Been Down: The Gathering of the Juggalos" (Greybox.TV 2012; 20:45 min; henceforth referred to as IVBD); and "Joe Goes Juggalo" (Badgesofshame 2014; 20:04 min; henceforth referred to as JGJ).

The research questions of this study are: 1) What are the multimodal expressions of counterculture in the Gathering of the Juggalos? 2) What are such expressions of counterculture doing?

Independent analyses of the three selected documentaries were conducted by each researcher. Multiple viewings of the documentaries resulted in the production of verbatim transcriptions, reflective journal entries, and time stamped notes corresponding with the research questions. The two authors met to share insights and compare notes for negotiating the development of thematic codes that emerged from the analyses of the documentaries, as related to the multimodal expressions of counterculture displayed at the Gathering of the Juggalos.

4. The Gathering of The Juggalos (GOTJ)

Each summer, thousands of Juggalos come together for a festival called the "Gathering of The Juggalos" (GOTJ) in the Midwestern United States (Halnon 2014). The setting for this event can be interpreted as a crossover between a theme park (organized play), a carnival show (masks and feasting), and a circus (clowns and performing). The GOTJ can be viewed as a ritual akin to a "countercultural family reunion" in which those who are marginalized and stigmatized by mainstream society throughout the year can come together to celebrate their diversity and shared identity.

At this festival, Juggalos use different modes to produce "countercultural statements" that end up becoming building blocks of a collective bonding ritual. These multimodal "family sayings" and "family ways of being" contribute to creating a discrete inner "family space" opposed to the societal outer "non-place" (Augé 2008), a locus occupied only because of circumstances or necessity, such as a hotel room or an airport.

4.1 From *Fan* to *Fam*

Although initially drawn to the Juggalo culture by a shared interest in the music of artists associated with the record label Psychopathic Records, interviewees across all three analyzed documentaries emphasize that music fandom (being a fan) has progressively been overtaken by a sense of belonging to the Juggalo family ("fam"), as expressed by the following quotes of Juggalos and Juggalette at the GOTJ:

I don't use the music ever to claim if you're a Juggalo or not. (IVBD 04:14)

I've got friends who don't even listen to ICP [Insane Clown Posse], you know. (IVBD 04:35)

To be a Juggalo it's not about the music; it's about, you know, family. (IVBD 04:40)

I've been here for so many of them [GOTJs]. It's not [...] the artist that we are here for anymore. It's the simple weekend to spend the time with everybody that [...] we don't get to see on the year because of life, because of everything else. (IVBD 10:42)

In the last quote, the adverb "anymore" is important, as it signifies a transition from gathering as fans in the past (to attend the show of an artist) to gathering as a family (to meet other Juggalos).

4.2 The Juggalos as a Countercultural Family

While most family relations are forged by genetic lines and shared histories, Juggalos seem to primarily be brought together by a sense of rejection from mainstream culture, as exemplified by the following quotes:

We don't fit in society outside. We didn't fit in high school. We don't fit in our work place. (JGJ 02:28)

We get unreasonable attention everywhere we go. Whether it be the restaurant, and they sit you by the, by the restroom because they want to keep the riff raff over with the shit. (JGJ 09:29)

Juggalos perceive themselves as being "the most hated people on earth" (IVBD 02:45), "despised, spit on, pissed on" (JGJ 09:17), and unjustly treated like a gang (JGJ 09:57). It is important to note here that in 2012 the Juggalos have been profiled by the FBI as a gang (Halnon 2014), which seems to have made them *de facto* "the first official counterculture," or, rather, "the first officially misunderstood and misrepresented counterculture."

Even if Juggalos feel marginalized by the mainstream society, their community prides itself on the acceptance of people from all walks of life (IVBD 14:52; 16:15), including Straight Edgers (AJ 16:53; 17:20), meth users (JGJ

00:38), fifth grade dropouts (JGJ 10:52), and college graduates (AJ 17:20). As one Juggalo contends, "It's about united nation. It don't matter your race, your size, your sex, your gender, what you're into, how you like it. As long as you claim the J-U-double G-ALO...You're accepted, buddy!" (AJ 21:42). This idea of "Juggalo nation" is also visually represented through conceptual reinterpretations of the American flag (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4). Further, although not biologically related, several Juggalos contend the relationships forged with others in the community are more significant than those experienced with their own relatives. One Juggalette stated:

I first became a Juggalo because of my brother right here [she indicates a boy standing nearby]. I mean, I've known him for over eleven years now. He's not my blood, but goddamn it, he'll be the closest thing I'll ever have to blood, you know? (AJ 03:17)

For the attendees of a family reunion, it is not unusual to wear similar clothing (e.g., custom printed t-shirts displaying the family surname). Such external means of expression help communicate an internal sense of belonging, and, at the same time, they demarcate *insiders* (family members) from *outsiders* (non-family members). Across the documentaries, such family identifiers are displayed in a variety of ways including clown-painted faces, clown masks, t-shirts, caps, and jewelry.



