Inquiry Question: How does the video *Where is the Love* be the Black-Eyed Peas use a “?” to fight against violent stereotypes in children’s minds?

The Black-Eyed Peas’ music video *Where is the Love* focuses on fighting against violent stereotypes towards people of color, while primarily directing attention towards covering violent scenes up for children. They cover up the violent scenes with a “?” sign as if forcing the audience to ask questions about the violence in the video. The “?” sign forces the audience to question why violence is occurring in our world and why nothing is being done to change it.

One way the “?” sign is used to prevent violence in the music video is in a scene where young children are playing a violent video game. The scene starts by showing a picture of a television screen with a first-person player point of view. A first-person player point of view makes children feel as if they are the ones actually committing the violent acts themselves, ultimately creating a sense of realism even though they are merely playing a video game. The scene continues and the viewer can see the person in the video game holding a gas tank and fire burning all around them. The character in the video game appears as if he is going to hurt somebody with the gas tank. This part of the scene alludes to the idea that the children are committing an act of violence through the video game as the first-person player. Then the scene continues with the camera flashing to a young, innocent boy’s face, staring at the video game. The boy and other children watching appear to be very interested and intrigued at the
violence in the video game. It appears that it could be one of their first times playing violent video games because they look as if they have never seen anything like it before. It is hard for children to comprehend violence and they do not know how to handle the way it makes them feel. The video shows a typical way children are first exposed to violence. After showing the children’s faces the video switches back to the video game and the gas tank is now directed towards a person. Immediately before a violent act the “?” shows up on the screen so the children can no longer see the violent video game. The “?” sign reminds the viewer to ask the question why is there violence?

The Black-Eyed Peas are a popular hip-hop group that serves as a role model for the youth that watch this video. As a hip-hop group the Black-Eyed Peas understand that they have the power to send important messages to their fans. Hip-hop is mostly within youth culture so young people are influenced by hip-hop music and because the music is popular in today’s culture many young people in the U.S. can be reached by its message (Morgan 177). The Black-Eyed Peas use the children playing the violent video games as a tool so the young people watching the video can better relate and understand the message of changing the violent world of today. The Black-Eyed Peas are also using this scene to fight against cultural stereotypes of hip-hop music. In the essay Preventing violence through hip hop: an evolutionary perspective Pims says, “focusing on hip hop as a cause of violence is just as irresponsible as defending it by pointing to social conditions as a justification for perpetuating gang, gun and drug slang, iconography and lifestyles in the music.” The video conveys a message of love and non-violence, that is opposite of the common cultural stereotypes of hip-hop music. The video
illustrates that hip-hop music is a legitimate form of music and can convey positive messages to today’s youth.

The children in this music video are primarily minorities. The video uses minority children because the stereotype is that minorities will end up in a gang or participate in illegal and violent activities. An important scene in the video addressing common stereotypes includes a black man being chased by the Police. The man originally starts running away from police when he puts a “?” sign on the back of the bus. Being chased by the police after he placed the sign on the back of the bus is ironic because the point of the “?” sign is to spread love and share a message of non-violence, but it ends up getting him in trouble. After the man gets chased down by the police, which is a common stereotype for minorities the scene flashes to teenagers who are people of color watching the scene play out on a public television while the lyrics of the song say, “wrong information always shown by the media, negative images is the main criteria” (2:59). The video cleverly matches the video of the man being chased by police after performing a non-violent positive act with song lyrics that tell the viewer the media always shows wrong information and negative images that convey negative stereotypes of minorities. By showing the police chase on television they are making it seem like the black man is a criminal which reiterates to the youth that the stereotype is that they will turn to a life of crime and violence. Eventually the police car runs into the man and the police tackle and arrest the man. The Police do not treat him with respect because they assume, he is a dangerous violent criminal based off stereotype of minorities. The “?” in this scene is supposed to make the children and teenagers watching the video ask themselves, why the police are prejudice towards people of color.
According to *Hip-Hop & the Global Imprint of a Black Cultural Form* “Hip Hop refers to the music, arts, media, and cultural movement and community developed by Black and Latino youth in the mid-1970s on the East Coast of the United States.” Hip-hop is a way that children and teenagers of color can connect with artists and become more involved with social issues that are directly affecting them. By showing the black man getting arrested violently and for no reason, children and teenagers of color can see the unfairness, and will be influenced to want to do something about it in society. The “?” sign is a symbol to the young minorities to ask more questions about why racism and violence towards people of color happens. And to realize racism and violence is not okay and there should be changes made in today’s society. When children who are minorities see other minorities being discriminated against in the media, they might feel like the world is out to get them, and they do not know where they belong. According to Anzaldúa’s “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” it is very important to have a place to belong, and as a Mexican-American she has been looking for that place for the majority of her life. This video directly relates to children of color living in violent neighborhoods, as they probably face the same quest to find a sense of belonging, by joining gangs. The video images and message shows minority youth, that there are other alternatives and that they do not have to fall into common stereotypes portrayed by the media. The Black-Eyed Peas hip-hop music gives the youth something to bond over and to gain a sense of belonging between each other and shows them that not everyone thinks that they are violent criminals that will fall into stereotypical behaviors.

The Black-Eyed Peas are not only giving the youth a place where they can belong and relate to but showing them a place where they can express who they are. In one scene, the
Black-Eyed Peas are singing in the back of a van, while the van is driving through what seems to be an urban neighborhood. This annunciates their audience of youth who grew up with violence around them because urban neighborhoods are more likely to have violence. Slowly children of all different races start following the truck. It is important that all of these children are different races because all types of children can be affected by violence. Some of these children are holding up the “?” sign while others are holding their hands up as if praising the Black-Eyed Peas music. The Black-Eyed Peas are showing these children that anyone can make a difference. By the children holding up the “?” sign they are already speaking their mind and telling everyone that they do not approve of the violence that is around them and they want to do something about it. To them the “?” sign represents their voice to the world, and it forces people to ask why does violence happen in our world, and how can that be changed? In the end as the van goes faster the children start running after it. This shows how dedicated these children are to spreading love, and they really want to make a difference.

Making changes in the world is typically something adults worry about and accomplish, while children focus on kids’ things. The video shows children and specifically minority children that they can see themselves as powerful enough to make a difference in the world. They see now that they can make a difference by fighting against the violence around them. Referring to hip-hop, “though not a conventional political community, it sometimes functions in that matter” (Morgan 177). This video was made in 2009 was before the recent wave of youth speakers and activists such as the Parkland High School kids who have recently been strong advocates for gun control. The Black-Eyed Peas saw that the youth needed to become more involved in making changes because the violence was directly affecting them. In this video they
made it possible for children to have a voice by holding up the “?” sign which is a fight against racism and violence towards their communities.
Works Cited


Peas, Black Eyed. YouTube, YouTube, 16 2009,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpYeekQkAdc