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Character judgements of rap music fans

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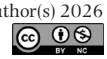

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Abstract

Extending Fischoff, we used vignettes to examine people's perceptions of a hypothetical rap fan accused of murder. Study 1 ($N = 300$) used a 2 (murder accusation) × 2 (inclusion of rap lyrics) × 2 (fan gender) experiment, asking participants to judge how capable of murder and sexually aggressive they found the fan. The presentation of lyrics and murder accusation were associated with the fan being more capable of murder, while rap lyrics and participants' rap attitudes were associated with the fan being more sexually aggressive. Thematic analysis revealed that, in conditions containing both the lyrics and the murder accusation, participants reported greater consideration of the rap lyrics than the murder accusation when rating the fan. Then, Study 2 ($N = 504$) used a 3 (criminal accusation) × 5 (genre label) experiment to separate the influence of the lyrics from the genre label and further interrogate criminal stereotypes. Holding more positive rap attitudes was associated with the fan being less capable of murder and less sexually aggressive. Importantly, a content analysis revealed that 86% of participants ascribed the lyrics as rap, even with a different label. These findings demonstrate the pervasiveness and salience of rap-related stereotypes on character judgements.

Keywords

rap lyrics, rap genre, stereotypes, music preference, juror judgements

Rap music has become a dominant form of popular culture (Hunnicutt & Andrews, 2009): hip-hop is one of the most-listened-to genres globally on Spotify, with almost half of the top 50 most-streamed artists classified as hip-hop or rap (Spotify, 2023). Yet concerns about its controversial lyrical content persist (Fried, 1999; Travis, 2013). Indeed, relative to country, pop and

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Christian songs, themes of violence, misogyny and depictions of women as objects of sexual gratification are frequently found within rap songs (Stickle & Tewksbury, 2015); and rap music contains frequent references to violence against women (Cundiff, 2013) and alcohol and drug use (Stickle & Tewksbury, 2015). Rap has been labelled as 'problem music' due to concerns that it promotes aggression, hostility and violence (Fried, 1999) and is more harmful than other genres (Hunnicutt & Andrews, 2009). Such rap genre stereotypes about violence, criminality and misogyny contribute to it being used as a scapegoat for a range of social ills (Gamble, 2021).

Rap genre stereotyping extends to negative dispositional inferences about the lyricists (e.g. Dunbar & Kubrin, 2018) and fans of the genre (e.g. Fried, 2003; Rentfrow et al., 2009). One context in which rap genre stereotyping is evident is in criminal proceedings. Since the 1990s, defendant-authored rap lyrics have been used in criminal trials in the United States to provide evidence of character, motive, intent, knowledge of the crime or confession (Araibi, 2020). More recently, mounting police pressure prevented Australian drill group, OneFour, from performing live gigs (Wynter et al., 2025), and rap lyrics were admitted into evidence during Atlanta rapper, Young Thug's high-profile criminal trial (Wang, 2025). In criminal proceedings, jurors have been encouraged to interpret inflammatory rap lyrics as autobiographical in nature and, thus, often make negative dispositional inferences about the lyricist (Dunbar & Kubrin, 2018). For example, Dunbar (2020) found that, when a hypothetical suspect was perceived to be guilty, defendant-authored rap lyrics were more likely to be interpreted as an incriminating confession than when the suspect was presumed innocent.

Fischoff (1999) examined how inflammatory defendant-authored rap lyrics affected mock jurors' judgements of the defendant in a murder trial. Using a 2 (accusation of murder) $\times$ 2 (inclusion of rap lyrics) experimental design, participants were asked to rate a hypothetical, African-American male from the provided biographical description (Fischoff, 1999). Participants perceived the hypothetical male as more capable of committing murder when presented as authoring the rap lyrics. Moreover, participants inferred other negative personality traits when exposed to the inflammatory lyrics, such as sexual aggression and dishonesty (Fischoff, 1999). Most notably, exposure to the rap lyrics without an accusation of murder evoked greater negative character judgements by participants than those exposed to the murder charge of a non-lyricist (Fischoff, 1999; Wilson, 2005).

Additional research indicates that songwriter judgements are influenced by the genre of their music. Dunbar and Kubrin (2018) asked participants to make inferences about the dispositional traits of a songwriter after reading a set of lyrics (labelled as rap, country or heavy metal). The songwriter was more likely to be assumed to be a gang member, involved in criminal activity or holding a criminal record when the lyrics were presented as rap. Moreover, Reyna et al. (2009) found that non-Black U.S. and U.K. respondents' attitudes towards rap music were associated with negative beliefs about Black people and discriminatory behaviours directed towards them. Exposure to violent and misogynistic rap music has been found to reinforce the implicit association between Black men and negative traits, such as sexism and criminality, reduce the association between Black men and positive traits, and prime participants to attribute hostility and low intelligence to Black men (Rudman & Lee, 2002).

