

Hip-Hop through the Lens of Madison Print Media

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Background and Methods

At the request of local non-profit Urban Community Arts Network (UCAN), undergraduate students at University of Wisconsin-Madison's Department of Community and Environmental Sociology analyzed newspaper articles to understand local media portrayals of Hip-Hop. We collected and analyzed 348 articles from Wisconsin State Journal, The Cap Times, and Isthmus. We looked for a variety of characteristics, ranging from location of content, to race of individual or groups in the article, to overall attitude of the author towards Hip-Hop. These findings indicate a potential bias in the way Hip-Hop articles are written in the Madison print media, though there is variation by publication. These findings are consistent with the racialized dominant narrative that Hip-Hop in Madison is perceived as violent.

Key Terms

- Neutral: no bias towards Hip-Hop
- Restricting: limiting of Hip-Hop, diverse subgenres within Hip-Hop, or of Hip-Hop culture
- Mixed: both limiting and encouraging of Hip-Hop, diverse subgenres of Hip-Hop, or of Hip-Hop culture
- Expanding: encouraging of Hip-hop, diverse subgenres of Hip-Hop, or of Hip-Hop culture

Key Findings

- Overall, 50% of articles written about all people are expanding. Articles written about People of Color have the smallest percentage of expanding stories, at 43%. In comparison, 60% of articles written about white people are expanding
- National articles were found to publish the least amount of expanding articles about People of Color, at 29%. Overall, articles about national news were less expanding (36%) than local articles (67%)
- Articles on local artists were generally much more expanding towards Hip-Hop, no matter the race of the person in the story
- Names and Faces of the Wisconsin State Journal used a newswire for national news and 63% of these articles were coded as restricting
- Out of all of the mentions of crime throughout the news articles used in this report, 65% of the articles were about People of Color. The least amount of mentions of crime were within articles about white people, at 10%

What are the implications of this research?

One interpretation of our results is that the relatively positive media portrayal of local Hip-Hop means that the discrimination local artists face isn't even supported by most of the local media. Another interpretation is that the media still have work to do in addressing the racial disparities in their coverage. This is particularly the case for the editorial choices made about what newswire stories to print. In particular, the strong racial disparities shown by the Names and Faces column undermine its legitimacy as a news source.