

Is Laughter the Best Medicine?

Moriah Roland

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Isn't it true that laughter is the best medicine? For a saying as old as time, no truer words were ever spoken. From the laughs at 2 a.m. with friends to the groans after hearing a dad joke, humor is a fundamental part of the human experience and has made its way into our homes and hearts via social media and programs like Saturday Night Live. Saturday Night Live, or SNL, is an American sketch comedy program that often parodies facets of American culture with each episode hosted by celebrities. From Kenan Thompson to Pete Davidson, there is a lot of variety on the platform, with some of their sketches going viral, such as their sketch titled "Rap Roundtable". The skit, which stars actor and comedian Pete Davidson and actor Timothee Chalamet, revolves around the two as a popular rap duo on TikTok, complete with dyed hair and tattoos, who are invited to a panel of musicians, including American musician and record producer Questlove, to answer questions about their music. The sketch mocks the new genres of "SoundCloud/TikTok rappers" in contrast to earlier subgenres while also using these celebrities who may be familiar to both younger tweens and even older adult audiences to deliver a witty and memorable skit that harps on the weird part of social media. Thus, in terms of the skit, it is clear that methods such as the repetition of "yee" and "skrt," visual contrasts, and cast accentuation combine to produce a funny skit that satirizes the surge of "SoundCloud/TikTok rap."

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The skit starts as host Nunya Bizness (Ego Nwodin) addresses the four panelists: Queen Latifah (Punkie Johnson), Questlove, and rap duo Guaplord (Pete Davidson) and \$mokecheddathaassgetta (Timothée Chalamet), and asks, "What does hip hop represent today" (0:00:55)? And off the bat, there's a clear difference between the four in terms of how they respond as a first impression. In response, Queen Latifah and Questlove offer candid replies, stating that hip hop today "...is about the lyrical tradition of America" (0:00:56). The duo's reply, on the other hand, is as follows: "Nah. See, for me, it's all about that yee-yee" (0:01:12). The humor in this contrast doesn't only stem from its initial impact when Questlove's monologue is interrupted by nonsense. It stretches throughout the skit, as these characters are portrayed as struggling to finish sentences and overusing words like "yee" and "skrt," as evident in this scene. This leads to an undeniably entertaining instance that is not just entertaining but also leaves the other characters confused, particularly in the third act. In the third act, the duo, in an effort to establish their credibility as rappers among the panelists, \$mokecheddathaassgetta states, "My last song got three billion streams, bro" following they perform the song titled "Yee" live for the others (0:04:22). And as expected, the two are accompanied by a trap beat and lyrics like "yYeet (yeet) skrt (yeet) yeet (skrt) skrt (skrt) roll up (yeet) drop that (yeet) skrt that (yeet) pop that (yeet) Ayy, ayy, ayy, ayy. You never loved me, mom, but I needed you, woah, yeah" (0:04:22-46). This part sticks with you for a reason—it's all about how these two continue to use slang like there's no tomorrow. They're implying they're not taking themselves too seriously, which younger and older persons can enjoy. Whether they're giving shallow answers or performing their music, it's crystal clear they're mocking your typical TikTok or SoundCloud rapper. They're not only matching the sound but also the look.

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It's difficult to find a more diverse group when it comes to appearances. Looking from left to right, it appears that things become more confused and varied. The panelists provide a lot of visual contrast, and the way they're showcased adds to the general tone. For example, during their introduction, Queen Latifah and Questlove are dressed in relatively common, almost everyday clothing that reflects their usual styles, with Queen Latifah wearing tailored separates and Questlove wearing sweatshirts and jeans. The duo, on the other hand, separate themselves by adopting the standard look associated with "SoundCloud/TikTok" rappers (0:00:20-46). As seen on Chalamet and Davidson (0:03:13), the tattoos are accompanied by multicolored dyed hair, several gold chains, oversized sweat suits, and even multicolored nails. Based on their appearance, one can immediately tell who or what the two are, with many of these characteristics resembling other well-known artists, such as Machine Gun Kelly, to whom Chalamet bears a resemblance. The duo are supposed to represent the general look of the "SoundCloud/TikTok rapper," which, in contrast to the others, resembles coloring pages. When contrasted with Queen Latifah and Questlove, who are dressed normally, the two look so childlike in their bright colors and statement pieces that it's hard to take them seriously. The two instantly draw our attention due to the way they contrast with the general aesthetic of their co-stars and the contemporary Piet Mondrian influenced background of reds and yellows. However, from a narrative stance, the way the two are dressed matches their personalities, which are successfully stressed by the actors.

As previously stated, SNL often invites celebrities, such as comedians or current figures, to host their episodes or sketches. They fully embrace this tradition in this skit. The pairing of well-known actors and musicians, such as Pete Davidson, Timothee Chalamet, and Questlove, is an enjoyable twist that catches you off guard but somehow clicks in an unexpected way. Pete Davidson, for example, is an actor and comedian who worked before with SNL on sketches such

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as "Chad," "Short-Ass Movies," and this one "Rap Roundtable." That is to say, Davidson is a suitable choice; however, SNL's casting of Timothy Chalamet to play Davidson's partner in crime, \$mokecheddathaassgetta, was unexpected. Timothee Chalamet, best known for his role in *Call Me by Your Name*, a popular film among the younger generation, is highly regarded in Hollywood as starring in more serious films, so seeing him in a comedic role was not on anyone's bucket list. However, with the support of Davidson, he and Chalamet adopt their characters' roles perfectly. Everything here is just so spot on – like how Chalamet delivers his lines, like when he abruptly ends a sentence resulting in awkward silence. And Davidson, he manages to stay in character even when singing, "You never loved me mom but I needed you woah, yeah". It's also intriguing that, despite playing a more muted role in the sketch, Questlove injects his own flavor into it, such as when he slaps the duo during their performance, to which the host replies, "You don't have to be sorry, it's what we all wanted to do" in (0:04:46). The interplay of these subtle and overt jokes is what makes this skit stand out on the program as very memorable and entertaining.

The Saturday Night Live sketch "Rap Roundtable," which uses these various techniques, effectively satirizes the rise of "SoundCloud/TikTok rappers". Cleverly using techniques such as Davidson and Chalamet's characters' use of slang, as well as visual contrast and strong acting from everyone, these factors help to create a comical and memorable skit that pokes fun at this trend. SNL's "Rap Roundtable" now shows the power of being able to reflect on and critique online trends, demonstrating that laughter truly is the best medicine.

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Work Cited

Davidson, Pete, et al. *Rap Roundtable - SNL*. *YouTube*, uploaded by Saturday Night Live (SNL) Studios, 12 Dec. 2020.