Negative dispositional traits are not only attributed to rap lyricists but to its listenership as well (Fried, 2003). The U.S. participants perceived rap fans to be low in conscientiousness, moderate in agreeableness and believed to abuse all types of drugs (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2007), while the U.K. participants perceived the prototypical rap fan to be substantially less intelligent and artistic than a fan of classical music (Rentfrow et al., 2009). Moreover, rap fans have been described as angry, aggressive and emotionally unstable (Schwär & Middleton, 2017) and as engaging in gang activities and perpetrating crimes against others (Fried, 2003). Research has

found connections between preferences for 'problem music' and deviant lifestyle choices (Bodner & Bensimon, 2015); however, causal investigations into violent music's effect on violent behaviours have been inconclusive (Hunnicutt & Andrews, 2009).

People's knowledge and relationship with a music genre can impact the stereotyped emotions elicited by the music; thus, fans and non-fans can have contrasting experiences when listening to the same music (Susino & Schubert, 2019). For example, fans of violent rap reported experiencing more positive than negative emotions while listening to their preferred genre and nominated 'empowerment' and 'joy' as the predominant emotions experienced (Olsen et al., 2020). It is unclear whether race or other individual characteristics may influence music genre stereotypes (Dunbar et al., 2016). North and Hargreaves (1999) found that fans of either rap or pop were more inclined to provide positive appraisals of a hypothetical person who was presented as having the same musical preference as the participant and negative appraisals of those with a dissimilar preference. Thus, people's demographic characteristics and preference for rap music can influence their perceptions of a rap fan.

To consider whether negative dispositional inferences associated with rap lyricists (namely, inferences of sexual aggressiveness and criminality) extended to rap fans, we undertook a modified replication and extension of Fischoff's (1999) investigation of how a rap lyricist on trial for murder would be perceived by potential jurors.

The present modified replication-extension (Study 1)

Our modified replication-extension made use of Fischoff's (1999) study materials (replication) but extends Fischoff's study by altering the focus to be on judgements of a rap fan (i.e. the hypothetical person was presented as a fan of inflammatory lyrics as opposed to being the author) rather than a lyricist (extension). In addition, we manipulated the gender of the rap fan and accounted for participants' individual characteristics in their ratings of the fan (the extension component). Based on our aims, Study 1 had three hypotheses and one research question:

Hypothesis 1: Participants presented with violent and misogynistic rap lyrics will rate the fan as (a) more capable of murder and as (b) more sexually aggressive than those not presented with the lyrics.

Hypothesis 2: Participants will rate a male fan as (a) more capable of murder and as (b) more sexually aggressive than a female fan.

Hypothesis 3: Participants with more positive attitudes towards rap music will have a more positive view of rap fans.

Research Question 1 probed participants' explicit considerations when inferring traits about the fan to determine whether participants were aware of potential stereotypical associations.

Method

Participants. Individuals (17 years and older) living in Australia and the United States were recruited via university research participation schemes and websites promoting online research studies (e.g. SurveyCircle), and social media posts. While participation was voluntary, those taking part via participation schemes were provided with course credit. The James Cook University Human Research Ethics Committee gave ethical approval for this study (ID: H8370).

Figure 1. Rap Lyrics From a Hypothetical Fan's Favourite Song (Fischoff, 1999), as Presented to Participants Following a Biographical Description in the Lyrics Conditions.

In total, 461 individuals participated in the experiment, 68 of whom were excluded due to missing data and 93 of whom were excluded due to residing outside of Australia or the United States. The final sample comprised 300 individuals (45.7% female, 53.3% male, 0.3% agender, 0.3% non-binary and 0.3% genderfluid) residing in Australia ($n = 91$) and the United States ($n = 209$). Participants were aged 17–62 years ($M = 22.25$, $Mdn = 20.00$, $SD = 6.58$). Most participants identified as White or Caucasian ($n = 178$).

Research design. We used a 2 (presence of rap lyrics) × 2 (presence of an accusation of murder) × 2 (the fan's gender) between-subjects experimental design. Qualtrics software was used to randomly assign participants to one of eight conditions.

Participants in all conditions were provided the following vignette from Fischoff's (1999) study, 'An 18-year-old African-American male high-school senior resides in the Southern California region. He is a state champion in track, has a good academic record and is planning on attending college on an athletic scholarship. He makes extra money by singing at local parties.' In conditions that included an accusation of murder, an additional sentence concluded the vignette which read, 'He is on trial accused of murdering a former girlfriend who was still in love with him but has repeatedly declared that he is innocent of the charges.' In the conditions that included the presentation of lyrics, following the vignette, an additional sentence read, 'Below is a set of rap lyrics from an 18-year-old African-American male's favourite song', and the song lyrics, 'authored by a defendant in a murder trial', from Fischoff (1999, p. 795) were displayed below the text (Figure 1). To address gender, each murder × lyrics combination was presented separately with a male and female fan (each condition's full description appears in the Supplementary Materials, Table S1).

