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**Stereotypes of Music Fans:  
Are Rap and Heavy Metal Fans a Danger to Themselves or Others?**

by

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### Abstract

The current study examines the stereotypes that people hold about fans of heavy metal and rap music. Based on previous research, it was hypothesized that stereotypes of fans of heavy metal would focus on traits and behaviors that are self-destructive, while stereotypes of fans of rap music would focus on traits and behaviors that are threats to others. The results support the hypothesis. Heavy metal fans are seen as a threat to themselves while rap fans are seen as a threat to others. In addition, fans of rap music were more likely to be described in reference to race and demographic factors. The study is discussed in terms of public concern about the negative influences of popular music on teens.

## Introduction

Rock music has long been criticized for contributing to teenage behavior problems (Epstein, Pratto, & Skipper, 1990). If any form of mass media influences adolescents, music is a prime suspect. Music tends to define teenage peer groups, and by the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, it is estimated that teens have spent as much time listening to music and watching music videos as they have in school (Zillmann & Gan, 1997). In the 1950's, parents and TV censors feared that showing Elvis "full frontal" would induce unhealthy sexual urges in teenage viewers. Since then, many continue to believe that rock music perverts youth and undermines the moral fiber of the country (Howard, 1992; Martin & Segrave, 1988).

Beginning in the 1980's, concern focused on heavy metal music. Tipper Gore and the Parents' Music Resource Center (PMRC) raised red flags among politicians and the general public about the negative impact heavy metal music had on young listeners. Their main area of concern was the lyrical content of such music, especially references to violence, drug use, sex, the occult, and suicide. The group feared such lyrics would drive teenage listeners to mimic these behaviors and promote antisocial behavior among listeners (Gore, 1987; Wass, Miller, & Redditt, 1991). The U.S. Senate held hearings and debated some form of censorship to reduce the potential harm of heavy metal music (Senate, 1985). One heavy metal band, "Judas Priest," was even sued in a case where parents claimed the band's songs drove their sons to commit suicide (Moore, 1996).

In the 1990's another form of music, "gangsta-rap" or violent rap music, provoked fear and condemnation. Again, the primary concern was the content of the lyrics, particularly the glamorization of violence, sex, and drug use. Like heavy metal, rap has been widely criticized by politicians and the general public, including the American Academy of Pediatrics and parental groups such as the Parent-Teacher Association (Hansen, 1995). The press has referred to rap as the "most dangerous genre of music" ("Trial Witness", 1933, p. 71), and has openly postulated that rap music poses a direct threat to public safety by pushing fans towards committing violent behavior ("Plain Brown Rappers", 1992). Congressional hearings held in the 1990's condemning rap music bore a striking resemblance to those a decade earlier condemning heavy metal. Currently, public concern and criticism falls squarely on these

two types of music: rap and heavy metal (Ballard, Dodson, & Bazzini, 1999; Binder, 1993). Efforts to monitor the content and limit the impact of heavy metal and rap music have been highly publicized and have made for popular books for parents (e.g., Dobson & Bauer, 1990; LaHaye, 1990).

Psychologists and other academics have objectively studied the relationship between popular music and negative behaviors among teens. Here too, heavy metal and rap have received the most attention (Took & Weiss, 1994). Teens who show a preference for heavy metal music tend to abuse substances and receive poor grades (Bleich, Zillmann, & Weaver; 1991), have difficulties in school or a lack of commitment towards education (Roe 1992; 1995), and show increased levels of delinquency (Singer, Levine, & Jou, 1993). Youth involved in heavy metal music have a greater tendency to engage in reckless, life-threatening behaviors, including things like speeding, DWI (driving while intoxicated), drug use, and engaging in unsafe sex (Arnett, 1991; 1992), and links have been found between heavy metal music and suicide (Lester & Whipple, 1996; Martin, Clarke, & Pearce, 1993) and psychiatric problems (King 1988). Exposure to rap can lead listeners to a greater acceptance of violence as well as predictions that they themselves would engage in violence (Johnson, Jackson, & Gatto; 1995). Certain types of rap music elicit negative attitudes towards women (St. Lawrence & Joyner, 1991; Gan, Zillman, & Mitrock, 1997), a greater acceptance of violence against women (Barongan & Hall, 1995), and an increased acceptance of anti-social behavior (Hansen & Hansen, 1990).

Academics are more careful about claiming that the music is a direct cause of these problems. Many researchers argue that rather than the music producing troubled teens, already troubled teens gravitate towards certain types of music (Arnett, 1991; Martin, et al., 1993; Scheel & Westefeld, 1999). For example, research by Verden, Dunleavy, and Powers (1989) suggests that musical preference does not cause anti-social behaviors; anti-social behaviors and peer-section influence musical preferences. Still, the wide array of academic research in the area suggests that there is an intuitive hypothesis that heavy metal and rap music may influence the thoughts and behaviors of teens in negative ways.

