

Stigma and the Inappropriately Stereotyped: The Deadhead Professional

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The Grateful Dead, a North American rock band that stopped performing in 1995 after thirty years together, was as well known for its fans as it was for its music. Deadheads, as these fans are called, traveled from venue to venue to hear the band play, sometimes staying "on tour" with them for extended periods of time. Although there is still a large concentration of Deadheads in the San Francisco Bay area where the band originally performed, there are now Deadheads everywhere in the United States and in many foreign countries as well.

The community claims at least a half million members (Adams & Rosen-Grandon, 2002). It is not only remarkable among music communities because of the length of time it has survived, how geographically dispersed it is, and how large it is, it is also noteworthy because of the length and intensity of involvement of individual fans. When the band stopped playing together as the Grateful Dead, the average Deadhead had been attending their concerts for 10 or 11 years, and more than half of them had traveled at least 800 miles to attend a show (Adams, 1998b). In 2003, almost eight years after the death of Jerry Garcia, the band's lead guitarist, Deadheads remain loyal to the community and continue to attend concerts given by surviving members.

During the Grateful Dead's heyday, the media generally depicted Deadheads as lazy, unwashed throwbacks to the 60's who used illegal drugs, dressed unconventionally, and valued collective experiences more than material success. Paterline (2000) found that there were variations in how the media depicted Deadheads in the 40 American cities where the Dead played in 1989 and 1990, but the coverage almost everywhere was more negative than positive. As a result, the cultural mainstream stereotyped and stigmatized these fans. This paper discusses the type of stigma that is applied to Deadheads, documents that not all Deadheads fit the stereotype that served as the basis of this stigmata, and describes the consequences of stigma for Deadheads who do not fit the stereotype.

The Data

The background data were collected as part of the Deadhead Community Project (Adams, 1998a) and include observational notes from 91 Grateful Dead shows and nine Jerry Garcia Band concerts (Jerry Garcia also had his own band) between 1989 and 1995; notes from Deadhead social gatherings and concerts at which survivors of the Grateful Dead, jam bands, and Dead cover bands performed between 1995 and 2003; and reports of 21 students on each of four Dead shows during the summer of 1989. Also available are interviews with key members of the

Deadhead community and of the Grateful Dead organization. When Jerry Garcia died, approximately 150 Deadheads wrote letters and email messages about their experience mourning for him. All of these data, both observational reports and interview transcripts, have been processed, coded, and analyzed using Ethnograph 5.0 text analysis software (Seidel, 1998). In addition, the available data include a file drawer of letters and more than 21 megabytes of electronic correspondence from Deadheads; downloaded online conversations among Deadheads from rec.music.gdead, an electronic discussion list, for 13 years beginning with the summer of 1989; and artifacts, photos, video tapes, audio tapes, Deadhead media, and mainstream media about Deadheads.

Although a scientifically-correct survey of the Deadhead community has not been conducted, researchers, magazine editors, and book authors have asked volunteers to fill out questionnaires and participate in interviews on the topic. The results of these surveys are fairly consistent, and make it possible to describe the characteristics of the Deadhead community with some degree of confidence. The surveys conducted as part of this project include three mail questionnaires with open-ended questions (total N=177) between 1990 and 1996; 77 open-ended interviews conducted by students during the summer of 1989; and a questionnaire with closed-ended questions students distributed in the parking lots of Dead shows during the summer of 1987 (N=286). In addition, these data are supplemented results of a survey distributed by Grateful Dead Productions in 22 cities during Furthur Festival, a series of concerts at which surviving members of the band performed as the Other Ones during the summer of 1998 (N=6020), findings from a survey sponsored by TDK of the readers of *Relix* magazine (Dobbin/Bolgia Associates, 1994), which started out as a tape-trading newsletter and became a fanzine (N=600), and information from several surveys of the readers of *Deadbase*, a book which was published annually beginning in 1987 and includes song lists for each show and reviews of many. Results reported here include some from the 1988 *Deadbase III* Questionnaire (N=359), the 1989 *Deadbase IV* Questionnaire (N=185), the 1990 *Deadbase V* Feedback (N=129), the 1991 *Deadbase VI* Survey (N=229), and the 1992 *Deadbase VII* Survey (N=229).

Stigma

As Goffman (1963) observed, a stigma has its origins in a discrepancy between opinions about the way people should live their lives and perceptions of the way they do. Some people are stigmatized because of physical deformities or because of character flaws (Goffman, 1963). Regardless of their own individual characteristics, others are assigned what Goffman called a "tribal stigma." In other words, expectations regarding individual behavior and evaluations of a person's moral worth are extrapolated from impressions of the larger group to which the individual belongs.

The cultural mainstream applies a tribal stigma to Deadheads because they do not appear to be what they should be. The majority of Deadheads have opportunities to occupy privileged positions in our society. Observations at shows reveal that they tend to be Caucasian men from middle and upper-middle class backgrounds. Surveys results show that between 63% and 91% of Deadheads were male, and that the vast majority of Deadheads had at least one parent who was a professional or held a white collar job. Given these demographic characteristics, outsiders were justified in expecting Deadheads to be successful, well-groomed, law-abiding citizens rather than unemployed, lazy, drug-users as they were depicted in the press.

