

Rhythm and Lyrics of Rap Music Do Not Change Narcissistic Personality State

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Abstract

Rap music often projects antisocial ideals that may influence personality state. This study sought to discover if exposure to the lyrics of rap music influence narcissistic personality state as measured by the 16-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-16). Participants (n=112) recruited from a small college in the southeastern United States took the NPI-16 before and after listening to rap music in one of three lyrical conditions: French, antisocial English and prosocial English. Changes in scores on the NPI-16 before and after listening showed no significant difference among three lyrical conditions using a repeated measures ANOVA, suggesting that the lyrical content of a song did not influence a person's likelihood of exhibiting narcissistic traits. The findings of this study call the results of previous literature into question, implying that the ill effects associated with listening to rap music are derived from other musical elements or psychosocial influences that should be further explored.

Keywords: Narcissism; Rap; Musical genre; Personality state; Lyrical content

Introduction

The DSM-5 identifies pathological narcissism as “a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts” [1]. Narcissism ranges from healthy to pathological and is exhibited by everyone in varying degrees. Giacomin et al. [2] found that narcissistic states fluctuates daily, indicating that this state can be altered. For example, Gibson and associates [3] found that exposure to audio-visual media can alter narcissism levels that were formerly thought to be stable. Men generally have a higher tendency towards narcissism than women [4]. This aspect of personality is often viewed negatively, particularly when it is manifested as a personality trait, as opposed to being a personality state. Personality traits are more stable and stem from internal factors, whereas personality states are temporary and can be altered by external factors [5]. While consistency is valuable, there are times when the ability to adapt is necessary.

Conformity is part of our social existence. When presented with the challenge, women are more likely to conform than men [6]. Various factors serve to induce such changes. Exposure frequency to external stimuli has been found to strengthen the relationship between attitudes and behaviors, a concept that in some ways has been explored in relation to music [7]. It is well known that music can change an individual's mood, implying that there is a reciprocal relationship between songs and their listeners [8,9]. For example, Greitemeyer et al. [10] found that a song's lyrical content changed participant's attitudes and behaviors towards women. Ballard et al. [11] showed that the lyrical content of certain genres can influence whether or not listeners engage in prosocial or antisocial behavior. Lyrics may promote short term changes in how one views their own personality [12], although it has been demonstrated that personality influences musical preference.

Rap music in particular has been linked to deviant behaviors such as drug abuse, violence, and gang involvement [13]. Unlike early rap songs that were meant to make social statements, the deviant behaviors found by Miranda and Claes are common topics found in contemporary rap [13]. Misogynistic themes can also be found in many of today's rap songs [14,15]. Listening to songs containing these themes increases the

likelihood that men will behave aggressively towards women [16]. The lyrical shift to self-focus, self-promotion, and antisocial behavior has increased over the past twenty years, and may reflect larger societal changes [17,18].

Knowing that many rap songs contain lyrics promoting antisocial behavior and self-aggrandizement, and given the lack of research on this specific topic, the purpose of this experiment was to determine if there was a link between the musical genre of rap and an exhibition of narcissistic personality states.

In order to assess this, researchers hypothesized that following immediate exposure to a rap song, there would be an increase in participants' composite NPI scores, and that gender and identification as a listener of the genre would be reflected in the change in scores.

Methods

Participants

After receiving IRB approval, participants (112; 61 female, 51 male) age 18-25 were recruited from a small, church affiliated, liberal arts college in the southeastern United States, 61 regular listeners of rap and 51 not. The majority of the participants were Caucasian (69.6%), although 15.2% identified as African American, 7.1% as Latino, 3.6% as Multiracial, 1.8% as Asian, 1.8% as Other and 0.9% as Pacific Islander, representative of the school's population.

Materials

Ames et al. [19] developed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory-16

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(NPI-16; Appendix A) to assess how likely a person is to exhibit narcissistic tendencies. In developing this shortened version of the NPI-40, Ames and associates found that their measure had α of 0.72 and correlated with the original scale with $r=0.90$ ($p<0.001$). Because other researchers have used the NPI to measure state narcissism, the shortened version was deemed fit for use in this study [3].

To control for external content influences on internal states [20], a single non-English rap song was chosen from the charts in France (Désolé by Sexion d'Assaut; Appendix B, used under fair use policies for scholarly work). For the purpose of this experiment, two musicians assisted in writing two sets of English lyrics set to the music of that French song. A song with anti-social lyrics (Appendix C) contained self-aggrandizing statements and antisocial statements, while another song with pro-social lyrics (Appendix D) avoided those kinds of statements and contained a positive message. The researcher aided in the writing of the antisocial and prosocial lyrics as a means of control so that the lyrics contained content specific to the researcher's definition of prosocial and antisocial. Lyrics were printed and displayed for participants to read as they listened through sets of identical headphones on Macintosh computers with volumes set to a level determined through pilot testing. Each song played twice, lasting three minutes total. This was determined by the researcher, so that the experiment would reflect the length of a typical song, which has been shown to induce some changes in previous studies [10].

