

Rap Music and its Effects on Children

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Rap music has become a staple all over the world. It is a great form of entertainment for everyone, especially children. According to The American Academy of Pediatrics (2009), “Although time devoted to listening to music varies with age group, American youth listen to music from 1.5 to 2.5 hours per day. Still, a study performed with a small sample of at-risk youth revealed an average of up to 6.8 hours of music-listening per day”. But while many view the art form as simply a form of entertainment to fill the silence on long car rides, at home, or at parties, others have concerns about the effects that rap music can have on children. As children are more at risk to have their mindsets incredibly altered and behaviors influenced by their increased consumption of rap music, it is important to dissect both the possible negative outcomes, as well as the possible benefits. These negative effects include the negative representation and attitude towards women, glamorized drug use, as well as poor academics and violent behaviors. On the other hand, the positive effects include rap music serving as a vehicle for discussions over racial politics, being an outlet for expression, and being a type of informal education for youth from all backgrounds about the world they live in.

Misogynistic attitudes are not a foreign topic for most rap music. This, in turn, marks one of the big reasons most people stray from having a positive attitude about rap music. Children who are exposed to this language, the derogatory terms used to describe women, and this attitude about women’s roles in society can be negatively influenced in their own lives and relationships with women. Many rap songs nowadays allude to women being objects of pleasure for men, with no other role than to look good for and please them. Adams and Fuller (2006) points out that “Whatever form the characterizations take-whether mild or extreme- provides the listener with derogatory views of women. These views ultimately support, justify, instill, and perpetuate ideas, values, beliefs, and stereotypes that debase women”. Children are easily swayed, or influenced,

and since they are able to listen to rap music with no restrictions, they might hear these things and believe that it's the norm, and think that is the correct way to act towards women since others are doing the same thing.

Along with the normalized misogyny, rap music also tends to glamorize the use of drugs. Whether it be in the lyrics of the songs, or the music videos showing people consume copious amounts of drugs such as marijuana and lean, rap music contains many references to the issue. According to Primack et. al (2008), "The average adolescent is exposed to approximately 84 references to explicit substance use daily in popular songs, and this exposure varies widely by musical genre". An example of this is the song "Wake up in the Sky" Gucci Mane (2018), where Gucci Mane raps "I drink till I'm drunk/ Smoke till I'm high/ Castle on the hill/ Wake up in the sky." This song exemplifies the euphoria related with drug use that could make it appealing to children. Those who see and hear this may be increasingly curious and want to partake as well, face peer pressure, as the use of drugs can be perceived as "cool" amongst children. Emmanuella (2019) stated that "This was a problem because for many teens, rappers are what are becoming to be their idols in life, and a good majority of them partake in using drugs as well as participating in gang violence". The glamorization of drugs in rap songs can cause long term problems and substance abuse in children.

Another negative effect that rap music has on children is that it is closely related to poor academics and violent behaviors. According to Took and Wiess (1994), their study on a group of adolescents showed that those who listened to heavy metal and rap music displayed below average grades, behavior issues, and arrests, giving the possible reasoning as "They supply them with an identity, complete with clothes and hairstyle. They also offer a peer group that has few requirements for entry. They do not need to be scholars or athletes, or even have musical talent.

Finally, the image of the music gives these adolescents a sense of power, something they may not have anywhere else in their lives". Violence is a common theme in the lyrics of rap music. In the song "The Race" Tay-K (2017), he sings "You want action, you get turned into past tense/ Your boys deep? Well, let's get to subtractin'/ Smith & Wesson made my .9 with some compassion". Tay-K released this song as a fugitive before his trial over capital murder charges. Rappers make violence seem like a reasonable response to many situations, and since they often get away with violence, children may believe that they should partake as well with no consequences.