Materials and procedure. Participants accessed the study online. After providing consent, individuals responded to demographic questions (i.e. gender, age, ethnicity and country of residence) and were then randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions. After reading the vignette, participants were asked to make character judgements about the fan via Fischoff's (1999) 6-point semantic differential scale. This scale contains nine items to gauge participants' inferences of the fan's dispositional traits, including the two dependent variables, sexually non-aggressive–sexually aggressive and not capable of murder – capable of murder. An author-developed, open-ended question, 'What was your main consideration when providing your ratings of the fan person above?', was included to examine the reasoning behind participants' inferences.

Participants then completed the Double Letter Cancellation Task (Diller et al., 1974) as a distractor task before completing measures about their own perceptions of rap. Rap preference ('I enjoy listening to rap music' – adapted from Warrener et al., 2020) was measured using a 5-point response scale (1 = *strongly agree*, 5 = *strongly disagree;* reverse-coded for analysis). The 24-item Rap Attitudes and Perceptions Scale (e.g. 'Most rap music represents a form of resistance to oppressive conditions'; Tyson, 2006) presented on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) was used as a global measure of overall rap music attitudes and perceptions (higher global scores indicate more positive rap music attitudes). Participants were thanked and debriefed upon completing the survey. Participation took no longer than 25 minutes.

Data analysis. We performed quantitative analyses in jamovi (version 2.4.6), SPSS (version 28.01.0) and the PROCESS macro for SPSS (version 4.2; Hayes, 2018). Sensitivity analysis was performed in G*Power (version 3.1.9.7). Via the six steps of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), qualitative data were systematically coded based on interesting features and subsequently collated into possible themes. Through recursive analysis, the first author refined, named and defined the themes. Preceding the finalisation of themes, the last author adopted the role of a 'critical friend' (Sparkes & Smith, 2013).

Results and discussion

Descriptive statistics pertaining to participants' character ratings of the fan by experimental condition can be found in Table 1. Correlations between fan character ratings, participant characteristics and other predictor variables are displayed in Table 2.

The influence of experimental condition and participant traits on character judgements. A linear regression model predicting perceptions that the fan was capable of murder was used to address H1–H3. Five measured predictors (age, gender, country of residence, rap enjoyment and rap attitude), and the three manipulated predictors (presence of lyrics, fan gender and presence of prior murder accusation) were entered into the model along with five interaction terms (presence of lyrics × presence of murder accusation; presence of lyrics × fan gender; presence of lyrics × country of residence; presence of lyrics × rap enjoyment and presence of lyrics × rap attitude). Following Hayes (2018, p. 231), non-significant interaction terms were iteratively dropped from the model (starting with the interaction term with the largest associated p value) to facilitate interpretation of coefficient values. Sensitivity analysis (following Perugini et al., 2018, p. 12) indicated that the overall sample size provided sufficient power (.80) to detect effects as small as $f^2 = .05$ for each tested predictor.[1]

The final model explained a statistically significant portion of the variance in perceptions of the fan's capability of murder, $F(10, 270) = 5.90$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .18$, adjusted $R^2 = .15$ (see parameter estimates in Table 3). In addition to the presence of lyrics × presence of murder

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Participants' Character Ratings of the Target.

Condition	*n*	'Capable of murder' rating	'Sexually aggressive' rating
Study 1			
Total sample included in the linear regression model	287	3.25 (1.48)	3.95 (1.48)
Male, no murder, no lyrics	42	2.37 (1.50)	2.90 (1.11)
Male, murder, no lyrics	29	3.21 (1.32)	3.30 (0.85)
Male, no murder, lyrics	31	3.24 (1.54)	4.68 (1.53)
Male, murder, lyrics	36	3.85 (1.23)	5.10 (1.06)
Female, no murder, no lyrics	38	2.42 (1.39)	3.05 (1.33)
Female, murder, no lyrics	34	3.81 (1.31)	2.84 (1.24)
Female, no murder, lyrics	38	3.27 (1.54)	4.76 (1.12)
Female, murder, lyrics	38	3.82 (1.22)	4.95 (0.88)
Study 2[a]			
Total sample included in the linear regression model	497	3.59 (1.34)	4.89 (1.20)
No crime, rap, lyrics	35	3.80 (1.21)	5.37 (0.77)
No crime, metal, lyrics	33	3.09 (1.21)	5.09 (0.96)
No crime, pop, lyrics	32	3.28 (1.35)	4.63 (1.39)
No crime, EDM, lyrics	35	3.60 (1.40)	4.71 (1.45)
No crime, no genre, lyrics	36	3.64 (1.53)	5.11 (1.19)
Domestic violence, rap, lyrics	31	3.84 (1.34)	4.75 (1.22)
Domestic violence, metal, lyrics	29	3.45 (1.30)	5.90 (1.29)
Domestic violence, pop, lyrics	40	3.25 (1.48)	4.85 (1.00)
Domestic violence, EDM, lyrics	35	3.40 (1.33)	5.17 (0.98)
Domestic violence, no genre, lyrics	35	4.09 (1.45)	4.85 (1.31)
Murder, rap, lyrics	27	3.63 (1.31)	4.75 (1.22)
Murder, metal, lyrics	30	3.43 (1.25)	4.73 (1.05)
Murder, pop, lyrics	36	3.89 (1.21)	4.74 (1.20)
Murder, EDM, lyrics	29	3.55 (1.09)	4.70 (1.29)
Murder, no genre, lyrics	34	3.91 (1.31)	4.65 (1.35)

[a]The fan was presented as male in all Study 2 conditions.