Clearly, the public, the media, and some academics believe that certain forms of music, primarily rap and heavy metal, promote or are associated with negative and problematic behaviors among teenage

listeners (for a more complete review, see Ballard & Coates, 1995). However, there are subtle differences in the concerns raised about these two forms of music. Binder (1993) examined news articles written about the negative influence of heavy metal music and rap music. The research shows that criticism of heavy metal focuses on what Binder termed a “corruption” frame. Concerns center on the negative impact the music will have on the listeners, leading them into a life of drug and alcohol use, risky sexual behavior, suicide, and a belief in the occult. The argument is that this music will corrupt otherwise good kids and lead them astray. When criticizing rap music, however, the focus shifts. The primary criticism raised about rap music falls within what Binder termed a “danger to society” frame; the concerns center on how rap will create fans who are a threat to society as a whole. The news articles raise fears that rap fans will commit rape, murder, violence, and other crimes against society. Under this frame, critics show little concern for the listeners themselves; the concern is for what the listeners would do to other people. Binder has found the same pattern in the criticisms raised by politicians during debates about censoring or controlling the content of music lyrics. While debates about heavy metal music focused on the need to protect the children, debates about rap music focused on the safety of the general public.

Binder (1993) hypothesized that these different reactions are due to two related processes. One is race: rap is associated with Black audiences and heavy metal is associated with White audiences. The other is group membership: heavy metal is seen as the music “our kids” listen to, while rap audiences are seen as outsiders. Rap fans are seen as young, urban, Black males, while heavy metal fans are seen as young, suburban, White males. The public, while concerned that the heavy-metal fan may throw away a promising future, is unconcerned about the rap fan, except that he may pose a threat. The perception that rap is a Black, urban phenomenon persists despite the fact that many fans are White and suburban (Epstein, Pratto, and Skipper, 1990).

The idea that racial stereotypes drive criticism of rap music has empirical support. Rap music may elicit images of criminality and aggression among fans simply because of its racial connotation. Because rap is seen as a predominantly Black form of music, judgments of rap music and of fans of rap

music may be influenced by preexisting attitudes and cultural stereotypes which include such traits as anger, hostility, aggressive behavior, and criminal behavior (Clarke & Pearson, 1982; Gordon, 1986; Jackson, Lewandowski, Ingram, & Hodge, 1997). The media plays a part in perpetrating these stereotypes. Blacks tend to be portrayed in the media in ways that foster stereotypical images of crime, aggression, and other negative characteristics (Baptiste, 1986; Greenberg & Brand, 1994). Media, including the news media, disproportionately portray young Black men as violent and dangerous criminals (Entman 1992; Oliver 1994).

There is already direct evidence that rap music can prime racial stereotypes and that these stereotypes can influence judgments. Labeling violent lyrics as rap or associating the lyrics with a Black artist can cause people to judge the lyrics more negatively, including judging them as more likely to cause harm to society (Fried, 1996). Dixon and Linz (1997) showed sexually explicit rap lyrics were judged to be more offensive than non-rap lyrics that were equally explicit. Johnson, Trawalter, and Dovidio (2000) found that exposure to violent rap lyrics caused subjects to rate a Black target in an unrelated study as more violent. Clearly the reactions to rap music are being influenced by race and racial stereotypes. The present study is designed in part to examine whether this extends to images of the fans of rap music, and to examine the differences in the images of fans of rap and heavy metal.

### ***Present Study***

The present study was designed to examine the images or stereotypes people hold of fans of heavy metal music and rap music. Examining the stereotypes of fans can provide a better understanding of the concerns the public has about the influence of such music on listeners. If people are concerned that specific genres of music influence the fans in a particular way, the stereotypes people hold about fans should reflect this. It was predicted that these stereotypes would fit the general frames Binder identified in her analysis of media articles and would reflect racial stereotyping and in-group / out-group effects. The images of fans of rap and heavy metal music were predicted to differ in three specific ways.

*Hypothesis 1.* Rap fans will be described as harmful to others, threatening, or dangerous to society (e.g., references to criminal behavior and aggression). This would fit Binder's "threat to society" frame and support the idea that the main concern people have about rap music is that the fans pose a threat to the general public. Even though violence and criminal behavior are common themes in heavy metal music (Ballard, et al., 1999), these traits will be less prevalent when describing heavy metal fans.

*Hypothesis 2.* Heavy Metal fans will be described as harmful to themselves (e.g., references to drug abuse, suicide, and dropping out of school). Such images would mirror Binder's "corruption" frame. This would support the idea that the main concern people have about the influence of heavy metal is that it will harm the listener. These characterizations will be less prevalent in descriptions of rap fans even though rap music glamorizes self-destructive behavior such as drug and alcohol abuse (Ballard, et al., 1999).

*Hypothesis 3.* Rap fans will be described in ways that distinguish them as out-group members. This will include references to race as well as other dimensions that mark group differences, such as social-economic status. Such traits will be less frequent in descriptions of heavy-metal fans. Hypotheses 3 does not come directly from Binder's frames (1993) but from her contention that some of the differences in perceptions of heavy metal and rap music come from in-group out-group categorizations. Research on social categories (e.g., Brown & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1981) has shown that we exaggerate differences between groups, and that this is especially pronounced when describing out-group members. If Binder is correct that rap fans are seen as outsiders while heavy metal fans are seen as in-group members, descriptions of rap fans should include more group identification references. When primarily White, middle class respondents are asked to describe rap fans, they will be describing an out-group. Such out-group descriptions should focus on ways in which these group members are different. Conversely, when describing a fan of heavy metal, they will be primarily describing someone from within their own racial or socio-economic group. Such descriptions should not focus on group-differentiation.

