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## **Analysing the media discourses surrounding DJs as authentic performers and artists within electronic dance music culture magazines**

### **Abstract**

This paper critically analyses how the media construct, consolidate and perpetuate discourses surrounding DJs as artists. It explores representations of their status and roles in a selection of dance music magazines (*Mixmag* and *DJ Mag*) and the links to wider ideologies concerning music and dance culture such as authenticity, originality, innovation, cultural progression and performance. It considers how the media bestow DJs with artistic credibility and authenticity in addition to the range and type of references used to position DJs within the cultural landscape and hierarchy of electronic dance music culture (EDMC). Furthermore, it discusses their sensationalist construction as powerful performers and the links between DJ performances and wider discourses surrounding event experiences. This paper concludes that not only do the discourses perpetuated serve to elevate and sustain the cultural status of DJs, they also validate and perpetuate a wider range of ideological notions within dance music culture. It also highlights the power relations between authors, audiences, DJs and promoters and the medias role in sustaining the social capital of different players, through projecting a vibrant and dynamic culture.

**Key words: DJs; EDMC; dance music culture; authenticity; media discourse; subcultural ideologies.**

### **Introduction**

Electronic dance music culture (EDMC) describes the musical genres and events which evolved from the warehouse scene of the mid 1980's and rave scene of the early 1990's. It contains a plethora of interrelated music cultures, genres, artists and events spanning the globe, characterised by electronic music, played by DJs in clubs and festivals to dancing crowds and is a popular leisure activity. The 1990's saw the rise of DJs to celebrity figures and whilst genres, events, media and

technology have evolved to create a range of underground and mainstream elements, DJs remain a central element of contemporary (electronic) dance music culture. This paper focuses specifically on DJs, revered by participants and the media and endowed with various qualities associated with authenticity, uniqueness, artistic credibility, creativity and performance (see Brewster & Broughton, 2000; Farrugia & Swiss, 2005; Girard, 2011; Haslam, 2001; Jackson, 2004; Langlois, 1992; Montano, 2010; Montano, 2011; Phillips, 2009; Reynolds, 1998). Whilst there is a wealth of literature relating to DJs, analysis of the media discourses surrounding them is limited. Although Herman (2006) analyses discourses surrounding authorship and DJs from a number of magazines and other artefacts, given the media role in constructing our social world (see Barker, 2000; Briggs & Cobley, 1998; Cohen, 1972; Wheaton & Beal, 2003) and its influence on various elements of dance music culture (Brewster & Broughton, 2000; Bussman, 1998; Herman, 2006; Jaimangal-Jones, 2012; Malbon, 1999; Thornton, 1995), further exploration of this area is beneficial to our understanding of dance music culture. Indeed Thornton (1995, p. 14) considers that within the 'economy of subcultural capital' the niche media are 'crucial to the definition and distribution of cultural knowledge' yet they have received limited analysis to date.

Through a discourse analysis of a range of magazine articles, this paper contributes to our understanding of dance music culture, through exploring niche media discourses surrounding DJs. The discussion focuses primarily on two magazines (*Mixmag* and *DJ Mag*) for their broader take on dance music culture, there are also some features from *Knowledge/Kmag*, which had a narrower market focus. The analysis was conducted from an insider perspective, having been a participant in dance music culture and a DJ since the mid 1990's, I performed at a range of events from the mid 1990's to the mid 00's, with infrequent gigs to this day. Having had some success, I decided to pursue DJing as a hobby, rather than a career. However, my involvement has led me to question how some DJs are elevated to such high cultural statuses and the role the media plays through constructing and perpetuating different ideological discourses? This is area has received little attention to date despite the significance of DJs to dance music culture and its popularity more broadly as a leisure activity. Therefore the key contributions of this paper are strengthening our understanding of the media discourses surrounding DJs, specifically how the media emphasise the cultural status and credentials of DJs as artists and performers. This analysis reveals the role of niche media in enforcing cultural ideologies including authenticity, originality, cultural progression, exclusivity, cultural capital, escapism and experiential consumption. Exploring the media representation of DJs also aids our understanding of the interrelationship between performers, events and the media more broadly. Methodologically this paper demonstrates the value of discourse analysis in events and leisure studies research and the role of niche media analysis in understanding

various facets of leisure cultures and experiences, particularly in terms of the ideologies which underpin their social practices.