Table 2. Correlation Coefficients for Ratings of the Fan's Capability of Murder and Sexual Aggressiveness, Participant Characteristics and Other Predictor Variables (Fan's Gender, Presence of Lyrics and Accusation of Murder) (Study 1).

	1	2	3	4	Lyrics (0 = absent, 1 = present)	Target gender (0 = female, 1 = male)	Murder accusation (0 = absent, 1 = present)
'Capable of murder' rating	.35***	0.08	−0.11	−0.01	0.22***	−0.06	0.30***
'Sexually aggressive' rating (1)		0	−0.04	−0.09	0.63***	0.03	0.10
Age (2)			−0.14*	−0.08	−0.01	0.05	0.03
Rap enjoyment (3)				0.42***	−0.09	−0.04	−0.02
Rap attitudes (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$) (4)					−0.02	0.01	0.08

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 3. Parameter Estimates for the Final Model Predicting Perceptions of the Fan's Capability of Murder (Study 1).

Predictor	*b*	*SE*	β	*p*
Age	0.02	0.01	0.10	.087
Gender of participant (0 = female[a]; 1 = male)	0.14	0.17	0.10	.412
Country (0 = Australia[a]; 1 = USA)	0.04	0.19	0.02	.853
Rap enjoyment	−0.11	0.07	−0.10	.103
Rap attitudes	0.02	0.01	0.16	.058
Presence of lyrics (0 = absent[a]; 1 = present)	3.29	0.97	0.64	< .001
Gender of fan (0 = female[a]; 1 = male)	−0.05	0.16	−0.03	.764
Murder accusation (0 = absent[a]; present)	1.16	0.23	0.80	< .001
Presence of lyrics × murder accusation	−0.80	0.33	−0.55	.015
Presence of lyrics × rap attitude	−0.04	0.02	−0.28	.014

[a]Indicates reference value. VIF for *presence of lyrics* and *presence of lyrics* × *rap attitude* were 37.09 and 37.36, respectively. For models with interaction terms, high values on measures of collinearity are possible (Cohen et al., 2003) and are not problematic for tests of interaction (Hayes, 2018, pp. 307–309). All other VIFs < 3.18.

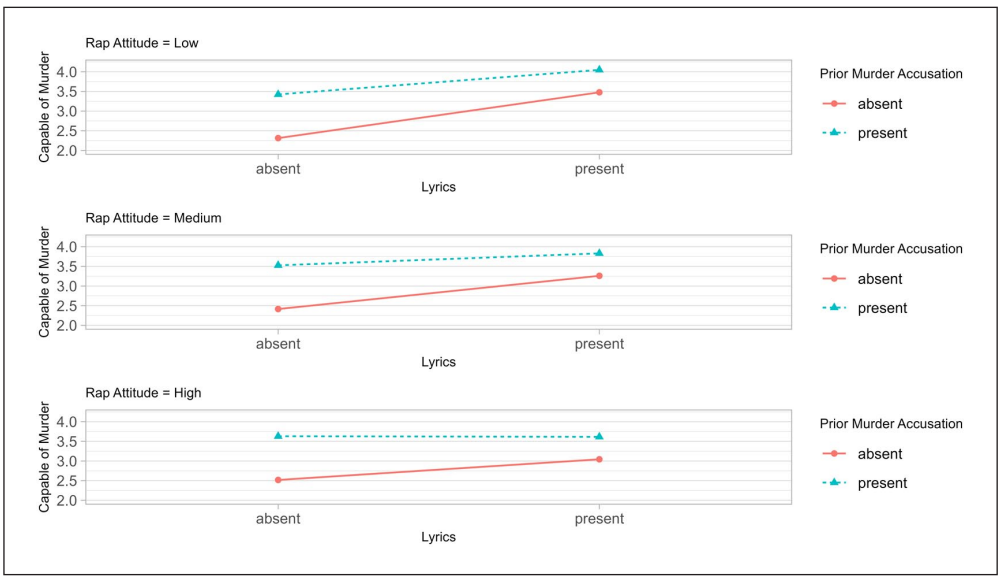

Figure 2. Conditional Effects of Presence of Lyrics at Low (−1 *SD*), Moderate (Mean) and High (+ 1 *SD*) Levels of Attitudes Towards Rap, at Both Levels of Prior Murder Accusation (No Prior Accusation, Prior Accusation).

accusation and presence of lyrics × rap attitude interaction terms, presence of lyrics and presence of prior murder accusation were both significant predictors in the final model. Probing the significant interaction effects using Hayes' (2018) pick-a-point approach (see Figure 2 and Supplementary Materials, Table S2) revealed that when the fan's biographical description included a prior murder accusation, the presence of lyrics was associated with perceiving the rap fan to be more capable of murder, but only among participants who already had a low

Table 4. Parameter Estimates for the Final Model Predicting Perceptions of the Fan's Sexual Aggressiveness (Study 1).