## **Methods**

### *Participants*

There were a total of 100 participants. Fifty of the participants were community members from South Bend, Indiana, who ranged in age from mid 20's to over 60, the other fifty were college students in a small public university in Winona, Minnesota. Although both samples came from Midwestern communities, they were chosen to represent different underlying populations. The college students (most from Minnesota and Wisconsin; about half are from large metropolitan communities such as Minneapolis, Milwaukee, and Chicago) were randomly sampled from several large Introductory Psychology sections. The student sample had a median age of 19 and was over 95% white. Community members from South Bend, Indiana were used to broaden and diversify the participant pool. South Bend, Indiana, is a racially-mixed, urban setting (population over 100,000). Although no self-reports of participant ethnicity were collected, researcher assistants estimated that 80-85% of the participants were White. Subjects in the community sample were approached by research assistants in public places (e.g., shopping centers or coffee shops) and asked if they would complete a short survey. Less than 15% of the people declined to participate. Within each sample, 25 subjects were randomly assigned to the rap condition and 25 were randomly assigned to the heavy metal condition.

### *Procedures*

Several researchers (Devine, 1989; Esses, Haddock, and Zanna, 1995) recommend open-ended free-response methods for assessing the content of stereotypes in order to avoid restricting responses or prompting certain types of responses. These researchers also recommend prompting respondents to list traits commonly associated with a particular social category without regard for whether respondents actually believe a trait is true. A similar method was used in the present study. A *between-subjects design* was used for two reasons: It seemed impossible to control for carry-over effects if participants had been asked to list traits of both groups. Also, a conscious attempt was made to keep the survey short to increase the response rate, especially among the community volunteers. Participants received one of two forms of the survey. One form began with the statement that the researcher was interested in “images that exist of fans of rap music.” Participants were then asked to take a moment and envision the “typical fan of rap music.” The other form read exactly the same with the phrase “heavy metal music” replacing “rap

music.” Participants were then directed to list as many images or traits they could think of, one trait per line. They were told to list the traits they thought were associated with the fans regardless if they themselves believed the traits were true of all fans. The rest of the page consisted of blank lines. Surveys were handed out in random order and the research assistant was blind to condition. Participants were given as much time as they desired to complete the survey.

### *Coding*

#### *Development of coding scheme*

The categories for coding responses were developed in two different ways. First, several categories came directly from the hypothesized group differences. These were (for Hypothesis 1) Threat to Others, Anger, and Gang Involvement; (for Hypothesis 2) Self-Destructive Behaviors, and (lack of) Achievement / Motivation; and (for Hypothesis 3) Race and Socio-Economic Status / Demographics. A more detailed description of these categories is as follows:

*Threat to Others.* References to behaviors that harmed others or posed a threat to society were coded into this category (i.e., references to committing crimes such as murder, rapes, assaults, or dealing drugs. References to carrying weapons or committing violence (e.g., fighting) were also included. This category was limited to behaviors that posed a true and real threat to others, so things like intimidating others, frightening others, or just being in a gang were not included. A secondary analysis of this category, which will be discussed later, separated out drug dealing (as some may argue that this is a victimless crime and does not constitute a true threat to others).

*Anger.* This category captured an angry personality type or emotional response. Examples include angry, hostile, hate-filled, racist. This category excluded specific behaviors or actions towards others (these were placed in the Threat to Others category) but did include non-specific references to being “aggressive.”

*Gangs.* This category only contained specific mentions of belonging to a gang (including gang signs and insignias). Although gang activities can be seen as something that poses a threat to others/society, they were put in a separate category because they are also part of the “gangsta” image of rap. Including

these traits in the "Threat to Others" category might have artificially inflated the number of responses in that category associated with rap fans.

*Self-Destructive.* This category captured references to behaviors that have a lasting negative impact on the fan him/herself. These references included alcohol abuse, taking drugs (not dealing), smoking, partying too much (but not simple references to “partying”), and suicide. Also responses concerning a lack of religion or worshipping Satan were combined into this category. These “religion” references came up a total of eight times (out of approximately 1200 individual response items). There were not enough cases to support this as a separate category and these responses seemed to fit the general idea of self-destruction. Turning against Christianity is primarily seen as something that would ultimately harm oneself (or at least one's soul).

*(Lack of) Achievement / Motivation.* This category captured personality traits or behaviors that reflect a lack of motivation or a lack of an ability which prevents the person from succeeding in life. Typically these were in reference to work or school (e.g., slow student, not good at school, can't succeed at work, dropping out of school, not caring, not trying).

*Race.* Only direct references to race (e.g., Black, White), or blatant racist stereotypes (e.g., “watermelon and corn-bread eating”) were included in this category. Things that could be considered indirect reference to race (e.g., homeboy clothes) were not included.

