

Introduction

Since its inception, Rock and Roll has excited, thrilled and entertained millions upon millions of people. Music lyrics have undergone a dramatic change over the years. These changes, along with the advent of music videos have caused parents, pediatricians, and sometimes politicians to become concerned about the impact of music on teenagers.

SOURCE A

Fact Sheet. National Institute on Media and the Family. 3 July 2001.

www.mediafamily.org/facts/facts_music.shtml

Music and Children

Music has long been a staple of kids' media diet, being the media of choice for many adolescents, frequently edging out television (Christenson & Roberts, 1998). Many teens use music to shape their cultural identity and to help define their social group. Some social groups are identified primarily by their choice of music.

Did you know?

- Pre-adolescents and adolescents listen to music (including radio, CDs, tapes and music videos) between 3 and 4 hours per day (Roberts & Christenson, 2001).
- By 11th grade, girls generally listen to music a half-hour more than boys do each day (Roberts & Christenson, 2001).
- 45% of U.S. teens listen to FM radio (Zollo, 1999).
- Teens consider musicians their heroes more frequently than athletes and rate the influence of music higher than religion or books (Knight-Ridder/Tribune News Service, 1999).
- More than 20-30 music styles are identified by teens. From this list rap and heavy metal stir the most controversy over song lyrics.
- Music affects emotions and teens use music to enhance or intensify their mood or to change mood directions (Christenson & Roberts, 1998).

Heavy Metal Rock Music and Explicit Lyrics

- Most heavy metal fans are not at-risk. However troubled, at-risk youth gravitate to heavy metal music, which correlates positively with casual sex, greater drug use, suicidal thoughts, drunk driving, conflict with parents and more school problems (Roberts & Christenson, 2001).
- Alienation from mainstream school culture often precedes a teen's choice of heavy metal music (Roberts & Christenson, 2001).
- The angry, depressive, violent lyrics of hard rock and heavy metal music may be a risk factor for suicide and violence for those adolescents who are already depressed and alienated, suicidal, have drug, alcohol and family problems or are alienated at school (Roberts & Christenson, 2001).

SOURCE B

Roehlkepartain. Eugene C. Music Mania. Search Institute. 1995.

www.search-institute.org/archives/tmsw.htm

Music Mania

As teenagers grow older, they spend less time watching television and more time listening to music. Between seventh and twelfth grades, the average teenager spends almost as much time listening to music as the entire number of hours spent in school since kindergarten. Older teens (15 to 19 years old) account for 25 percent of all recording sales in the United States.

Despite its widespread use, music's impact on teenagers is much less clear-and thus even more controversial-than television. This may be due, in part, to the fact that music rarely has kids' full attention; they tend to be doing something else with music in the background. It also reflects that music is so pervasive in youth culture that it's difficult to isolate music's effect.

Psychologists generally believe that music tastes reflect a teenager's personality instead of shaping it. In other words, kids choose music that reflects how they already feel about the world and themselves. One study of troubled teenagers found, for example, that heavy metal listeners tend to have a deep sense of isolation from others, while folk music lovers tend to have lower self-esteem and lack of communication with parents. Acid rock lovers show a lot of conflict and anger.

And while there's no doubt that some popular music conveys negative, harmful messages, there are questions about whether kids hear those messages. A California State University sociologist surveyed junior and senior high students about their favorite music. Only 7 percent perceived that their favorite songs were about sex, violence, drugs, or Satanism. Twenty-six percent indicated that the songs were about love. And 37 percent said they didn't know what their favorite songs were about. They just like the melody or beat.

There is evidence, however, that heavy a music subculture-particularly heavy metal music-can signal problems. According to the Journal of the American Medical Association, "Teenage immersion into a rock subculture may be primarily symptomatic of alienation and hostility toward adult society . . . The music may be both a portrait of their alienation and an unflattering reflection of their perception of moral and ethical duplicity of adult society."