Predictor	*b*	*SE*	β	*p*
Age	<0.01	0.01	<0.01	>.999
Gender of participant (0 = female[a]; 1 = male)	0.03	0.15	0.02	.815
Country (0 = Australia[a]; 1 = USA)	0.08	0.16	0.05	.639
Rap enjoyment	0.08	0.06	0.07	.180
Rap attitudes	−0.02	0.01	−0.12	.023
Presence of lyrics (0 = absent[a]; 1 = present)	1.83	0.14	1.25	<.001
Gender of fan (0 = female[a]; 1 = male)	0.10	0.14	0.07	.489
Murder accusation (0 = absent[a]; 1 = present	0.19	0.14	0.13	.162

[a]Indicates reference values. VIF < 1.29 for all predictors.

opinion of rap. When a prior murder accusation had not been made against the rap fan, the presence of the lyrics was predictive of perceiving the fan to be more capable of murder among those with low and moderate attitudes towards rap (H1a and H3).

As predicted, when the fan's biographical description included inflammatory rap lyrics, the fan was perceived as more capable of murder (H1a), confirming the preference for rap is associated with negative dispositional inferences (Fried, 2003; Rentfrow et al., 2009; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2007). Thus, in addition to these traits being associated with rap lyricists (as in Fischoff, 1999), they are also attributed to rap fans.

The gender of the fan was not a significant predictor in the model; thus, H2a was not supported. However, it is important to acknowledge that the lyrics presented expressed a masculine perspective and included dominant misogynistic themes.

A second linear regression model using the same analytic approach was conducted predicting perceptions that the fan is sexually aggressive (H1–3). All five interaction terms were found to be non-significant predictors and were dropped from the final model (as this model contains the same number of predictor variables as the regression model predicting capability of murder, the above sensitivity analysis applies here also). The final model accounted for a statistically significant portion of the variance in perceptions of the fan's sexual aggressiveness, F (8, 272) = 23.30, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .41$, adjusted $R^2 = .39$ (see parameter estimates in Table 4). The only significant predictors in the final model were rap attitude and the presence of lyrics. The presence of the lyrical content was associated with perceiving the fan to be more sexually aggressive (H1b). Holding more positive attitudes towards rap was associated with perceiving the fan to be less sexually aggressive; however, a preference for rap music was not a significant predictor (H3). Like with murder, the gender of the fan was not a significant predictor (H2b).

The influence of experimental condition on the prevalence of themes. Our thematic analysis of participants' main consideration(s) when rating the fan ($N = 277$; RQ1) resulted in identifying seven themes (individual traits, participants' personal experiences, rap lyrics, achievement-focused, overall description, murder accusation and unwilling to speculate) and eleven sub-themes. Descriptions of the themes, sub-themes and exemplar quotations are presented in the Supplementary Materials, Table S3.

The frequency of theme by experimental condition is shown in Table 5. Participants predominantly based their ratings on the achievements of the fan described in the vignette. Crucially, in conditions where rap lyrics were presented, participants primarily based their

Table 5. Frequency of Themes in Open-ended Responses by Study 1 Experimental Condition[a] ($N = 277$).

	No murder, no lyrics	Murder, no lyrics	No murder, lyrics	Murder, lyrics	Total
Individual traits	22	21	10	12	65
Participants' personal experiences	8	5	4	8	25
Rap lyrics	0	0	32	45	77
Achievement-focused	50	40	25	16	131
Overall description	5	9	14	17	45
Murder accusation	0	15	0	12	27
Unwilling to speculate	6	4	0	2	12

Note. Multiple codes were allowed for a participant's response if more than one idea was contained within the response (Nowell et al., 2017), making it possible to have a greater frequency tally than the sample size.
[a]The gender conditions have been collapsed.

ratings on the lyrics, followed by the fan's achievements. Of the 77 responses which pertained to the rap lyrics presented, 40 reported consideration of the rap lyrics broadly (or in conjunction with the description), 18 responses indicated an overall negative view of the lyrics and/or fan and 19 responses revealed that the participant had either deliberately ignored the rap lyrics or had weighted the biographical description more heavily than the lyrics when making their evaluation. Furthermore, in conditions where both the rap lyrics and murder accusation were presented, participants reported greater consideration of the inflammatory rap lyrics than the accusation of murder when rating the fan's criminal propensity and personality (RQ1). Thus, when considering rap-related stereotyping, our findings suggest that observers not only implicitly associate rap fans with criminality and negative personality traits (Reyna et al., 2009; Rudman & Lee, 2002) but consciously consider rap lyrics when making their character inferences. A preference for rap (rather than authorship), therefore, may be sufficient to prejudicially impact character judgements in a legal setting.