## **Contextualising the research**

### ***Dance music culture and the media***

The media is central to the construction and consolidation of identity within dance music culture (Jaimangal-Jones, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2015). Also in terms of cultural validation whereby ‘members of subcultures acquire a sense of themselves and their relation to the rest of society from the way they are represented in the media’ (Bennett, 1999, p. 604). Historically many youth cultures sought distance from the mass media, as its accessibility reduces the exclusivity of cultural knowledge and discourse. Conversely, niche media were embraced as they perpetuate youth cultural discourses through evocative reporting and selective reference to markers of cultural distinction (Thornton, 1995). Within dance culture a range of niche media vehicles exist to serve cultural and commercial agendas and are highly influential in generating and disseminating cultural knowledge and capital (Jaimangal-Jones, 2012; Thornton, 1995). They provide a cultural narrative and commentary on musical trends, developments and events (Huq, 2006), whilst also serving their own commercial agendas in their reporting (Hall, Evans, & Nixon 2013).

The influence of magazines within dance culture peaked around the Millennium in terms of the number of publications and circulation figures. *Ministry* (part of the Ministry of Sound group) ceased publishing in December 2002, *Muzik* in September 2003 and other publications such as *Jockey Slut*, *Seven* and *Wax* also ceased operations between 2002 and 2004, and *Knowledge Magazine* (subsequently rebranded *Kmag*) ceased publishing in 2009. However, a small number of magazines continue to this day like *Mixmag* and *DJ Mag*. Although one could question the relevance and value of magazine discourse to the contemporary positioning of DJs. I would argue the cultural status of DJs has been cemented by historical media reporting of their performances and productions, to which magazines made a significant contribution. Therefore, even though the circulation of magazines is lower, exploring the discourses they generate and perpetuate is significant to our appreciation and understanding of present day dance music culture. Also it is notable that both *Mixmag* and *DJ Mag* are not just print magazines, but global media brands. In terms of readership in 2015 *Mixmag* (print version) had a monthly circulation of 16,000 (Southern, 2015), the *Mixmag* Digital app (a replica of the magazine) had 98,000 subscribers worldwide (*Mixmag*, 2016). *DJ Mag* had a monthly UK print circulation of 35,000 in 2014 along with a *DJ Mag* app (*DJ Mag*, 2014). Both publications also have extensive online outlets such as websites (*Mixmag.net* claims to have 1.2 million unique users per month and *DJMag.net* 500,000) (*DJ Mag*, 2014; *Mixmag*, 2016), YouTube channels (at the time of

writing Mixmag TV has 652,890 subscribers and DJ Mag TV has 246,463) and social media followings on platforms including Facebook and twitter. These figures demonstrate that although the print magazines have lower circulations than at their peak, these brands have a huge global following and thus remain very influential. It is also notable that the primary content on their social media channels are videos of DJ performances and interviews.

### *Authenticity and cultural discourse*

It is well established that the media play a major role in cultural activities and are central to the power structures and systems of belief, shaping the definition and distribution of cultural knowledge and ideologies (Hall et al., 2013). In turn, ideology is central to the development of meaning, interpretation and response structures, which shape cultures (Blumer, 1969). A key element this paper explores is how the various facets of authenticity are linked and positioned in relation to DJs within the media. Within dance music culture, notions of authenticity and cultural integrity are omnipresent and interlinked with discourses of artistry and performance, and notions of underground and mainstream (Thornton, 1995). Ideologically, those who consider themselves as part of authentic underground genres view the mainstream as unoriginal and shallow, a product of homogenised cultural production and of lower cultural value (Huq, 2006; Shuker, 2005). As the antithesis of the mainstream, ideologically the underground is independent, authentic, real, autonomous, uncommercialised and culturally exclusive (Banerjea, 2000). Replicating wider cultural discourse, dance music cultures celebrate groundbreaking artists, whilst seeking to preserve the identities of genres from unscrupulous commercial exploitation. This links to discourses of authenticity and originality, where authentic cultural products display cultural continuities, yet possess distinct original properties (Spracklen, 2013). Authenticity is highly valued ideologically and is central to 'discourses surrounding popular music' (Shuker, 1998, p. 20). An elusive and subjective attribute of artist's and music, entwined with narratives of 'originality, creativity, sincerity, uniqueness [and] musicianship' (Huq, 2006, p. 113). It also links to notions of community, tradition and the natural (Johnson, 2000), whilst its subjective nature and the interactions between life experiences and media consumption makes it fluid and contested (Blumer, 1969). As Feifan Xie (2003, p. 6) comments, 'the authentic is not a fixed property of an object or a situation but is a negotiated attribute with multiple dimensions whose status is evaluated by different assessors'.