*Socio-Economic Status / Demographics.* References to socio-economic status or demographics were coded into this category. These included location of home (e.g., trailer parks, suburbs), type of work (e.g., blue-collar), economic status (e.g., poor), educational level (e.g., college students), age, and gender.

#### *Other Categories*

An initial pilot sample of 30 surveys was used to develop and refine the above categories. After pulling out the traits that fell into the above categories, the remaining items were examined to see what themes might emerge. Four additional categories were developed. These were Family Characteristics, (other) Negative Personality Characteristics, Image, and “Other.” These final categories were purely

speculative and exploratory; no a priori hypotheses were made about expected group differences. A more detailed description of these final categories is as follows:

*Family Characteristics.* This category captured issues of childhood or family environment. This included childhood experiences such as how they were raised or treated and by whom (e.g., references to abuse, neglect, single parent, etc). This category included both past tense and present tense references.

*Negative Personality Characteristics.* This category contained negative personality traits that did not clearly fit into in any other category. Examples of these characteristics include: getting into trouble, crazy, low self-esteem, disrespectful, and obnoxious. Interestingly, there were very few positive personality traits used to describe either group of fans.

*Image.* This was a category designed to capture more superficial traits pertaining to a person's look or style. Items in this category included references to physical appearance (e.g., clothing, hair, piercing, tattoos, "scruffy" or "grungy"), material possessions (e.g., cars, jewelry), language use (e.g., slang, swearing), and image-oriented personality traits (e.g., non-conformist, conformist, artsy, weird). Also included were references to specific musical groups, being in a band, or knowing band members. This category was primarily designed to capture many superficial traits that were not of interest in the current study. It was predicted, however, that this category would be the most widely used.

*Other.* This category was designed for responses that didn't fit anywhere else, responses that didn't make sense, or responses whose meaning was unclear. Examples include things like "have messy room", "anyone", "loud", and "2000 partying." Other examples were responses like "destructive" because it was unclear who was destructive or in what way. The other category was used as little as possible but it was occasionally necessary to avoid over-interpreting responses.

Eleven categories were used in the final analysis. To test hypothesis one: 1) Threat to Others, 2) Anger, and 3) Gang Involvement. To test hypothesis two: 4) Self-Destructive Behaviors, and 5) (lack of) Achievement / Motivation. To test hypothesis three: 6) Race, and 7) Socio-Economic Status / Demographics. To code the remaining responses: 8) Family Characteristics, 9) Negative Personality Characteristics, 10) Image, and 11) Other. The researcher felt that fewer categories would have deluded

important distinctions between types of responses, but that more categories would have led to having too few responses in each category for meaningful analysis.

### *Coding*

Surveys were first transcribed into spreadsheets with individual response items (single traits) typed onto separate lines along with a code for participant identification, and a blank for coders to enter a category. The lines were then randomly ordered so that different responses from the same individual were not together and responses were not grouped by condition. Two undergraduates were trained in using the coding scheme and then coded all the single trait responses individually. These coders were blind to condition and hypothesis. One additional rater who helped fine tune the coding scheme and was aware of the hypothesis, but who was blind to condition of individual response items, also completed the coding.

Coders were told to place each trait in the single category that best fit. On rare occasions there were clearly two separate categories represented in a single response items (e.g., white male). In these cases it was counted as a single response in both categories. Distinctions between categories were made so that some related issues were placed into separate categories. For example, sexual references were placed into three different categories. Simple references to sex (e.g., sexually active) were placed in the Image category. References to using sex in a way that hurt others (e.g., uses women for sex, degrades women sexually) were categorized into Threat to Others. References to putting oneself in danger through sexual behavior (e.g., getting sexually transmitted diseases/STDs because of unsafe sex) were categorized as Self-Destructive. Likewise, references to drugs were categorized as Self-Destructive (using or consuming drugs) or Threat to Others (dealing drugs). There was over 95% inter-rater agreement in the coding. If no agreement could be found among two of the three coders, these responses (4 out of approximately 1200 individual responses) were placed in the Other category.

### **Results**

There were no significant differences in the characteristics used by the two different participant populations (college students vs. community members).<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the responses for each condition (rap or heavy metal) were collapsed across participant populations.

There was no significant difference in the total number of responses participants gave in the two conditions. In the Rap condition, participants listed an average of 11.78 traits ( $SD=4.79$ ) and in the Heavy Metal condition, participants listed an average of 11.98 traits ( $SD=4.12$ ),  $t(98) = .22$ .

The use of categories was tabulated in two ways, whether or not a trait category was used at all in a participant's description and how many times a category was used in each description. Likewise, two approaches were used in analyzing group differences in the use of categories. Chi square tests were used to look for differences in whether or not categories were used. In addition, Mann-Whitney  $U$ -tests were conducted to look for significant differences in the number of times categories were used. This non-parametric test was used because most of the distributions were not normal; most were significantly positively skewed. In all cases, the analysis pattern was the same. If groups differed significantly on the Chi-Square measures of whether or not a response category was used, they also differed in the Mann-Whitney  $U$  looking at the frequency of use. The percentage of respondents who used a particular category and the total number of times each category was used can be seen in figure 1 and 2 respectively.