Study 2

Study 1 was limited in that the influence of the inflammatory lyrical content cannot be separated from that of the music genre label (rap), and there was only one criminal accusation considered. In addition to rap, heavy metal and Electronic Dance Music (EDM) are also considered 'problem music' (Lozon & Bensimon, 2014). Heavy metal has been feared to elicit aggression and antisocial behaviours in its listenership (Olsen et al., 2022), and EDM has been associated with rampant drug use (Conner & Katz, 2020). In contrast, pop music is not considered problem music, and its consumers are perceived as extraverted, conventional, enthusiastic and submissive (e.g. Tian et al., 2022). While rap and heavy metal fans are often associated with a proclivity for physical violence, and EDM with recreational drug use, pop fans are not typically linked with criminality. Similar to music genres, criminal stereotypes exist regarding severity and perpetrator personality. Crimes of violence perpetrated against people are considered to be more severe than non-violent crimes (e.g. property crimes and white collar crimes) (Adriaenssen et al., 2018; Freitas et al., 2022). Furthermore, Levy et al. (2021) found that individuals accused of physically violent or sexual assault-related crimes are perceived more negatively than perpetrators of other crimes.

Therefore, we undertook a focused, second study using a 3 (crime accusation) × 5 (genre) experimental design. In this study, regarding the criminal accusation, we included the original murder condition, as well as a domestic violence and control condition. To interrogate the impact of the genre label, all conditions included Fischoff's (1999) inflammatory lyrics from Study 1, but the fan's preference and song lyrics were labelled as either rap, metal, EDM, pop or were unlabelled.

Hypothesis 4: Participants in the rap conditions will perceive the fan as (a) more capable of murder and (b) more sexually aggressive compared to the pop and unlabelled genre conditions.

Hypothesis 5: Crime accusation and genre label will interact in their effect on perceptions of the fan's capability of murder, such that the highest ratings will be given by the participants in the 'rap genre label and accusation of murder' condition.

Research Question 2 probed participants' perception of the genre of the lyrics regardless of the condition label.

Method

Participants. James Cook University gave ethical approval for this study (ID: H9420). Recruitment techniques were identical to those of Study 1. Study 2 used data from a sample of 504 adults aged 17 to 77 ($M = 31.12$, $SD = 13.64$) residing in the United States ($n = 178$) and Australia ($n = 326$). Participants identified their gender as male (40.30%), female (56.30%), agender (0.40%), transgender (0.40%), non-binary (2.00%), other (0.40%) or genderqueer (0.20%). As in Study 1, many identified as White or Caucasian ($n = 270$).

Research design, procedure and materials. We used a 3 (crime accusation: murder accusation, domestic violence and no criminal accusation) × 5 (genre: rap, pop, metal, EDM and no genre) online, between-subjects experimental design.[2] The Study 1 vignette was used, with two notable amendments. The genre label used to label the fan's 'favourite song' was also used in a sentence that read, 'he is a fan of X music'. Furthermore, the biographical description included a prior accusation of murder, domestic violence or no accusation was present (control condition). In all conditions, the fan was presented as male (as per Fischoff [1999] study, and because fan gender was a non-significant predictor in Study 1). See Supplementary Materials (Table S4) for verbatim descriptions by condition.

The procedure and materials used were identical to those of Study 1, with one additional open-ended question. This question, which appeared before the distractor task, asked participants, 'What genre label would you ascribe to the target's favourite song?'

Results and discussion

Descriptive statistics for character ratings by condition are in Table 1. Zero-order correlations for continuous and dichotomous study variables are presented in Table 6.

A linear regression model was specified, predicting perceptions that the fan was capable of murder (H4a and H5). Five measured predictors (age, gender, country of residence, rap enjoyment and rap attitude), and two manipulated predictors (prior accusation type and genre label) were entered into the model along with three interaction terms (genre label × prior accusation type, genre label × rap enjoyment and genre label × rap attitude). Following the same logic as

Table 6. Correlation Coefficients for Ratings of the Fan's Sexual Aggressiveness and Capability of Murder, Participant Characteristics and Other Predictor Variables (Study 2).