Procedures

Participants gave informed consent before answering a demographic questionnaire that also asked if the participant listened to rap music frequently for their own enjoyment. This question was used to classify participants as either listeners or non-listeners of rap. The NPI-16 was then administered. Following the completion of the NPI-16, participants were assigned to one of three conditions. In order to assign participants to one of the conditions, they were first asked if they had any knowledge of the French language, with all French speakers being assigned in alternating cycles to either the anti-social or pro-social experimental condition, so as not to skew the data for the control group. Non-French speakers were randomly assigned to the three conditions. This is because the control group was exposed to French lyrics, and being able to understand the lyrics might have influenced the results of the second NPI-16.

All participants were seated at a computer where they watched a distractor video. Songs for the respective groups were then played on the same computers. Every participant had the lyrics to the song printed before them, and was asked to read them as the song played. Once they were finished listening to the music clips, participants completed another NPI-16.

Results

All data were analyzed using SAS University Edition (SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC: SAS Institute Inc., 2000). Repeated measures ANOVA compared pre- and post-test NPI scores for each condition. Contrary to expectations, there was no significant effect found in the French condition ($F(1,38)=0.002$, $p<0.963$), the antisocial condition ($F(1,36)=0.063$, $p<0.804$), or the prosocial condition ($F(1,35)=3.788$, $p<0.062$). A factorial ANOVA showed that there was no significant effect between the change in scores on the NPI-16, the condition, gender or listening identification groups ($F(1,11)=0.84$, $p<0.6001$). There was no interaction effect among these variables (Table 1).

Source	DF	Type I SS	Mean Square	F Value	Pr>F
Condition	2	3.52538321	1.76269161	0.53	0.5890
Gender	1	5.09176467	5.09176467	1.54	0.2180
Rap	1	5.93958583	5.93958583	1.79	0.1836
Condition*Gender	2	1.64508889	0.82254445	0.25	0.7806
Condition*Rap	2	3.91154902	1.95577451	0.59	0.5560
Gender*Rap	1	3.37607494	3.37607494	1.02	0.3152
Condition*Gender*Rap	2	7.14845027	3.57422514	1.08	0.3439

Table 1: Interaction effects from factorial ANOVA.

Discussion

Results suggest that the lyrical content of a song does not influence a person's likelihood of exhibiting narcissistic tendencies, contrary to the findings of Dijkic [12] and Miranda and Claes [13]. Songs contain elements other than just their words. When choosing songs that we like, we take into account their musical nature as a whole, not just the lyrical content [21]. Numerous musical genres exist because of this, and each genre has been found to influence listeners in different ways [22]. It is possible that the reverse is true, and that personality influences musical preference. Those who listen to music that is classified as Rebellious (e.g. punk, heavy metal) or Rhythmic and Intense (e.g. hip-hop, rap) have been found to have negative personality profiles, suggesting that personality and musical preference are closely intertwined [23]. The findings of this experiment are consistent with this, suggesting that it may be these other components of music that either influence or reflect the personality state of individuals.

Research has shown that despite some cultural diversity, there is a basic universal understanding of the emotional cues presented in speech [24]. While the participants in the control group of this study could not understand the French lyrics, they may have been able to pick up on the mood of the song, which keeps in line with typical contemporary rap. This may have influenced their scores; furthermore, the tone and emotional cues in the other two songs may also have impacted participants. This logic presents another possible explanation for the lack of significant difference among the groups.

Limitations

Continued exposure to the genre may yield different results, making this a potential limitation of this study. The NPI measures pathological narcissism and though there may have been a change in score, it may not have been enough to promote such a drastic shift, which may bode well for the genre as a whole.

Conclusion

Although rap music is becoming increasingly popular among teens and young adults, both within the United States and internationally, the question still remain: do the deviant behaviors of those who listen to rap result from the music, or does the music attract this type of audience? Future studies should examine how the musical elements specific to the genre of rap influence those who listen to it. Knowing the cause of the ill effects associated with listening to this musical style is important for listeners to be aware of, so that they can be cognizant of both the influences and effects of their musical selections. Understanding how the musical and tonal elements of song and language interact to influence listeners can open up a new avenue of research. It can help clarify how sounds impact human understanding and behavior, which may be universally applicable.

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