

Shanta Claiborne

English Comp. 11/Tinajero

07 April 2014

The Effects of Rap Music on Children

Music is a form of art that has proven to be an everlasting addition to the lifestyles of many people all around the world. Rap music in particular has been a major influence in the lives of children. Many people feel that rap music causes only negative effects on children due to a majority of the rap artists that are shown on television and that are delivered on the radio being heard rapping negative lyrics. Rap generated through mediated influences do show a great deal of negative attributes that some children seem to copy. However, rap music is not only a negative expression of music, but a positive form as well. In the article "Music Psychology and Effects of Music", Stevie Wonder sang, "Music is a world within itself, with a language we all understand..." (1). This article confirms the idea that music is an art that has the ability to reach all people old and young. Rap music gives children ways of stabilizing and developing their mental health, acts as a form of encouragement and gives children hope for the future. Rap also gives children a creative way of learning. Rap songs by the artists Nas, Z Ro, and Lauryn Hill support the reasoning that rap music has the ability to produce positive insights to children leading to positive effects.

The article "Music Psychology and the Effects of Music" also states that "Music can be a positive force for mental health, calming, relaxing, and intellectually stimulating" (1). The article also reads that "our choices in music, the intensity and frequency of the music we listen to, can have a bearing on our mental health" (1). A child that is exposed to the different music

may have the advantage of being able to develop a well-rounded view of ideas. Mental development of children is a process consisting of many phases. Exposing a child to only one style of music may cause that child to have an imbalanced ability to adapt in situations or environments that may be different than what the child has been exposed to. This may cause the child problems later in life when it reaches adulthood. Psychology of Music also states that “There are many positive benefits for children and teenagers to be actively involved in learning about a wide variety of music” (1). This supports the need for children to be exposed to different forms of music. Some people feel that rap music consists of only negative music and will not allow their children to listen to rap music. However, children are naturally curious and will do what they are not allowed to do.

While we know that children are naturally curious and will do what they may be discouraged from doing, we can be assured that rap music can offer insights that will teach them about life and give them advice the same way their parents give advice. Many children try to copy traits of their peers that may lead them down a path of destruction if they are not guided to the right road. In the song “I Can”, by rapper Nas, children are encouraged to keep focused no matter what obstacles may come their way. Nas warns children that not everyone is looking out for their best interest. He lets children know that through hard work and dedication they can be where they want to be in life. Children are often faced with situations that they may not be able to run from and will need to have the will power to overcome what is thrown their way. To shelter a child from life’s real world situations may not be in the best interest of the full development of the child. In the song “I Can”, Nas states,

Be, b-boys and girls, listen again/

This is for grown-looking girls who’s only 10/

The ones who watch videos and do what they see/
 As cute as can be up in the club with fake ID/
 Careful, for you meet a man with HIV/
 You can host the TV like Oprah Winfrey/
 Whatever you decide, be careful, some men be/
 Rapists, so act your age, don't pretend to be older than you are...

In this verse Nas warns young girls that there are many predators in the world that will take advantage of their ignorance and rebellious ways. This also implies that sexually transmitted diseases will not discriminate against their age, and that ultimately the choices that are made can hinder or end their future.

In addition to rap being a method of warning children about dangers in life, it also serves as a form of encouragement to children to find alternate ways to express their frustration about life's economical and unjust situations in a positive way. The rapper Z Ro raps in the song "These Days", that "Daughters disrespect their mothers like sons do their dads and these days/ I just don't know what to do struggling just to make it homie what about you?" Sometimes when children are being raised by a single mother who may not be employed and may not be able to provide a stable home, the children may feel the need to go out and commit unlawful acts in order to obtain money that is needed in the household for survival. Being able to rap about their problems instead of acting out gives a new method of relieving stress. Children must know that enemies don't always come as enemies, but often times they come as friends wanting to help. Children that are deceived in this way may end up in juvenile detention centers instead of in their homes listening to rap music. Children need to be assured that they will have an opportunity at life as what is expressed in the interview with Lauryn Hill.

In the interview “Window of Opportunity”, Lauryn Hill challenges listeners to think about the idea of defining their own meaning of success and not the ideas of others. Hill points out that being normal can have more value than fame. This may help a child who does not have what others children have to be able to recognize what real value is and interpret it for themselves. Children often compare their success stories with famous people instead of realistic ideas of success. Hill emphasizes the importance of living life with patience and understanding and applying knowledge to their lives. A child viewing this interview can be influenced greatly because this is a rapper who raps positive messages and is also giving positive advice.

With rap music being able to give new ideas of thinking in life’s situations, it also gives new and creative ideas in educational settings as well. Everyone has different ways in which we learn. Being able to capture the learning style of a child will ensure the child will succeed at any subject that is taught. Educating in the form of rap is one way to reach children who enjoy listening to music. An example is shown in the video “Dwarf Planet, Wassup? (Pluto Rap)”. In this video students are seen rapping about the solar system. Each child is given an opportunity to rap and express their knowledge of a single planet. Children are involved in their part of the song which may help each child to remember what is said in the song.

Another educational video used to help children is “ABC Rap video” from dancephonics. In this video each alphabet is named with an example being shown through a powerpoint of each definition. The rap song has an edgy rhythmic beat that can be soothing to the ears of the children who hear it.

The music style of rap music has proved to be a style of music that can reach a diverse group of children and impact their lives in a positive way. Parents that are worried that rappers don’t know how to be role models by having a cleaner image of music can be relieved that there

are other songs they can explore to be a part of their child's choice of music. The songs from Nas, Z Ro, Lauryn Hill, and songs of education are examples of how rappers not only rap about topics that some may feel are negative, but are also able to create artistic ways of capturing a diverse style that will compliment any form of life. By giving words of encouragement, teachings about life's situations, giving ways to overcome economic problems, and being able to aid in education, rap music is making a lasting positive effect on children.

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