*Hypothesis 1: Rap fans will be described as threats to society.*

Three categories were analyzed to test hypothesis 1, Threats to Others, Gang Involvement, and Anger. As predicted, stereotypes of rap fans were significantly more likely to contain references to being a Threat to Others (74% of respondents used such traits) than stereotypes about heavy metal fans (16%),  $\chi^2(1) = 33.98, p < .01$ . A significant Mann-Whitney  $U$  test indicates that use of the Threat to Others category also occurred more frequently in descriptions of rap fans than in descriptions of heavy metal fans,  $U=475, z=6.07, p < .01$ . This pattern remained even after references to dealing drugs were removed (these references occurred a total of 6 times out of 82 items, always in the rap condition). The same pattern was seen in the Anger category; 60% of the respondents used references to Anger when describing Rap fans while 34% used such references when describing Heavy Metal fans,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.78, p < .01$ . The use of the Anger category was also more numerous in the descriptions of rap fans than heavy metal fans,  $U=856.5, z=2.98, p < .01$ . Finally for hypothesis 1, references to Gangs came up in 68% of the

descriptions of rap fans, but only 2% of the descriptions of heavy metal fans,  $\chi^2 (1) = 47.87, p < .01$ . The Gangs category was also more numerous in descriptions of rap fans than heavy metal fans,  $U=424, z=6.86, p < .01$ . These results support the hypothesis that stereotypes of rap fans are more likely to include references to being dangerous, or at least threatening, to other people or society in general.

*Hypothesis 2: Heavy metal fans will be seen as threats to themselves.*

Two categories were analyzed to test hypothesis 2: Self-Destructive Behaviors and (lack of) Achievement / Motivation. As predicted, heavy metal fans were more likely to be described as Self-Destructive (82% of the respondents used this categorization) than fans of rap music (54%),  $\chi^2 (1) = 9.01, p < .01$ . The use of the Self-Destructive category was also more frequent in those describing heavy metal fans than rap fans  $U=713.5, z=3.87, p < .01$ . This analysis indicates that heavy metal fans are characterized by behaviors that may be harmful to themselves. Such traits are not as common in descriptions of rap fans. Contrary to the prediction, there were no significant differences in the use of the Achievement / Motivation category (Rap=24%, Heavy Metal=34%,  $\chi^2=1.21, p=.27; U=1122, z=1.11, p=.27$ ).

*Hypothesis 3: Rap fans will be seen as out-group members.*

Two categories were analyzed to test hypothesis 3, Race and Socio-Economic Status / Demographics. Rap fans were more likely to be described in terms of Race; 54% of respondents used race to describe rap fans, while 12% of respondents used race to describe heavy metal fans,  $\chi^2 (1) = 19.95, p < .01$ . The use of the Race category was also more frequently used to describe rap fans than heavy metal fans,  $U=716, z=4.49, p < .01$ . Rap fans were also more likely to be described in terms of Socio Economic Status / Demographics (82%) than heavy metal fans (56%),  $\chi^2 (1) = 7.90, p < .01$ , and such descriptions were more numerous in describing rap fans,  $U=716, z=4.49, p < .01$ .

Figure 1. Percentage of respondents who used specific trait categories to describe fans of rap or heavy metal music.