Discussing music and authenticity Johnson (2000, p. 281) considers two factors are 'crucial to authenticity [these] are context and purpose'. Context can be applied in numerous ways to dance culture, from a musical perspective each genre has a pallet of sounds, beat patterns, tempo range and production techniques which distinguish them from others and evolve over time. Thus the contextual

situation of samples and sounds and their links to the wider musical landscape are highly relevant to notions of authenticity and originality (Girard, 2011). Then there is the arrangement of songs within DJ performances, which may be from the confines of one genre or a mix of several – the latter approach however must be carefully negotiated to retain authenticity and cultural acceptance. As Shuker (2005, p. 121) indicates with genres there is a ‘tension between...emphasis on standardized codes...and their fluidity as these codes are elaborated on and challenged and displaced with new codes’. Whilst some genres can be mixed e.g. house and techno, others are stylistically and ideologically too different to credibly mix together, therefore DJs who transcend genres tread a fine line between authenticity, innovation and alienation. In terms of genuineness, authenticity also relates to motivations and purpose. If something is perceived as genuinely motivated, it is authentic however, when something is insincerely motivated, it may be interpreted as lacking authenticity (Huq, 2006). This highlights the intertextuality and subjectivity surrounding authenticity, as ‘a relative and constructed concept’ (Johnson, 2000, p. 283). Shuker (2005, p. 17) goes further suggesting that ‘perceptions of authenticity (or non-authenticity) are also present in the degree to which performers and records are assimilated and legitimized by particular subcultures or communities’. This further emphasises the role of the media in validating the cultural credentials of DJs through reporting on their performances, musical productions and contextualization within the wider cultural landscape.

Within dance music culture, as with other musical cultures, there are genres and sub-genres where levels of authenticity are greater, as Shuker (2005, p. 122) states ‘genres are accorded specific places in a musical hierarchy by both critics and fans, and by many performers...loosely based around notions of authenticity, sincerity and commercialism’. Given the current popularity of dance music culture most genres have a commercial and mainstream element e.g. electro-house, EDM, drum and bass and trance. They also have sub-genres for example deep house, tech-house, and liquid drum and bass, which are commercially and ideologically less accessible and have greater underground status with the implications (for participants) that they are more authentic and original. The subjective nature of authenticity however means that genres which are more accessible, will still be considered as authentic by their followers although it may be recognised that they are valued less in terms of cultural capital (Thornton, 1995).

Another aspect which DJs are valued for are their live performances and their ability to transport audiences through unique experiences, with powerful and emotional audience reactions serving as authentication of DJs credentials (Jaimangal-Jones, 2012; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003). Although the artistic works of DJs (mixes and tracks produced) will be experienced by participants in different formats e.g. through streaming, downloading or purchasing DJ mixes, the ability of artists to

perform live is symbolic of their worth (Brewster & Broughton, 2000). Also the manner in which live performances are reported will inevitably influence the public perception and image of DJs leading to increased demand for their mixes, tracks and tickets to their live performances, thus fulfilling commercial agendas (Phillips, 2009). Whilst much has been written about the experiential dimensions of dance music events, the media representation of DJs performances and links to discourses of experiential consumption and escapism has not been significantly explored either.

The links between authenticity and ideologies surrounding musical artists are well established in many senses. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to apply the various dimensions of artistry and authenticity discussed above, to the media reporting on DJs, to explore how journalists and DJs navigate these cultural discourses. Exploring how they tackle aspects such as originality, purpose, motivations, genre tensions, commitment and contribution in addition to considering indicators of acceptance and approval will be key areas of focus in the following sections.

### **Research approach and methods**

The findings in this paper are the result of a thematic discourse analysis, seeking to investigate the prevailing discourses surrounding DJs as artists and their links to wider cultural ideologies concerning music and dance culture such as authenticity, originality, innovation, cultural contribution and performance (Stokes, 2003; Tonkiss, 1998). The magazines chosen were *DJ Mag* and *Mixmag* for the global status of their brands and the range of genres and sub-groups they cover within dance music culture. In terms of the profiles of readers *DJ Mag*'s are 97% male, average age is 26, 67% are DJs (with 59% being aspiring/bedroom DJs and the remainder professional DJs) and 67% go clubbing at least once a week (*DJ Mag*, 2014). *Mixmag*'s readers are 72% male and 28% female and the median age of readers is stated as 24 (*Mixmag*, 2016). It is evident these magazines target different audiences, whilst *DJ Mag* is geared to those with an interest in music and aspiring DJs, *Mixmag* focuses on music and wider club culture. Both magazines have a predominantly male audience with *DJ Mag* being nearly exclusively so, this is probably attributable to the DJ audience who are also largely male. The initial phase of the research was conducted in 2003/2004 as part of a PhD with an exploration of a range of magazine features; this was followed up by further investigations between 2008 and 2016, to update the initial findings and ascertain if such approaches continued over time. From this analysis a range of discursive themes emerged within the media surrounding DJs, these are classified within the discussion under the headings of musical evolution and progression, cultural contribution and commitment, technical ability and DJs as performers.