	1	2	3	4
'Capable of murder' rating	0.36***	−0.02	−0.03	−0.31***
'Sexually aggressive' rating (1)		−0.01	−0.01	−0.15***
Age (2)			0.11*	−0.15***
Rap enjoyment (3)				−0.06
Rap attitudes (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$) (4)				

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

in Study 1, non-significant interaction terms were iteratively dropped from the model. No interaction term was found to be significant. Sensitivity analysis (following the same method used above) indicated that the overall sample size for Study 2 provided sufficient power (.80) to detect effects as small as $f^2 = .03$ for each tested predictor.[3]

The final model explained a statistically significant portion of the variance in perceptions of the fan's capability of murder, $F(11, 449) = 5.91$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .13$, adjusted $R^2 = .11$ (see parameters in Table 7). Holding more positive attitudes towards rap was associated with perceiving the fan to be less capable of murder. H4a was not supported. Participants did not perceive the fan to be more capable of murder when the lyrics were ascribed to rap as compared to any other genre. H5 was also not supported, as indicated by the non-significant interaction term. Instead, perceptions of the capability of murder did not differ across crime accusation conditions.

The same process was followed to predict perceptions of the fan's sexual aggressiveness (H4b). The overall model was significant, $F(11, 447) = 2.06$, $p < .022$, $R^2 = .05$, adjusted $R^2 = .03$. The only significant model predictor (reported in Table 8) was rap attitude, where a more positive attitude was associated with perceiving the fan to be less sexually aggressive. Therefore, H4b was not supported as the assigned music genre did not influence perceptions of the fan's degree of sexual aggressiveness.

Regarding RQ2 and parsing the findings of Study 2, it is important to note that most participants (81%) self-ascribed the lyrics to the rap genre (or one of its sub-genres; See Table 9 for ascribed genre by condition), even when told that the lyrics were from a different genre as part of the genre label manipulation. Therefore, the lyrical content itself was readily recognised as rap, which may have resulted in associated genre stereotypes, regardless of the genre label used.

General discussion

The present research considered the potential prejudicial influence of exposure to inflammatory rap lyrics when asking people to make character judgements of a hypothetical rap fan. The results of both studies indicate that the negative traits associated with rap lyricists in adjudicative contexts (Dunbar, 2020; Dunbar & Kubrin, 2018; Fischoff, 1999) are also attributed to rap fans, widening the scope of personality associations (e.g. Rentfrow et al., 2009; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2007). In particular, Study 1 indicated that the inclusion of rap lyrics in the rap fan's biographical description resulted in the fan being perceived as more capable of murder and more sexually aggressive. Participants' reasoning for their character ratings (Tables 5 and S3) confirm the impact of the lyrics is not only implicit, but also (at least for some) explicit, as participants more frequently reported consideration of the inflammatory rap lyrics than an

Table 7. Parameter Estimates for the Final Model Predicting Perceptions of the Fan's Capability of Murder (Study 2).

Predictor	*b*	*SE*	β	*p*
Age	0.00	0.44	−0.05	.345
Gender of participant (0 = female[a]; 1 = male)	0.21	0.13	0.16	.107
Country (0 = Australia[a]; 1 = USA)	0.02	0.15	0.01	.914
Rap enjoyment	−0.06	0.04	−0.06	.167
Rap attitudes	−0.04	0.01	−0.31	< .001
Crime accusation				
No accusation[a]				
Domestic violence	0.12	0.14	0.09	.384
Murder	0.26	0.14	0.19	.075
Genre				
Rap[a]				
Metal	−0.28	0.19	−0.21	.150
EDM	−0.08	0.19	−0.06	.691
Pop	−0.19	0.19	−0.14	.311
No label	0.21	0.19	0.16	.267

[a]indicates reference value. VIF < 1.23 for all predictors.

Table 8. Parameter Estimates for the Final Model Predicting Perceptions of the Fan's Sexual Aggressiveness (Study 2).

Predictor	*b*	*SE*	β	*p*
Age	0.00	< 0.01	−0.06	.302
Gender of participant (0 = female[a]; 1 = male)	−0.15	0.12	−0.13	.212
Country (0 = Australia[a]; 1 = USA)	−0.24	0.14	−0.20	.084
Rap enjoyment	0.01	0.04	0.01	.790
Rap attitudes	−0.02	0.01	−0.15	.001
Crime accusation				
No accusation[a]				
Domestic violence	−0.08	0.13	−0.07	.533
Murder	−0.23	0.14	−0.19	.095
Genre				
Rap[a]				
Metal	−0.02	0.18	−0.02	.901
EDM	−0.11	0.18	−0.09	.542
Pop	−0.24	0.17	−0.20	.168
No label	−0.12	0.17	−0.10	.476

[a]indicates reference value. VIF < 1.23 for all variables.

accusation of murder when making character judgements. Importantly, though, as reiterated by the Study 2 findings, one's own attitudes towards rap is an important predictor: participants who held more positive attitudes towards rap music were less likely to perceive a rap fan as sexually aggressive (Studies 1 and 2) or capable of murder (Study 2), suggesting that observers' perceptions of the rap genre play an important role in their evaluations of rap fans.

Table 9. Frequency of Ascribed Genre Labels by Study 2 Condition ($N = 504$).