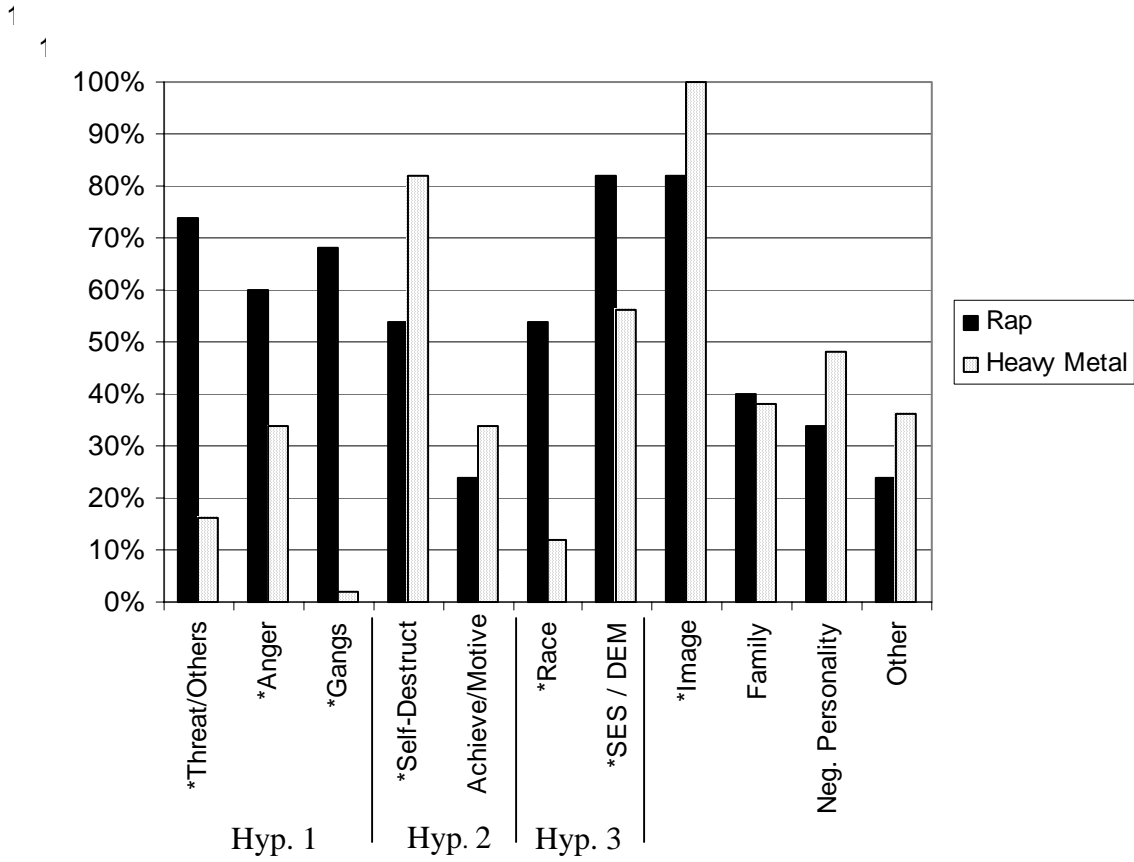
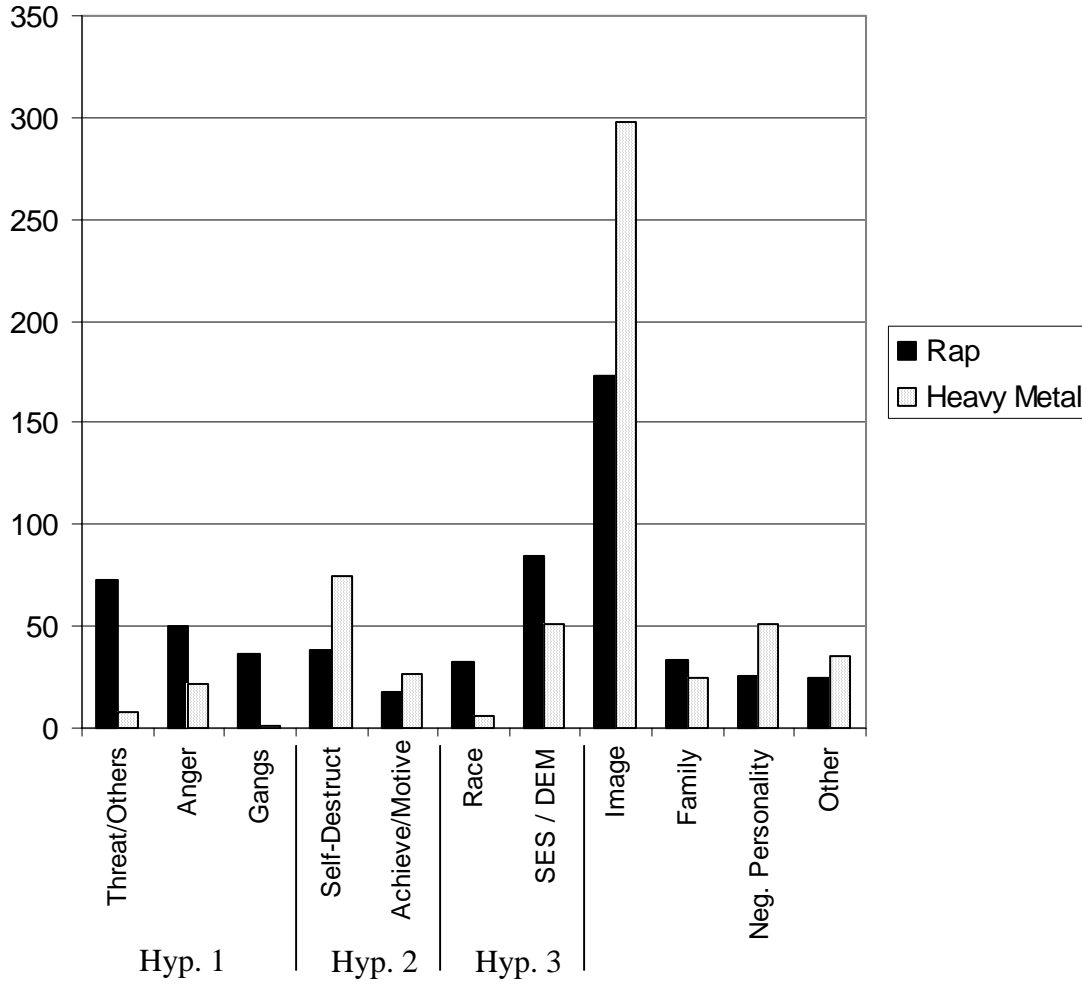


Figure 2. Total number of times specific trait categories were mentioned in descriptions of fans of heavy metal or rap music.