There are a range of approaches to media analysis. Discourse analysis was chosen as it provides insights into the cultural mechanics and value systems at play, by exploring the meaning and

wider cultural signification of language. As Fairclough (1995, p. 55) comments 'language use – any text – is always simultaneously constitutive of (1) social identities, (2) social relations and (3) systems of knowledge and belief (corresponding respectively to identities, relationships and representations)'. Therefore, analysing the construction and reception of texts (magazines) provide insights into media agendas in terms of maintaining and transforming systems of knowledge and belief (ideational functions). This relates to social practices and beliefs and how specific ideologies are perpetuated or challenged within the media. Analysis should also consider the power relations between author and audience – is it formal or informal, are they trying to create distance or intimacy? Also one must question the identities of different social actors - in this case journalists, DJs and the magazine consumers (interpersonal functions). How are issues of status addressed in terms of statuses sought and terms used to convey status? What roles are being performed and stressed? Who has authority and how is it constructed and conveyed? These are all questions which required consideration as part of this analysis.

Discourse analysis therefore requires intricate examination of texts through scrutinising the use of language, i.e. choice and arrangement of words within sentences, connections between sentences, cultural references and applicability to wider socio-cultural contexts and audiences (Fairclough, 1995; Saukko, 2003). In line with the advice of Tonkiss (1998), the approach was to identify articles focusing on DJ performances and interviews with DJs, then analyse the reporting and markers of social distinction utilised to validate the cultural positioning of DJs within the context of EDMC. Drawing from semiotic analysis and viewing words as signs functioning in wider systems of signification, the literal meanings of words provide the starting point for discourse analysis by considering what is presented at face value. Once the obvious interpretation has been considered, the second level of analysis explores what is implied by certain signs to generate meaning for the recipients given their social context (Blommaert, 2005). Here one can take multiple readings and extract multiple intended outcomes and layers of meaning from the same text, based on interpretations of signs, media agendas and audience interpretations. As Slater (1998, p. 238) comments, 'words do not derive their meaning either from the psychological intentions of individual speakers, or from the things the words describe. Rather their meanings arise from their place in a system of signs and their relations of difference or sequence with other terms in the system'. Indexicality is another aspect of discourse analysis, Blommaert (2005, p. 11) states how in addition to the 'referential meaning, acts of communication produce *indexical* meaning: social meaning, interpretive leads between what is said and the social occasion in which it is being produced'. So we must look not only to what specific words refer to, but also understand that they index particular statuses, roles and identities both of the writers and others within texts. For example, this work was exploring the social status attributed to

DJs and how the media perpetuate and elevate different DJs status' by the terms of reference used. It is not just the direct meaning of language used, but the wider implications and connotations of its use. How the media creates status and artistic credibility through indexing aspects such as authenticity, originality, cultural contribution, technical ability and so forth are a key feature of this analysis.

My insider role was also helpful, in terms of reflecting on the cultural codes and 'cultural knowledge' required 'to understand the text' (Stokes, 2003, p. 75). Exploring the signs and signifiers, such as genres, record labels, releases, events, cultural contribution and other markers of distinction, I was also able to consider the cultural knowledge required to interpret texts and its role in conferring the statuses of journalists as cultural commentators and DJs as cultural icons. Other important issues for consideration are matters of variation, emphasis, silences and equilibrium within the text (Stokes, 2003; Tonkiss, 1998). For example, do articles emphasise particular common themes, or bring anything new or unexpected to the fore, are there specific absences? Do they readdress and alter power relations, or do they seek to enforce existing ones? The approach to this analysis could be considered an ethnographic approach, as it is very much concerned with the social construction of DJs in the eyes of participants, through their reporting in the media. This is described by Blommaert (2005, p. 16) as an 'ethnographic-sociolinguistic analysis of discourse', which focuses on 'linguistic form' and 'social environment' i.e. text and context in of the exploration of social worlds.

## **Results and discussion DJs and the media**

The credibility and status attributed to DJs in EDMC is largely down to their cultural status as 'artists' and entertainers. Although DJs primarily select and mix music, over time they have achieved the cultural status of artists and pop stars. This section considers how the media represent DJs and link them with wider discourses of musical evolution and progression, cultural contribution and commitment, technical ability and position them as powerful performers.

