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The Killer’s *Human* Analysis

The Killers have become a popular band in recent years. One of their more popular songs is entitled *Human*. Their song writer, Brandon Flowers, typically write lyrics that are intended to be figurative and have a nonliteral meaning. In The Killer’s *Human*, metaphor is used to describe the consequences and effects of conformity and defying common conventions.

One of the most controversial lines in this song is, “are we human? Or are we dancer (16-17)?” The debate lies in the interpretation of the words human and dancer. Brandon Flowers, in an interview about the song, said that the inspiration for the word dancer came from a quote by Hunter Thompson in which he said, “America is raising a generation of dancers.” Thompson was commenting on the lack of individualism of the young people, later saying that they are “falling into line,” following social norms; much as dancers do to choreographed arrangements. This leads to the inference that being human would contrast being dancer. In other words, being a dancer would mean one who conforms to the norms and expectations set, or, in contrast, being a human meaning one that is original and has embraced the spirit of the unknown despite the fear and risk involved with not conforming to the norms. This interpretation of the dancer versus human nature serves as a metaphor that is referred to many times through the song and becomes the basis of further analysis of the various lyrics and the overlying message of the song.

The song recognizes the temptation of not leaving the established norms when it said, “cut the cord (9).” This cord that is mentioned is the links between an individual and society, typically reinforced the individual’s conformity to the conventions. The question of the whole song is whether or not one should “cut the cord (9)” and break away from society. The fear involved with this is to embrace the unknown because no one can predict what will come of someone breaking off from the known existence given by society. Now, the individual in the song makes mention to “My sign is vital, my hands are cold (12-13).” These represent some of the consequences that occur after the singer had “cut the cord” and began defying conventions. The singer seems to be reassured by his actions of deviating from the norms because he feels “vital” rather than detached, such as the dancer seems; but at the same time he expresses fear about deviating when he said that his “hands are cold (13)” or numb. In short, some of the immediate feelings that one may feel after deviating from the social norms is a thrill or excitement coupled with fear of the progressing unknown. Now that this person has begun “cutting the cord,” more natural consequences occur.

In the third stanza, the individual seems to be talking to someone directly. This seems to be because he says, “you’ve gotta let me go (26)” suggesting that someone is not wanting him to embrace the unknown; the person is acting as a cord which was meant to be cut off. A few lines before this, the song read, “so long to devotion (22).” Devotion, Flowers says, is a representation of his parents. This fits quite well with the next line that says, “you’ve taught me everything thing I know.” This line, once again, is being directly said to someone and supports the idea that devotion is a metaphor for the song writer’s parents. The parents literally taught their son everything that he knows and has come to love, thus “cutting the cord (9)” would involve deviating from the only thing that he does know, which would involve many the norms and values taught to him by his parents. The subsequent lines seem to illustrate the preparing for the final departure, “wave goodbye, wish me well (24-25)…” and then finally, the final request, “you gotta let me go (26).” This stanza must represent some of the consequences and actions that occur when one begins to deviate from the norms and begins defying conventions. In this case, one consequence is the need for one to separate themselves from those that have raised or taught them. After all, those are the norms and ideals that one is limited to deviate from.

In the sixth stanza, it appears as if the man who began defying the conventions started to question if what he had done was appropriate and worthwhile. This inquiring became apparent when he said, “I’m on my knees, looking for the answer (43-44).” The looking back at the actions of the past illustrates another consequence of defying conventions, and this was illustrated in the metaphor from the lyrics. In other words, the character in the song seems to be uncertain as to if he will be able to maintain this rejection of conventions for the sake of becoming a man of his own. In the last line of this stanza, he says, “you’ve gotta let me know (45).” This line seems to be one final plea from the character to know the answer to his question, which is if all of his actions are worth continuing. As well, the character in the song never directs this question to any specific person, which allows one to guess who is being asked. In general though, it seems that he is urging someone to reassure him that his efforts of defying conventions are not being wasted and that he will be able to continue being his own man. In other words, these lines serve as a metaphor and show one of the natural consequences that occur after one has begun deviating from the set of established norms. Some of these include questioning one’s efforts, the worthwhileness, and which are followed by a longing for reassurance of those efforts.

In conclusion, in The Killer’s *Human* uses metaphor to describe the effects of conformity and the consequences of defying conventions and deviating norms established by society. The controversial line of “Are we human. Or are we dancer?” is used to illustrate the difference between one who conforms and one who becomes their own man. Some of the consequences that will occur include a separation from society, which includes the cutting of the cords from the one defying and the acceptance of those who are on the receiving end of those connections. This all ends with the original person question as to whether or not the effort to maintain it all.