

Rap and Kids; the Good, Bad, and Ugly

English 1323

Sheyla Aguilar

University of North Texas at Dallas

Rap music is a popular genre that has a large demographic consisting of kids and adolescents. Although this genre usually has a negative connotation grouped with it, it also has quite a bit of positive effects that occur. Kids are very impressionable growing up, this means that they adopt whatever they hear and see that they to relate to or feel resonates with them. Most kids start heavily listening to rap around their teenage years, an era where they tend to be the most troubled and can potentially pick up on the negatives; influenced to take drugs or alcohol, learn misogyny and degradation of women, and have increased aggression and developing disorders. However, this music can also help kids out throughout different eras of their childhood; it can help develop and stimulate their brains early on, help with speech and confidence, and encourage them to seek and form bonds. Everyone listens to music, there are just certain conditions in life that dictate how much each person listens to and how it will end up affecting them. Overall, rap is still music, and it will always be a popular genre that reaches all types of demographics, including kids.

A widely known negative effect that rap music can have on kids is the introduction and influence of drugs and alcohol. Although they are underage, the songs they listen to tend to have graphic lyrics and visuals over the party life. In “ADHD” Kendrick Lamar (2011) raps, “Marijuana endorphins make you stronger, stronger/ I’m in the house party trippin’ off/ My generation sippin’ cough syrup like it’s water”. The song describes doing drugs with friends and the music video provides a happier tone where everyone is just hanging out together. The illusions that these songs produce is that of a happy lifestyle by doing drugs. Friends have a good time while getting high or drinking together, but not all, if any, of popular rap songs show the dangers that this lifestyle can have, physically. Ryan states, “77 percent of rap lyrics mentioned drugs or alcohol” and also discussed how in a study of young Black girls who listen to heavy

rap, they are “1.5 times more likely to get a sexually transmitted disease, use drugs, or drink alcohol” (2017, p.1). This provides a good insight as to how extreme listening times or hardcore rap, which have these negative lyrical contexts, have a negative effect on adolescents.

Although, it is not a certain outcome that they will indulge in substance abuse, their probability of at least trying drugs or alcohol increases significantly compared to kids who do not listen to extensive amounts of hardcore rap.

Another negative effect rap music can have on youths is the potential learning of misogynistic tendencies and degrading women. Rap culture and the industry has a higher male prominence than female. This means that misogyny is prominent in songs, artists, and other people in the music industry. The concept of misogyny may not be understood by kids and adolescents to the full extent, however, thanks to rap culture they are exposed to it. Young boys and girls look towards forms of mass media, including music, to understand and learn what to expect as they grow up and get into relationships. Some young men are taught to respect women and treat them as equals, while others do not view them as such, they see them as people below them. In a study discussed by Hall (1998) there seemed to be an increase in assaultive mannerisms and justifying these actions in males who listened to misogynistic rap compared to those who did not listen to it. Hardcore rap, with the more aggressive lyrics and visuals, tends to be the main culprit in presenting these ideals of women serving men for entertainment. Usually, in the rap music they listen to there are many women for a single man, where the man gets a show from them and it symbolizes how the man, in a way, owns the woman. Ownership over women, although not always clearly stated, is an underlying point in many rap songs (Adams and Fuller, 2006).

The last negative effect discussed will be the troubled behavior that can be triggered in adolescents, they can be more aggressive and lash out towards others, especially adult figures. The brain can be overstimulated and end up not working properly because of it. Although some listening time to rap music will not prove any damage in the long run, those who listen to an extensive amount a day prove to be at risk for overstimulation and even developing other disorders. A study mentioned by the Council on Communications and Media Pediatrics (2009), stated that rap music contained the highest percentage of violent and aggressive lyrics and that this influences its young listeners, especially the boys, to be violent and lash out towards others. The aggression does not necessarily retain to a single category of person, the hate they feel can be based on gender, sex, race, etc. In “All Black” Big L (1995) raps, “I roll with scary crews, I come out of wars barely bruised/ I’m puttin’ motherfuckers on the Daily News/ I was a gangsta from the get-go/ Leavin’ fags in body bags with tags on they big toe”. This shows a snippet of how violent the songs can be and how they might influence younger, troubled kids with thinking they might go down that path since they want to act and be gangster too. Anger in teens can quickly turn to aggression if they do not have healthy coping mechanisms, they can start targeting anybody around them as long as it is out of their systems. In severe cases, there could be kids who end up killing others because they always heard it in rap songs as a means to an end of rivals.