Fig. 3. The American flag featuring the "Hatchet Man," instead of the stars. (AJ 22:11)



Fig. 4. "United Streets of America" : An alternative version of the American flag. (JGJ 12:00)

Both clothing and hair styles present a recurring color scheme of radiant colors (e.g., acid green and fuchsia) intertwined with black, which resembles black light posters and contrasts with the mellow conformity (and uniformity) of clothing in mainstream society (Fig. 5). Resembling the appearance of Hatchet Man, the logo of Psychopathic Records, hair is often spiked or braided (AJ 00:20; JGJ 02:42).



Fig. 5. A Juggalette with a "Hatchet Man" necklace and the contrast between vivid colors and black. (IVBD 17:37)

While the above mentioned identifiers are temporary (i.e., faces can be washed, clothing and hairstyles can be changed), the display of Juggalo related tattoos (e.g., *Juggalo Family*, *Juggalette*, Hatchet Man logo) is pervasive

throughout the documentaries as a permanent indicator of one's sense of belonging in the community (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. A tattoo on the leg of a Juggalette representing a female variation of the "Hatchet Man." (AJ 05:09)

As one Juggalo humorously posits: "This guy was walking around asking if you've seen this guy with a Hatchet Man tattoo. There's about 15,000 of us... We've all got Hatchet Man tattoos!" (AJ 10:11). Another attendee comments that community related tattoos are so common, conversations about the placement of tattoos (e.g., necks and torsos-AJ 10:00, legs-AJ 5:08, arms-IVBD 00:37) are more common than conversations about the tattoos themselves. Such tattoos, frequently despised by outsiders and mainstream society, become bonding elements that prompt visual, verbal, and physical interaction.

4.3 And the Ninja Said "Whoop Whoop": Communication in The Juggalo Family

Family reunions can be loud affairs filled with laughter, storytelling, and other ways of expressing enjoyment of spending time with loved ones. Juggalos express themselves in these ways, as well as other modes that would likely be frowned upon at a traditional family reunion: they refer to each other as "ninjas" (JGJ 02:16), use rampant profanity (AJ 05:12), and openly discuss sex (JGJ 01:56). Attendees at the GOTJ also communicate through humorous writings on pieces of cardboard, body paint, and t-shirts (AJ 12:28; AJ 16:17; AJ 18:24). Examples include "I need a single Juggalette or a pair of Letts" (AJ 12:26), "21 Year old virgin. No STDS! PLEASE HELP" (AJ 18:24; Fig. 7), and "Titties 4 a dollar" (AJ 19:20).

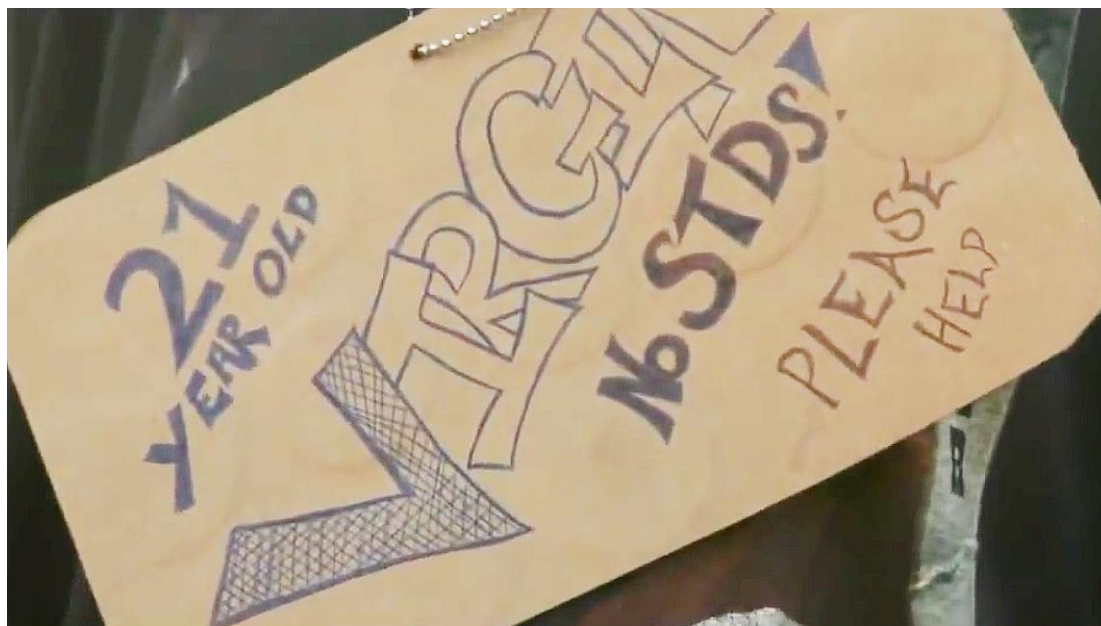


Fig. 7. Humorous cardboards as communicational and connecting devices at the Gathering of the Juggalos. (AJ 18:24)