### ***Musical evolution and progression***

Firstly, musical evolution is a central element of dance culture ideology, mixing musical influences and pushing the boundaries of musical genres to create new ones (Haslam, 2002; McLeod, 2001). The media positioning of DJs largely correlates with and complements this discourse of musical evolution and innovation, portraying DJs as innovators and sources of artistic progression. Many media interviews pay considerable attention to the factors influencing the progression and development of a DJ's sound, which makes them unique, authentic and original. A DJ's sound is reflected in their compositions, musical selection, sequencing of records and technical mixing skills. Such differentiation is elemental to generating and enhancing artistic credibility and authenticity, where uniqueness of style and composition are highly valued traits (Ebare, 2004). This issue is

exemplified in the following comment by Clarke (2012, p. 29) in *DJ Mag* discussing Maya Jane Coles a DJ awarded Best Producer of 2011 who states ‘From deep tech house to delectable dub-wise treats, Maya’s production’s ruled 2011 ... the former “one to watch” has been streaking ahead of the pack so fast that you’d need a telescope to keep her in view’. Such comments are common, emphasising the variety and originality of musical outputs, the development of individual styles and wider role in musical progression. Stating she was awarded ‘best producer’ and her ‘production’s ruled 2011’ also further enforces and evidences her authoritative status and distinctiveness as a performer (Clarke, 2012, p. 29). The use of genre labels (a common facet of media reporting) also assert the authority of the author, as a credible cultural commentator and the identity of the reader as a knowledgeable participant (or not, depending on their understanding of this description).

Speaking to Danny Tenaglia, a world renowned house DJ about to begin a new residency at super club Space in Ibiza in an interview titled ‘Return of the King’ Burns (2008, p. 66) discusses his ability to evolve over time, stating ‘it’s not a stretch to say that Danny Tenaglia may just be house music’s version of the...Human Chameleon.’ Further on in the same feature Burns (2008, p. 66) states how ‘Tenaglia approaches every track like a remix, adding a touch of his classic “Elements” here or taking the vocal from GummiHz’s “Desire”’. Again, this evidences musical development and progression, however being described as a chameleon could also be interpreted as being inconsistent, two faced and disloyal to certain scenes and lacking authentic roots (although I believe it is intended as a complement). Through describing his approach to ‘every track like a remix’ and the reference to previous releases the author demonstrates that although his style has evolved, he retains cultural continuities through ‘his classic’ tunes (Burns, 2008, p. 66). Ownership is also emphasised here, through stating ‘his classic “Elements”’ demonstrates Tenaglia is not only playing others music, but remixing his own (Burns, 2008, p. 66). Again the labelling of specific tunes asserts the status and knowledge of the author, that they can identify these tracks by name.

Innovation, musical evolution and authenticity, whilst desirable, present challenges for the media and DJs as comments made by DJ Sasha, a world renowned house DJ, in an interview with *Mixmag* demonstrate.

Right now I’m focusing on a sound I really care about. I obsess over what I play. I’m always searching for the perfect record for the perfect environment. I’ve never been comfortable with treading water, though some fans have got bent out of shape about that. People have got attached to me at certain points, but pushing forward is the only way I can sustain what I do (Moore, 2011, p. 44).

Sasha seeks to perpetuate discourses of musical perfection, uniqueness and progression, whilst anchoring them in terms of authenticity and originality. 'Focusing on a sound' he 'really care[s] about' is indicative of his sincerity, his obsession with music and commitment to musical evolution (Moore, 2011, p. 44). That he is not 'comfortable with treading water' and is constantly 'pushing forward' further highlights his progressive philosophy and motivations (Moore, 2011, p. 44). This also hints that other DJs don't evolve, and if you fail to innovate and tread water for too long you will inevitably drown and perish. He also comments how some fans have reacted negatively to his changing style (getting 'bent out of shape') (Moore, 2011, p. 44), demonstrating how DJs must carefully negotiate audience expectations when they stray beyond the musical parameters they are associated with (Gerard, 2011). It is also clear the media has a vested interest in portraying DJs as part of a vibrant progressive culture as it provides enticing content, plays to participant ideologies, whilst simultaneously ensuring they retain favour with DJs and the managers who promote them.

### ***Cultural contribution and commitment***

The development and evolution of genres and the labelling of new ones is another dimension of musical evolution and artistic authenticity (McLeod, 2001). Notably DJs perceived as instrumental in the development of existing and new genres are accorded higher status. Many of these issues are exemplified by the following quote, taken from a *Mixmag* event review which discusses DJ Andy C, a globally renowned drum and bass (d'n'b) DJ.

A pioneering force in the d'n'b scene, Andy C (dubbed "The Executioner") has been at the bass driven heart of the genre since 1992. Co-founder of the illustrious RAM records, he's on a mission to keep UK bass music fresh and exciting. "Alive" sees him elevate his captivating audio set to new heights by adding a mind blowing, real-time visual light show to his frantic three deck performance (Roberts, 2012, p. 24).