For most kids, however, music is a natural symbol of young people's search for independence and autonomy. Dr. Laurence Steinberg and Ann Levine conclude in *You and Your Adolescent*: "Today, as in the past, parents worry about the effect of music on their adolescent's behavior . . . There is little evidence that adolescents listen to lyrics, much less use them as a guide for behavior . . . Like light reading, music is a harmless way of escaping from everyday life and indulging fantasies. If you find your adolescent's taste in music offensive, ask them to close the door or treat yourself to a pair of headphones for them."

Perhaps even better advice would be to insist that they listen to music at reasonable volume levels. There's clear evidence that listening to loud music on personal stereos for long periods of time can cause permanent, irreversible hearing damage. "I would never tell a kid not to go to a rock concert now and then," says Dr. William W. Clark of Washington University Medical Center. "But listening to a headset at maximum volume for hours at a time . . . means trouble."

SOURCE C

Jipping, Thomas. Music-inspired Killing. World Net Daily. 8 March 2001.
www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?article_id=21976

"He said a song inspired him."

So said 15-year-old Neil O'Grady of fellow 15-year-old Charles Williams, who on March 5 was arrested for shooting up Santana High School in suburban San Diego, killing two teens and wounding 13 others. Once again we ask: Could popular music inspire a teenager to violence?

Consider what we know music can do. On the positive side, the profession of music therapy is growing rapidly, and hospitals find that music actually enhances the healing process. The Roper organization found in a 1999 study that listening to music is the most popular way to relieve stress in the entire world. A little jingle can not only sell tons of coffee, but even those who will never drink a drop of java will remember the jingle forever.

No one can possibly believe that a medium with such positive power has no negative potential, a sobering thought since music is such a powerful element of youth culture. In a September 2000 report, the Federal Trade Commission noted that the most popular Internet purchase for teens is music. The Kaiser Family Foundation's November 1999 study concluded that between the ages of six and 16, music's portion of a young person's media consumption triples while television's portion declines by half.

Teens name listening to music as their top non-school activity, consider musicians as heroes far more than even athletes, and rate music ahead of religion or books as factors greatly influencing their generation. Two researchers in this field found that "one of the most important reasons cited by adolescents for seeking exposure to popular music is to learn about their social world." Dr. Sheila Davis, adjunct professor of lyric writing at New York University, aptly states that popular music provides "the primary equipment for living for America's youth."

As Dr. Howard Hanson, director of the Eastman School of Music, put it nearly 60 years ago, music "has power for evil or for good." A 1999 report by the Senate Judiciary Committee concluded that music "affects our moods, our attitudes, our emotions and our behavior." The American Psychological Association includes "media influences" in the list of factors contributing to a child's violence risk profile. The American Academy of Pediatrics says popular music can contribute to depression, suicide and homicide. The American Medical Association says popular music with destructive themes "could be harmful to some young people."

Dr. James Johnson, associate professor of psychology at the University of North Carolina, found that consuming violent music videos makes teens more approving of violent behavior in others and more likely to report being violent themselves. Dr. Hannelore Wass at the University of Florida found that the more negative music's theme, the more its consumers know and believe its message. It's no wonder that Newsweek magazine named popular music lyrics as a factor contributing to the current "culture of aggression."

Young people know that the "equipment for living" they receive through music is often destructive. Polls show that more teens than adults believe popular music encourages anti-social behavior. The Institute for Youth Development recently found that teens believe that repetition of negative messages in popular music "reinforces the idea that it's OK to use drugs or have casual sex." A 1999 survey found that two-thirds of America's teens believe that violence in television and music is partly responsible for school shootings.

The teenage murderer of Officer William Robertson in Milwaukee said he was inspired by lyrics from gangsta rapper Tupac Shakur. The teenage murderer of Texas State Trooper Bill Davidson actually defended himself by arguing that violent gangsta rap motivated him to kill. To murder his father in Los Angeles, Christopher Golly

lured him to his bedroom by blasting on his stereo a rock song in which the singer fantasizes about killing his father.