These communicational devices represent a humorous opportunity to be noticed, connect, and establish bonds. Further, they recall the signs fans have for their favorite artists at concerts. The fact that such signs are now addressed at other Juggalos (not at artists), again signals a passage from fandom (artist-directed) to family (member-directed).

The omnipresent "Whoop Whoop" salute, as one Juggalette states, is "just how we communicate or say what's up" (JGJ 03:33). In the documentaries, this phrase is almost always emphasized by physical gestures, such as hand signs or arms up in the air (AJ-11:10; AJ-12:00). Whether one is responding to those passing by (AJ 19:48), expressing love for the Juggalo family (AJ 21:42), talking with friends (AJ 16:24), or virtually any other scenario that occurs throughout a GOTJ, the phrase is chanted repeatedly by Juggalos and functions as a dynamic connector between strangers, an "instant family-maker" that acknowledges the openness and generativity of familiar bonds in the Juggalo community. It is an instinctive and primordial salutation, a quick and effective way to say "Even if I don't know you, you matter to me, because you are part of the family; and you are part of the family because the society doesn't care about you. They ignore you – I call on you. They reject you – I welcome you."



Fig. 8. The “Whoop whoop” salute emphasized by gestures. (IVBD 06:59)

4.4 The Socially Constructive Misbehaviors in the Gathering of the Juggalos

The Gathering of the Juggalos is “like a family reunion, it really is” (JGJ 01:32). However, even if it brings together diverse generations to spend time together (AJ 16:36; AJ 20:50; IVBD 12:36; IVBD 16:38), communally share meals, tell stories, and enjoy entertainment, the GOTJ features several exhibits of behaviors that would likely be considered unacceptable at a mainstream family gathering.

Examples of such behaviors include pouring *Faygo*, a sweetened and colorful soft drink, on one’s own head or on other people (AJ 00:22; AJ 22:19; JGJ 00:21), throwing objects (AJ 00:32), chewing gum emphatically (AJ 00:39; AJ 01:00), wearing menacing face paint (AJ 00:57; AJ 01:22; AJ 01:53; AJ 02:06; AJ 08:27), being half-naked (AJ 00:53; AJ 09:00; AJ 19:17; AJ 22:09) or completely naked (AJ 08:28; JGJ 01:44), dancing barefoot on tables (AJ 01:02), sticking out one’s tongue (AJ 02:02; AJ 21:51), dancing erotically (IVBD 08:15), using or selling drugs (JGJ 03:16; IVBD 11:57), and spraying painting on private property (IVBD 18:52), to name a few.

While these behaviors would be considered deviant or even criminal in the outside world, in the context of the GOTJ not only are they *socially acceptable*, but also *socially constructive*, as they contribute to forming a shared countercultural identity. Further, apparently “neutral” items, such as the soft-drink *Faygo* (Fig. 9), end up becoming communicational and bonding devices that represent the identity of the Juggalo culture.



Fig. 9. People spraying the colorful soft-drink *Faygo* at a Juggalo wedding. (JGJ 00:22)

5. Conclusions

This article presented idiosyncratic forms of representation, expression, and communication enacted by Juggalos at their annual gathering. The three analyzed documentaries show common themes that highlight situated bonding rituals and behaviors, many of which would likely be considered *faux pas* at traditional family gatherings, but that instead function as socially constructive bridges in the Juggalo family.

Throughout the years, Juggalos have transitioned from a music-inspired fandom to a community-driven family in which diversity and freedom of expression are valued and celebrated. Notwithstanding the labels and stigmatization of the dominant culture, Juggalos have constructed a family identity based on nonjudgmental relationships, reciprocal respect, and welcoming attitudes that facilitate intergenerational and cross-cultural bonds.

In conclusion, the multimodal analysis of the documentaries shows that the Gathering of the Juggalos can be interpreted as an opportunity for individual and group identity formation through the celebration of common rites, shared symbols, behavioral norms, and sheer diversity. In the context of their annual reunion, Juggalos' expressions of counterculture contribute to raising an open and dynamic family, creating original forms of representation and communication that function as strengthening bonds and countercultural reactions to the negligence and distrust of mainstream society.

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