Condition genre label	Participant broad genre label (%)				
	Rap[a]	Metal	EDM	Pop	Other
Rap ($n = 97$)	98	0	0	0	2
Metal ($n = 93$)	64	27	0	1	8
EDM ($n = 100$)	77	3	10	2	8
Pop ($n = 109$)	90	0	0	4	6
No label ($n = 105$)	95	0	0	3	2
Entire sample	81	7	2	3	7

Note. Non-responses ($n = 14$) and non-genre-related responses ($n = 34$) were excluded.
[a]Rap is inclusive of hip-hop and rap sub-genres (e.g. gangsta rap).

People's own attitudes appear to have a buffering effect against the stereotype of rap aroused by the inflammatory lyrics. Indeed, the Study 2 results suggest that it is the lyrics, rather than the genre label, driving these effects because people perceived the lyrics as largely belonging to the rap genre (even when otherwise labelled – Table 9). Though the lyrical content must be kept in mind (Figure 1), it appears that perceived rap stereotypes are powerful – they outweigh the other positive attributes included in the fan's biographical description to influence character judgements.

In line with previous research demonstrating how songwriters of rap are perceived more negatively than those of other genres (e.g. Dunbar & Kubrin, 2018) and that negative dispositional traits are ascribed to rap fans (e.g. Fried, 2003; Rentfrow et al., 2009; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2007), the present findings concerning the pervasive nature of negative rap-related stereotypes have implications concerning how rap genre preferences may inform perceptions of criminality in legal settings. Courts are encouraged to consider the social constraints and artistic conventions influencing the rap genre and source expert testimony to educate judges and jurors on the interpretation of rap lyrics to dismantle myths and better inform evaluations of the admissibility and credibility of rap lyrics as evidence (Dennis, 2007; Hunnicutt & Andrews, 2009; Owusu-Bempah, 2022). Additionally, educating people on rap stereotypes would assist in countering 'problem music narratives' portrayed in the media and the pre-emptive policing of rap music (e.g. of Drill music in Australia – Wynter et al., 2025).

Limitations and future directions

It is important to acknowledge that the lyrics used in the present study (Fischoff, 1999) are not representative of all sub-genres of rap music (and presented the same masculine perspective and dominant misogynistic themes in all conditions). Thus, it falls on future research to manipulate the lyrical content (e.g. comparing gangsta rap to conscious rap or other sub-genres with positive messaging) to further examine lyrical messaging and its impact on character judgements. Moreover, some research indicates that listeners prioritise musical content over lyrical content (Frith, 1989) and that the importance of lyrics differs between listeners (Condit-Schultz & Huron, 2015). Even listeners who do attend to lyrics are not always able to accurately decipher them (Condit-Schultz & Huron, 2015). Thus, the investigation of participants' dispositional inferences of rap fans when exposed to audio lyrics instead of written text may be an important consideration in future research.

Another suggestion is to explicitly design an unconscious media priming study; for example, participants could be asked to listen to a song that is presented as being unrelated to the rest of

the study tasks. Furthermore, explicitly asking participants to provide their reasoning may not reflect implicit biases and stereotypes which may become activated in an adjudicative context when associations of criminality are pronounced (Dabney et al., 2017; Dunbar, 2020). Conducting the experiment under mock trial conditions (e.g. Dunbar, 2020), may be beneficial to applying the findings in policy formulation and practice.

Finally, while the present sample comprised Australian and U.S. participants, most identified as White or Caucasian and the study presented the rap fan as an African-American. This means that manipulating the fan's race (e.g. Fried, 1999) in conjunction with explorations of rap's sub-genres that may be more or less prominent in different cultures (e.g. Drill in Australia) may prove beneficial to future research designs, particularly in light of research highlighting the association between rap-related attitudes and negative beliefs about Black people (e.g. Reyna et al., 2009; Rudman & Lee, 2002). Given that music genres evolve, fork and merge over time, the continued examination of pervasive 'problem music' stereotypes will broaden our understanding of the impact of popular culture.

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The study was approved by the James Cook University Human Research Ethics Committee (ID: H8370 and H9420).

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Data availability

No aspects of the study were pre-registered. Requests regarding the dataset and study materials should be directed to Ms Kaila Putter, kaila.putter@jcu.edu.au.

Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Commonly accepted benchmarks for f^2 are .02 for small effects and .15 for medium effects (Perugini et al., 2018). Thus, the study was adequately powered to detect effects in the small-to-medium range but underpowered to detect small effects.
2. An a priori power analysis following the procedure for a multiple regression analysis outlined in Perugini et al. (2018) was conducted. This analysis relates to the power for each main effect. The following parameters were used: desired power = .80, 10 predictors entered (main effects and interaction terms), 10 predictors tested, $f^2 = .05$ (a f^2 of .05 was chosen as this sits between the convention for a small [$f^2 = .02$] and medium effect [$f^2 = .15$]). This analysis indicated that an N of 335 would be needed to adequately power the study.
3. Given that $f^2 = .03$ closely approximates the commonly accepted benchmark for a small effect ($f^2 = .02$; Perugini et al., 2018), the study can be considered adequately powered to detect small main effects.

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