### *Other Analysis*

As expected, Image traits (per respondent  $M=4.71$ ,  $SD=2.98$ ) were more commonly listed than any other trait category. Forty-three percent of all traits listed were image traits. One difference that was not predicted was that Heavy Metal fans were more likely to be described using the Image category (100%) than rap fans (82%),  $\chi^2(1) = 9.89$ ,  $p < .01$ . The frequency of use of this category allowed for standard parametric analysis. Descriptions of heavy metal fans had significantly more references to image traits ( $M = 5.96$ ,  $SD = 2.65$ ) than descriptions of rap fans ( $M=3.46$ ,  $SD=2.78$ ),  $t(98) = 4.6$ ,  $p < .01$ .

There were no significant differences in the use of three additional categories: Family Characteristics (Rap=40%, Heavy Metal=38%,  $\chi^2 = 0.04$ ,  $p = .84$ ;  $U=1184$ ,  $z = .523$ ,  $p = .60$ ), Negative Personality Characteristics (Rap=34%, Heavy Metal=48%,  $\chi^2 = 2.03$ ,  $p = .15$ ;  $U=1033$ ,  $z = 1.69$ ,  $p = .09$ ), or Other (Rap=24%, Heavy Metal=36%,  $\chi^2 = 1.71$ ,  $p = .19$ ;  $U=1109$ ,  $z = 1.29$ ,  $p = .30$ ).

### **Discussion**

Most of the hypothesized differences between images of heavy metal fans and rap fans were supported. Rap fans were more likely to be described using traits related to being a threat to society. This included references to crimes against others, gang activity, and aggression / anger. Heavy metal fans were more likely to be described using traits related to self-destructive behaviors. Heavy metal fans were seen as a threat to themselves while rap fans were seen as a threat to others. Also, rap fans were more likely to be described in ways that set them apart as out-group members, as measured by references to race and SES/demographics. One predicted difference was not supported. There was no significant difference between heavy metal fans and rap fans in terms of motivation / achievement. It had been predicted that heavy metal fans would be described using such traits, because failing in school or employment could be seen as harming oneself. In hindsight, though, the lack of difference isn't surprising. Although lack of achievement may be seen as a characteristic way heavy metal fans destroy their own future, it may also be part of the culturally held negative stereotype of African Americans

(Gordon, 1986). It makes sense that such traits would be used to describe fans of both heavy metal and rap.

Image traits were by far the most common traits listed in both the heavy metal and rap stereotypes. Although not a focus of the present study, their dominance is interesting. The primary way we think about fans of certain types of music is the way they look and act. This is undoubtedly true for many types of fans (e.g., the fans of Elvis in the 50's, the fans of psychedelic music in the 60's). The search for identity is the hallmark of adolescence. Teens and young adults are trying to assert who they are via identification with some peer group. This identity is made stronger by dressing and acting in a certain way. In this process, I don't think the fans of rap music and heavy metal music are any different from any other group of adolescence, past and present, forming identities by visually distancing themselves from their parents' generations.

It is interesting to speculate on where these stereotypes come from and how they are perpetuated. As hypothesized by Binder (1993) and as mentioned earlier in this paper, part of the answer is undoubtedly preexisting racial stereotypes. Also, as Binder demonstrated, the media has added to these stereotypes by focusing on the danger to society and corruption frames when discussing the threats posed by these forms of music. Finally, the actions of the musicians themselves may have spawned or added to these stereotypes. Several heavy metal or "grunge" musicians have been involved with highly publicized suicides and drug overdoses (e.g., Kurt Cobain). In contrast, several important figures in rap music (e.g., Biggie Small, Tupac Shakur) have been involved in murders (as victims or suspects). The behaviors of the musicians undoubtedly influence the images of the fans.

Of course it is possible that the stereotypes described by participants in this research actually reflect true differences between fans of these different types of music. Violent criminals may be more likely to listen to rap while self-destructive individuals may be more likely to listen to heavy metal. Or perhaps rap music does drive people to violent crimes, while heavy metal drives them to self-destructive behaviors. There is empirical evidence that this is not the case. Rubin, West, and Mitchell (2001) directly compared fans of rap to fans of heavy metal and found they did not differ significantly in the

amount of aggression they showed. Ballard and Coates (1995) had subjects listen to either heavy metal or rap songs that had either homicidal or suicidal lyrical content (or nonviolent control songs). They found that neither musical type nor lyrical content effected thoughts about suicide or levels of anxiety. Perhaps the clearest test of this explanation comes from Epstein, et al., (1990) who looked at fans of heavy metal and fans of rap music in a public high-school and compared them on a number of “problem behaviors” including both self-destructive and criminal activities. They found that the two groups did not differ in the number or type of behavior problem, and that the only significant difference between the two groups was that rap fans were predominately Black and heavy metal fans were predominately White. It seems unlikely that the differences in the stereotypes of the fans represent true significant differences in the groups.

