

HARD ROCK, HEAVY METAL AND PUNK: COMPARING PSYCHOLOGICAL FINDINGS WITH CULTURAL STUDIES ACCOUNTS

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A number of psychological studies – some clinical – have dealt with the interrelationship between the personality of individuals and their affinity to or preference for certain musical styles or genres. Hard rock, Heavy Metal and Punk quite often appeared to be associated with problematic personality traits such as psychoticism or neuroticism (Rawlings et. al 1995). Most of these studies are based on the five-factor-model of personality ('big five') and respective psychological tests such as the NEO Personality Inventory or the Myers-Briggs-Type Indicator (MBTI). In addition, various tests on musical preferences are used, and the results are correlated. However, what appears to be missing is the attempt to understand these musical styles or genres in their cultural dimension. Common approaches in Popular Music Studies would instead try to offer a more differentiated picture where Hard Rock, Heavy Metal or Punk are seen

as cultural phenomena of many dimensions. And even if these studies might contain a number of interviews or observations in the 'scene', an empirical verification is neither included nor intended. Instead, the problem is raised that the results from empirical studies can be instrumentalized in favour of certain political or ideological interests, sometimes even resulting in a call for censorship (Walser 1993, p. 137-171). A 'link' seems to be missing: while cultural studies approaches frequently appear as too speculative for psychologists ('without an empirical basis'), researchers in cultural studies are often turned away by the results from empirical studies which they consider as reductionist and frequently missing the point. In this paper, I will argue that both sides will need to widen their perspective in order allow more interdisciplinary exchange in the future.