As with all stereotypes, there is some truth to the way Deadheads were portrayed in the media. They sometimes wear subcultural dress such as tie-dyed shirts, Guatemalan pants, home-sewn calico jumpers and halters, and Indian gauze skirts. When they are "on tour," they do not always bathe. Many Deadheads use marijuana and other psychedelic drugs or accept their use by others. The cultural mainstream interprets these behaviors of some Deadheads as signs that they reject the Protestant work ethic, a major North American value (Williams, 1951).

The irony is, however, that most Deadheads are successful and hardworking by mainstream standards. Rather than reject the mainstream value of individual material success, they supplement it with an appreciation of collective experientialism. Although their hippie forebears are often described as members of a "counterculture," Deadheads comprise a "subculture" (Hall, et al., 1976). The vast majority of Deadheads eventually obtain college degrees, and many of them finish graduate school (see Table 1). Although some employed Deadheads are pink or blue collar workers, most of them are professionals or fill white collar positions (see Table 2). Their level of income varies, but between 15% and 20% of samples including student Deadheads earned \$50,000 or more per year (see Table 3). Even the young "tourheads" who made their living selling food and hand-crafted items in the parking lot worked hard to support themselves and their "show families" (Sheptoski, 2000). Despite these facts, the negative stereotype of Deadheads prevails.

Table 1
Educational Attainment of Deadheads

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Level of Education	1987 UNCG Survey (N=292)	1992 Deadbase VII Survey (N=239)	1994 TDK Survey (N=615)
% < High school	8	0	1
% High school graduate	26	17	13
% Some College/ Trade School	64	1	20
% College degree	19	60	47
% Graduate degree	10	22	19

Table 2
Percentage of Deadheads in Each Occupational Category

Study	Professional	White Collar	Blue or Pink Collar	Student	Unemployed or Retired or Homemaker
1988 <i>Deadbase III</i> Questionnaire (N=359)	15	46	1	23	6
1989 Summer Tour Survey (N=78)	8	16	14	53	9

1989 <i>Deadbase IV</i> Questionnaire (N=185)	20	44	12	21	3
1990 <i>Deadbase V</i> Feedback (N=129)	17	41	16	25	2
1990 Open-Ended Survey (N=51)	26	40	11	23	0
1991 Open-Ended Survey (N=51)	21	58	8	13	0
1991 <i>Deadbase VI</i> Survey (N=229)	18	39	17	21	5
1992 <i>Deadbase VII</i> Survey (N=239)	18	34	26	18	2
1994 TDK Survey (N=615)	42	26	25	2	5
1995 Open-Ended Survey (N=56)	17	56	12	12	4

Table 3
Income of Deadheads

Level of Income	1991 <i>Deadbase VI</i> Survey (N=229)	1992 <i>Deadbase VII</i> Survey (N=239)	1994 TDK Survey (N=615)
% < \$20,000	25	38	13
% \$20-29,999	23	21	24
% \$30-39,999	21	18	18
% \$40-49,999	6	6	17
% \$50-59,999	8	6	14
% >\$60,000	7	10	14

Discussion

Tribal stigmata generally apply to people who share ethnic origin (Goffman, 1963). Race and nationality, which could each form the basis for a tribal stigma, are generally ascribed characteristics. In contrast, membership in the Deadhead community is "achieved" or voluntary. Research shows that reactions to voluntary membership in a stigmatized group is likely to evoke a more negative reaction from outsiders than membership in a group in which membership is not voluntary (Rush, 1998; Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988). When participation and identity is voluntary, as with the Deadhead community, the idea is that people who do not want to experience stigma can simply end or hide their affiliation. It is thus fair to expect that the stigma

assigned to Deadheads who choose to make their membership in the community known to others is relatively potent.

The stigma was particularly salient for older Deadheads who "should have grown up" and "gotten lives" (Adams & Rosen-Grandon, 2002). The stereotypical rock music fan is college aged, but this is not so with Deadheads. According to the Terrapin Station survey, which was conducted in 1998, two and a half years after the Dead stopped playing together, Deadheads' average age was about 32 years and most of them were in mid-life. Only a small percentage of Deadheads were younger than 22 years old (15.7%). Almost a quarter of them were more than 40 years of age (24.4%).

Goffman distinguished between the "discredited" (those whose community membership is known) and the "discreditable" (those for whom exposure is a possibility). For the "out" Deadhead, tribal stigma can result in actual discrimination. For example, police profiles for cars to stop without reason include those with Dead stickers on them (Eagan, 1990). Professional Deadheads dressed to attend shows have reported such incidents as being refused seats in restaurants, having guns trained on them while shopping in convenience stores, and not being allowed to take guests to their rooms in expensive hotels.

For the "closeted" Deadhead the issue is concealment and "passing." Of course, Deadheads might be "out" in one context and "closeted" in another. The issue is whether "[t]o display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where" (Goffman, 1963, p. 42). Another approach could be to "cover" how intensely involved the Deadhead is in the community. In both cases, whether entirely closeted or partially out, the need for concealment diminishes the identity of the Deadhead and limits how free they feel to be themselves. For example, when Jerry Garcia died, many closeted Deadheads reported depression resulting from fear of mourning publically (Adams, 1995).

The Deadhead community is not the only stigmatized community in which many participants are hardworking, law-abiding, professionals (e.g., bikers). Furthermore, many of the problems Deadheads reported are similar to problems reported by members of ascribed stigmatized groups (e.g., ethnic groups). This case study of Deadheads demonstrates that individual achievement is not a sufficient anecdote to tribal stigma. Even for people successful by mainstream standards, the potential consequences of membership in a stigmatized community include discrimination and the diminishment of identity.

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