#### *Limitations of the Current Study*

In the present study, separate samples of college students and older community members were used to create a more representative sample and to control for familiarity with the forms of music. The lack of differences in the two samples is telling. Although both Midwestern, the two communities the samples were drawn from are fairly distinct. One (South Bend) is a conservative, racially mixed, blue-collar city, while the other (Winona) is an overwhelmingly White, fairly liberal, small, college town. The underlying populations sampled (college students vs. middle-aged community members) are also distinct. The fact that there were no differences in the stereotypes possessed by these groups makes it less likely that a different sample would show dramatically different results. However, these were still convenience samples drawn from various locations in the Midwest. Therefore, there are limitations to the generalizability. A more racially and regionally diverse sample may have yielded differences.

One explanation for the lack of differences in the present samples is the methodology used to assess the stereotypes. As recommended by previous researchers in the area (Esses, Haddock, & Zanna, 1995; Devine, 1989), participants in the present study were asked to list traits they thought were associated with the groups (rap fans or heavy metal fans) regardless of whether or not they actually believed the stereotype traits to be true. It is possible that both groups know the stereotypes but that the younger

college students do not believe them. This may be of little consequence. Previous research has shown that stereotypes can have negative effects and influence judgments even among people who do not believe the stereotype to be true (Devine, 1989). However, future research may examine the extent to which different segments of the population believe these stereotypes are true.

#### *Practical Implications of the Research Findings*

The key implication of these findings is that these images of fans will frame public discourse about the possible consequences of music on listeners. If heavy metal fans are seen as teens whose actions harm only themselves, concerns raised and actions taken to counter-act the negative influence of this music will focus on saving the fans. If rap fans are seen as primarily outsiders whose actions harm society at large, concerns raised and actions taken to counter-act the negative influences of the music will focus on protecting society from the fans. These stereotypes may also have direct implications on the judgments of individuals. Fischhoff (1999) reports a case of a young man accused of murder. One of the pieces of evidence used against the defendant was a passage of rap music he had written. Although the lyrical passage did not directly relate to the murder, it was used as an indication of the defendant's violent tendencies. The present research certainly suggests that a fan of rap music will likely be seen as someone dangerous who poses a threat to others. Fischhoff, acting as an expert witness in the case, examined whether identifying a person as a writer of rap lyrics would taint them in the eyes of a jury. In a controlled experimental setting, he found that defendants presented as authors of violent rap lyrics were judged more negatively on traits such as aggressiveness, capability of murder, and being a gang member. In fact, knowing that a person had written such lyrics was more damning than knowing he had been charged with murder. Clearly these stereotypes can have a significant impact on the judgment of individuals known to be fans of particular types of music. This may impact not just criminal investigations but also judgments in areas such as treatment (e.g., substance abuse or suicidal tendencies), school settings (e.g., discipline, expulsions, abilities), juvenile justice, or family court settings. Knowing that a teen is a fan of rap music may lead school officials to believe the student poses a threat to fellow students and may be the one piece of information that sways the officials to expel a student following

some infraction rather than to administer a less harsh punishment that would keep him in school. A heavy metal fan may find himself in drug treatment rather than just grounded after being caught smoking pot. Being a music fan isn't the behavior that would get a teen in trouble, but the influence of the stereotypes may be enough to change other's reactions to the behavior.

A final implication inherent in these findings is that these different views of heavy metal and rap fans may influence, even unconsciously, the research done examining possible negative consequences of these forms of music. There are very few direct comparisons of the effects of rap and heavy metal (e.g., Ballard & Coates, 1995; Epstein, et al., 1990; Rubin, et al.; 2001) and these find few if any significant differences. Most research in this area examines either rap or heavy metal, and focuses on issues within the "threat to self" or "threat to society" framework. Specifically, heavy metal is most often researched as "a threat to self." Research on heavy metal has often focused on self-destructive behaviors such as substance abuse (e.g., Bleich, et al., 1991; King; 1988), suicide (e.g., Lester & Whipple, 1996; Martin, et al., 1993; Scheel & Westefeld, 1999), or reckless and life-threatening behaviors (Arnett, 1991; 1992). Rap is most often studied as a threat to society. Research on the effects of rap music has most often focused on increased levels of violence against others (e.g., Barongan & Hall, 1995; Gan, et al., 1997; Johnson, et al.; 1995; St. Lawrence & Joyner, 1991), and "anti-social behavior" (e.g., Hansen & Hansen, 1990). Note I do not mean to suggest that researchers in the area are deliberately using these separate frames, nor is this by any means a comprehensive review of research in the area. However, it is possible that the same processes found in Binders (1993) research on news articles and in the current research on public stereotypes may subtly influence the questions researchers ask.

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## Footnotes

1. This was examined two ways. First, participant populations and condition (age and rap) were entered in a MANOVA with individual category use for the 13 categories as the DVs. There was no significant effect for participant population; Wilks' Lambda = .845, ns; Hotelling's Trace = .184, ns. There was also no significant participant populations by condition interaction; Wilks' Lambda = .860, ns; Hotelling's Trace = .163, ns. In addition, none of the univariate ANOVAS for participant population were significant. Second, Chi Square tests were performed on whether specific categories were used, again using participant populations and condition as IVs. None of these Chi Square tests were significant.

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