Roberts (2012, p. 24) describes Andy C as 'a pioneering force' at the 'heart of the genre since 1992' enforcing his central and longstanding contribution and commitment, both socially and emotionally. Pioneering also portrays someone who has paved a way through challenging territory, breaking new ground, which other people seek to emulate. Whilst the reference to the 'illustrious RAM' record label, further enforces his cultural status (Roberts, 2012, p. 24). Furthermore, Andy C is portrayed as 'on a mission', seeking to 'elevate his captivating audio set to new heights' emphasising his desire to push the experiential dimension of his 'mind blowing' performances too (Roberts, 2012, p. 24). Here we can see how the media seeks to portray the credentials of Andy C, with the acknowledgement of his unrivalled position within the cultural hierarchy of this genre. There is also

almost an element of worship of the author towards Andy C, acknowledging his superiority over the journalist.

References to contextualise DJs within the cultural landscape and hierarchy, highlighting the duration and extent of their contribution to justify their elevated status are pervasive within the media commentary. Within EDMC various leagues of DJs exist, similar to other artists and celebrities, whilst some are known globally across genres, others are only known within their genre on varying geographical scales. The more famous DJs like Andy C above are referred to as pioneering, others such as Dave Clarke (below) are referred to as gods and masters (Armin Van Buuren) (Edwards, 2003), whilst others such as Danny Tenaglia (above) are kings endowed with these qualities through their performances, productions and role in other cultural institutions. Such references also require a level of cultural knowledge to appreciate the links to other markers of social distinction, rewarding those who possess the cultural knowledge, whilst excluding those who do not (Bourdieu, 1984; Hall et al., 2013). Comments such as those by Anon (2003, p. 37) ('Techno god Clarke blew away Horatio's bar on Brighton Pier at last year's Skint party with a rare electro set') are typical of such commentary. Calling Clarke a techno god positions him as superior within his genre; a powerful and inspirational figure. The reference to 'last year's Skint party' also associates him with the Skint record label owned by Fatboy Slim (Norman Cook), another A-list DJ (Anon, 2003, p. 37). The following extract is another excellent example of such positioning, for the cultural references and terms.

Yoshitoshi new boy Desyn Masiello gets the crowd really hyped with some pumped up, funk'd out explosive house - dropping his, Leon Roberts and Omid 16B's epic "Feel The Rush" (Edwards, 2003, p. 39).

To outsiders such commentary is relatively meaningless, but to insiders this is loaded with meaning – this is a DJ they are trying to elevate on the cultural hierarchy. Yoshitoshi is an established house music label, whose hundredth release advert occupied the rear cover of this magazine. Edwards (2003, p. 39) is recognising his lower status by describing him as the 'new boy', however the association with this label indicates his rising cultural status. The statement that he 'gets the crowd really hyped up' (Edwards, 2003, p. 39) has two readings. It foregrounds the audience demonstrating his focus (and commitment) on them (which some DJs are accused of not caring about) and also emphasises the positive reaction he received. In citing Feel The Rush and the famous artists he co-produced the record with emphasises his connections within the DJ world and also highlights his artistic credentials through his musical productions.

### ***Technical ability***

Technical capability is another aspect DJs are praised for, through their use of equipment, developing new ways of mixing genres and utilising the latest technology to create dynamic and authentic soundscapes. Writing in *DJ Mag* about a performance by James Zabiela, a house DJ known for embracing the latest technology within his DJ performances, Duffield (2004, p. 54) states ‘it ain’t what you play it’s the way that you play it that’s the key ... it’s all about providing a unique musical experience ... and it’s here where Zabiela really stands above the pack’. This statement is typical of how the media portray certain DJs, asserting the unique experiences they create through their innovative performances. In stating ‘it ain’t what you play’ Duffield (2004, p. 54) is emphasising anyone can play a record, but not every has the technical ability to create something unique from doing so. Such issues are exemplified further in the following extracts from a *Mixmag* feature on Hannah Wants, a house DJ who rose to become a global star in 2015. In discussing her performance at Amnesia (a super club in Ibiza) Brailey (2015a, p. 66) discusses how:

She reduces the rammed Amnesia terrace to a humid mass of smartphones, beaming faces and grasping hands. Blending and cutting between Daniel Bortz and Dusky, thundering sub-bass and “Professional Widow”, it is in anyone’s estimation, a technically compelling and joyous performance.

The quote contrasts the emotional reaction of the audience demonstrating their approval, with the technical ability of her performance, enforcing her status and identity as a powerful, authentic and creative DJ. The author also asserts their authority, through references to specific records and their judgement on the technical merits of her performance.