It is obvious that rap music and its influence on children often has a negative connotation in most people's minds. Parents and other close adults stray from allowing their child to listen to the music in fear of the negative effects that might linger. These concerns, while completely valid, overshadow the favorable effects that rap music can have on adolescents, such as it being a vehicle for discussions and debates over racial politics and stereotypes. Rap music shares stories, real stories, that many artists, primarily African American, have experienced in their lives, including racism, hate crimes, police brutality, and sexism. The song "This is America" Childish Gambino (2018) is a widely popular example of these stories, as he raps "This is America/ Don't catch you slippin' now/ Look at how I'm livin' now/ Police be trippin' now/ Yeah, this is America/ Guns in my area". While on its own rap music won't necessarily contribute to any drastic changes in society's views about these things, as most people don't dissect the music's teachings but rather solely view it as entertainment, when brought up in an academic setting or in a safe space that provides common ground for students from all groups it can open a door to educating children on misconceptions, creating empathy, and be the first step to a more inclusive society. "Though most Hip Hop is produced for a media culture that is market and consumption

driven, it can serve as an arena to challenge the foundations of America's racial order when its representations, discourses, and ideologies of race are made subjects of explicit and critical investigation” (Netcoh, 2013). Opening up a discussion about race and portrayals of different backgrounds contained in rap music can help adolescents develop a more open-minded approach to such sensitive, and incredibly controversial topics. Hip -Hop and rap music can be a crucial tool in mobilizing a shift in society, and young children’s minds, creating a better society for all.

Along with being a tool in creating discourse about racial politics and stereotypes, rap music also creates a safe space for artistic expression, and gives youth a sense of purpose. Rap music has become very widely known and there are many different artists out there, from all over the world, who create and share their music. Within the lyrics of those songs, there are allusions to real world events, strong emotions, and the highs and lows of life, all working together to create a story. Pham (2021) states “And both melodically and lyrically, there’s variation, there’s spontaneity, there’s the unexpected, there’s pace and delivery while also containing intention, structure, and emotional coherence. And the beauty of this intertwined and enmeshed artistic nature is apparent in the fact that for any listener, a complete understanding or comprehension of the lyrics, allusions, references, or melodic production is not necessary for the listener to grasp the *emotions and ideas* conveyed in the music”. Rap music is an art form, and gives those who create it a sense of identity, an opportunity to make something uniquely theirs. No matter what beat, what rhythm, what lyrics, or tone the artist chooses, there are a million ways to express emotions and thoughts through rap music that will also get others to listen and appreciate it.

Rap music isn’t just music. It can also serve as a type of informal education for children, communicating issues and happenings in the world they live in. This is especially true when

talking about black rappers sharing stories about police brutality, racism, and aggression towards them, and educating others about struggles they face on a day-to-day basis. Wilson (2018) stated that, “rap music has a positive influence on Black American youth as it serves as an outlet, both for listeners and artists, for understanding the hardships of growing up within the struggles of inner-city life caused by institutional racism”. This can be seen in the song “The Bigger Picture” Lil Baby (2020), where rapper Lil Baby says “I find it crazy the police’ll shoot you and know that you dead/ But still tell you to freeze/ Fucked Up, I seen what I seen/ I guess that mean hold him down if he say he can’t breathe”, a reference to George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter Movement. This understanding spreads to all races, and can lead to a better overall understanding of the issues that the world we live in faces. Rap music argues for social and political change, creating a sense of community, and educating others about important matters.

Overall, rap music and its effect on children is a controversial topic. With children from as young as the age of 8 listening to the genre almost every day, the things presented in rap music are bound to affect them in some way. And with increased access to electronic devices, or through interactions with peers, shielding them from these topics is ultimately not going to work. The effects that rap music has can be both negative and positive. Misogynistic lyrics and attitudes, drug abuse, and violent or self-destructive behaviors are examples that back up the negative connotation of rap music today. What many don’t realize though, is how rap music can have a positive impact on children, with things such as challenging stereotypes and politics regarding race, being a form of safe, artistic expression for youth, as well as educating children on the occurrences of the world around them.

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