Thomas Solomon, who shot up Heritage High School in Conyers, Ga., also listened to Tupac Shakur. Following that incident, Time magazine reviewed recent headline-grabbing school shootings and noted a clear pattern of cultural influences. Mitchell Johnson, who with Andrew Golden killed a teacher and four students and wounded 10 others in Jonesboro, Ark., listened to Tupac Shakur.

SOURCE D

Sonni-Ali, Maria. Rapped with a Ruler. Black Information Link. 24 May 2006.

www.blink.org.uk/pdescription.asp?key=11672&grp=7cat=31

Rap artists such as Mos Def, Black Star and The Roots have been noted for making exciting rap music with positive messages that actually radiate self worth in young individuals.

Wyclef Jean (formerly of The Fugees) has always maintained a positive attitude about life and he presents this well in his rap style. Although he still informs us all about life in the streets, and shares some aspects of ghetto / gangster lyric style, the majority of his rhyme has a positive influence on most people.

Annemarie Olufuwa CEO of Mewe performing arts organization said: “This is not the first time this idea has been put forward, what people fail to realize is that many rap artists are making an effort to send positive messages through their lyrics.

“Children are open to so many influences so you cannot just pin aggression in children on the music they listen to...it could be a whole variety of things...such arguments of incitement to aggression and sexism can be used for computer games like Grand Theft Auto which parades scantily clad girls and men with guns.

“It is unsafe to assume that rap can have a negative effect on children as they are subject to masses of stimuli.”

Organizations have also highlighted that most adolescents are aware that swearing, guns and threats are part of the performance. Overwhelmingly, teenagers are conscious that violent histories of rap artists like 50 Cent, Tupac Shakur and Notorious BIG are the exception rather than the rule.

SOURCE E

Palumbo, Frank. Testimony: The Social Impact of Music Violence. American Academy of Pediatrics. 6 November 1997.

www.aap.org/advocacy/washing/t1106.htm

During the past four decades, rock music lyrics have become increasingly explicit -- particularly with reference to drugs, sex, violence and even of greater concern, sexual violence. Heavy metal and rap lyrics have elicited the greatest concern, as they compound the environment in which some adolescents increasingly are confronted with pregnancy, drug use, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome and other sexually transmitted diseases, injuries, homicide and suicide.

For example, Nine Inch Nails released "Big Man with a Gun," with the following lyrics: I am a big man (yes I am) and I have a big gun; got me a big old dick and I like to have fun; held against your forehead, I'll make you suck it, maybe I'll put a hole in your head; you know, just for the f--k of it...I'm every inch a man, and I'll show you somehow; me and my f--king gun; nothing can stop me now; shoot shoot shoot shoot shoot...

Marilyn Manson has quite the way with a lyric: "Who said date rape isn't kind," "The housewife I will beat" and "I slit my teenage wrist" are just a sample from two songs.

To date, no studies have documented a cause-and-effect relationship between sexually explicit or violent lyrics and adverse behavioral effects, i.e., I'll listen to a song about killing someone and therefore I go out and kill. But we can all acknowledge the overall effect music has on people, including adolescents and children. Otherwise, we wouldn't listen to it. Music wakes us up in the morning, makes us want to dance, soothes us when we're feeling sad and grates on some folks' nerves in the elevator. From infancy to adulthood, it is an integral part of our lives. Mothers sing lullabies to babies, toddlers and children play "ring around the rosie," and teenagers become absorbed in songs they believe help better define them during this rocky transition into adulthood.

Make no mistake about it; music can summon a range of emotions, most of which are wonderful. Yet there is some music that communicates potentially harmful health messages, especially when it reaches a vulnerable audience.

SOURCE F

Cagle, Daryl. Daryl Cagle's Professional Cartoonists Index. 1 May 2005.

www.cagle.com