Discourses of authenticity present at various levels in the analysis of DJ performances, which are frequently loaded with connotations and cultural references. An event review in *DJ Mag* Edwards (2003, p. 39) typifies such approaches when referring to tech house DJ Steve Lawler, unleashing ‘a torrent of dark, sleazy tribal electronics and twisted jackin’ house beats’. Terms such as torrent depict a powerful masculine performance, a barrage of sound, whilst dark and sleazy assert the underground nature of his performance. Being capable of unleashing a torrent also demonstrates mastery as an artist. Tribal electronics is evocative, for not only is tribal a sub-genre of house music, it is associated with authenticity, tightknit groups with shared ancestry, language and culture. The positioning of the term tribal alongside electronics confirms his performance is not only culturally but also technologically embracing. Progression through technology, whilst retaining and respecting elements of tradition, positions Steve Lawler as innovative and authentic.

### ***DJs as performers***

The final theme regarding DJs relates to their role as performers. The media go to great lengths to emphasise the ability of DJs to entertain, captivate, influence and transport audiences through quasi-religious experiences. Depictions of powerful and emotional DJ performances (and crowd reactions) feature prominently within event reviews and interviews with DJs, which serve to enforce the dominant status of DJs and the audience as their worshipers. These issues are perfectly encapsulated by the comments of Verma (2003) writing about the 1 Extra tour in *Knowledge Mag* which describes the atmosphere in a club before and during another performance by Andy C:

With the pressure cranked up past the point of no return, the mass of bouncing bodies is sent into rapture by the arrival of people's favourite, Andy C. There is, quite simply, no other d&b DJ that is responsible for such wide-eyed wonderment amongst punters, or who can work an entire venue into a frenzy of flailing limbs, as Andy C (Verma, 2003, p. 76).

This quote emphasises the energy and atmosphere at this event, demonstrating how the media link discourses of hedonism and escapism to DJ performances (Jaimangal-Jones, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2010). The opening sentence immediately sets the scene, creating the impression of an emotional and physical force, an atmosphere so intense and charged, there was no escaping it. That the 'mass of bouncing bodies' is 'sent into rapture' by the arrival of 'people's favourite Andy C' (Verma, 2003, p. 76) is potent, representing the emotional response of clubbers, quasi-religious nature and hedonistic pleasures of dance music experiences and role of DJs in such processes (Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003). Calling him the people's favourite, emphasises his status and his commitment to his fans. In using terms like wide-eyed wonderment, frenzy of flailing limbs and near mythical status further underpins the power relations of superiority and subordination between DJ and audience.

Commenting on an event at DC10, a major club in Ibiza, Brailey (2015b, p. 36) enforces the role of DJs in liminal experiences commenting how 'Space and time: [are] concepts rendered meaningless in DC10's packed main room when Dixon is holding court...but as people lose their shit, the Innervisions boss remains unruffled'. In their portrayal of DJ performances, the media frequently emphasise the ephemeral nature of dance music events, linking with wider discourses of experiential consumption and living for the moment (Jaimangal-Jones, 2012). Here again we can see the power between DJ and audience as they 'lose their shit' (go crazy), the 'boss remains unruffled' (Brailey, 2015b, p. 36). The encapsulation of unique moments within specific DJ performances, often related to a particular record or mix, underpins both their positioning as artists and performers. Discussing another DJ (Hot Since 82) at the same event, Brailey (2015b, p. 36)

states ‘and smash it Hot Since 82 does, the monstrous drop of Traumer’s Hoodlum greeted with a visceral roar and piston fists’. Moments are short lived, fleeting instances, precious, memorable times, with potentially far reaching consequences. The emphasis on moments and the temporal nature of dance events also elevates the DJs, as they constitute a major element of the experiential dynamics. The discourses surrounding DJs in this context also echo the general hedonistic discourse within dance culture which foregrounds experiential consumption. Indeed, it is the pursuit of the experiential that motivates the participation of many within dance culture, seeking out new and different experiences and role performance opportunities (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2015). The centrality of moments and the experiential within dance culture, therefore perpetuates the cultural significance of the DJs, who are positioned as the performers responsible for their creation.

It could be contended that a significant factor in the longevity of dance music culture, is this media focus on and promotion of DJs as artists and the discourses surrounding them. Although art, and therefore the consideration of individuals as artists, is subjective, the nature of media commentary very much promotes the superiority of DJs within dance culture as icons of worship. Influenced by and contextualized within a myriad of evolving and established genres, DJs are continually portrayed as pushing and breaking down the boundaries of contemporary music, embracing new technology and techniques in the pursuit of new structures of musical composition and performance. The implicit suggestion is always that dance culture is alive and flourishing, with audiences witnessing powerful, unique experiences, with DJs as their focal point. Such reporting also reminds of the wider promotional and marketing role of these magazines and their journalists. In granting access to these events and agreeing to interviews the primary motive on behalf of the event promoters and DJs is to gain positive exposure. Therefore, there is a power relationship between the authors and the events and DJs they report on and a pressure for sensationalist coverage, which by and large the media oblige in creating. For if they generate negative reviews or publicity they are effectively shooting themselves in the foot in terms of being granted access again, in terms of advertising sales and in presenting a negative picture of dance culture, which has the potential to be negative for their own sales. Such activities by organisers, DJs and the media have to date ensured this culture has continued to fulfil the ideological agendas of many adherents through the continual presence of such evocative discourses and their symbiotic nature of interdependence.

### **Conclusions and summary**

Although a range of factors influence the cultural positioning of DJs and participant perceptions of individual DJs, this papers contribution is its focus on the dance music magazines and the discourses surrounding DJs as artists. From this analysis it is evident that in constructing DJs as powerful

artists and performers, status and authenticity are key features of the reporting. It has been demonstrated through the discussion how notions of authenticity manifest in various ways, for example the media go to great lengths to portray dance culture and the DJs who create its sound tracks as progressive, innovative, original and pushing boundaries. These are essential elements to musical cultures, for the absence of innovation and change implies cultural stagnation and demise. In order to maintain the interest of current participants and attract new ones DJs continue to develop their production and mixing techniques, drawing on inspirations from within and outside dance culture, whilst the media serves to emphasise these efforts and achievements and the sincerity of individual DJs motives. The evolution of soundscapes and genres has been identified as a central aspect of positioning DJs as artists. Contributing to the wider evolution of dance music culture, whilst also forging their own distinctive sounds are attributes which are valued and praised by the media. The analysis also reveals how DJs must carefully negotiate musical progression so as not to alienate fans, which demonstrates that although musical innovation is valued, it must also be carefully managed to retain authenticity and links to cultural continuities. Both DJs and the media make considerable efforts to anchor new musical developments and innovations historically, whilst emphasising their genuine motivations and commitment to dance music culture through wider markers of cultural distinction and acceptance.

In considering the position of DJs as artists, this paper has also revealed how certain DJs are accorded with higher status through additional displays of commitment. Time served as a DJ is a common aspect of media emphasis, with duration reflecting commitment and expertise, again this highlights how true artists don't just appear overnight with it taking years of commitment to refine their skills. DJs positioning and role within the wider cultural landscape has also been evidenced within the analysis for example, DJs who are positioned as gods, masters and pioneers for their pivotal role in the development of genres are often linked with other markers of cultural distinction notably musical releases, record labels, collaborations with other artists and event performances. Exploring discourses incorporating such markers of cultural distinction also reveals another feature of magazine reporting, which is the display of cultural knowledge by authors and that required of readers. Such measures locate journalists in authoritative positions of power, rewarding readers for their cultural capital and exclude outsiders, perpetuating notions of exclusivity which in turn elevate the value of cultural knowledge and promote media consumption.

The final aspect which this paper explored in terms of the positioning of DJs was their performances and corresponding impacts on crowds. Alongside the promotion of the musical feats of individual DJs there is also great emphasis on the powerful effects they have on the crowds they perform to. Often these descriptions incorporate references to specific records, their technical skills

and ability to evoke strong emotional reactions. Here the paper demonstrates the links between DJs performances and wider discourses surrounding dance music culture related to hedonism, experiential consumption, liminality and living for the moment. In validating the cultural status of specific DJs references to their performances are essential for these are the culmination of their efforts, where they perform as artists leading crowds in a quasi-religious fashion.

This paper has sought to contribute to our understanding of dance music culture in terms of the media depictions and discourses surrounding DJs and the potential for using media discourse analysis in this sphere of study. Whilst it is widely understood that the media exert a significant influence on the construction and interpretation of our social worlds, the ways in which it does so are often less clear and to date there has been little systematic analysis of either of these publications featured here. Through careful analysis of media articles, deeper insights can be gained into the discourses and value systems at play in a range of given cultural contexts and the wider agendas of different media outlets. It highlights how we must not take media reporting at face value, but question notions of power, identity, status and the means in which the media convey and construct social realities. In terms of future research, this paper provides an insight into a select number of magazines and articles which focus on the representation of DJs, there are various other dimensions of dance music culture which could be explored using the same techniques. Also given the ubiquity of consumer magazines and online media, especially social media, this research approach could be applied to a range of media formats to aid understanding of other leisure cultures and events.

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