Likewise, rap music also has a lot of positive effects on kids and their brains. School life is a big part of kids’ lives, they spend a majority of their years at school. Usually, adults, especially teachers, tend to not introduce the topic of rap music since they believe it to be a bad influence on children. However, there are some teachers that have learned that rap music can have positive effects on a growing mind. The effects of music on Childhood Development states,

“Music can stimulate the brain’s alpha waves, which creates a sense of calmness in the listener (2020, p.1). If taught early on, the effects music can have on kids is a positive one, regardless of it being rap. The steady sounds of the beat paired with fast lyric execution can provide a good stimulus for the brain as it has to focus on two things at once as well as trying to decipher what the artist is saying. Repeating the lyrics can help those kids who struggle with speech impediments, the practice of prose can help them develop better speech skills or at least to cognitively think better in a conversation. There are not many rap songs in mass media that are made specifically for kids yet, however, to combat this, many teachers have made their own rap songs depending on the subject they want the kids to remember.

Another positive effect rap music can have on kids is the ability to better their speech or speaking skills and how it can also help them establish some confidence. Both of these factors contribute to the other since you need confidence to talk freely to others but also need good communication and speech skills to execute the plan. In the song “Confident” Ace Hood (2020) raps about how he has gained confidence and how that is a big key element to his success and personality. Although the song is not a clean version, it is an example of rap songs that can help encourage kids and adolescents to seek out the best in themselves and gain confidence to put in effort and succeed. Crooke and Travis Jr. (2022) discuss different study programs for teens that have helped them sense of self confidence as well as learning to speak up and produce their own actual songs. The idea of having kids and adolescents make their own songs as well as recite pre-existing ones, is the fact that it puts their speech abilities to the test. They rap as fast as they can while staying coherent, this has presented itself to be a good speech therapy exercise as well as simple regular therapy since the songs portray the kids’ thoughts and emotions.

Finally, rap music can positively impact kids and adolescents by encouraging them to seek out a form bond. Kids tend to either be social or timid and are learning to make friends and usually start conversations by comparing something they have in common. Engaging a person by mentioning something they like is a good way to start conversations and if both parties share the same interest, it can open an opportunity for friendship to form. Jackson (2018) states, “rap offers a creative outlet and a way to connect with peers” (p.1). Music is a form of self-expression and with different genres there are many opportunities for groups of friends to be formed based on the particular music taste. Music can be heard anywhere and with today’s modern technology, kids have access to social medias that are able to connect them with other kids from around the world. Having rap as a form of self-expression and storytelling, rappers tell stories with their songs, and not all have to be violent or tragic. In the song “Best Friend” by Saweetie (2021) she raps about her best friend and how independent and fun she is. The song is about their friendship and how much she will always hype her best friend up. The song is a good example of expressing friendship. Rap music can bring people together based on the artists they listen to or the artist themselves can express their friendships through music.

Overall, rap music has had an unpopular influence on children and adolescents from an adults point of view. However, rap music has a lot more elements than the stereotypical curse words, alcohol, sex, and drug crazed popular songs that are the real cause of the unpopularity. Although rap is mainly popular in younger demographics, adults can also look into the types of rap music there are and see that not all of them are a bad influence on kids and that the songs themselves are not the sole reason for a kid to turn out “bad”, there are many factors in their lives that will help determine that. Rap music is able to provide kids with early on brain and speech stimulation as well as helping them build confidence for themselves and to present themselves to

others. There are both negative and positive connotations to rap music, however, it is a better balance than most adults believe it to be.

## References

Ace Hood. "Confident". (2020)

Adams, T. M., & Fuller, D. B. (2006). The Words Have Changed But the Ideology Remains the Same: Misogynistic Lyrics in Rap Music. *Journal of Black Studies*, 36(6), 938–957.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40034353>

Alexander Crooke Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Music Therapy, & Raphael Travis Jr.

Associate Professor of Social Work. (2022, March 8). *The healing power of hip hop*. The

Conversation. Retrieved April 4, 2022, from [https://theconversation.com/the-healing-](https://theconversation.com/the-healing-power-of-hip-hop-81556)

[power-of-hip-hop-81556](https://theconversation.com/the-healing-power-of-hip-hop-81556)

Big L. "All Black". (1995)

Hall, P. D. (1998). The Relationship Between Types of Rap Music and Memory in African American Children. *Journal of Black Studies*, 28(6), 802–814.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784818>

Jackson, N. (2020, January 14). What influence and effects does rap music have on teens today?

How To Adult. Retrieved April 14, 2022, from [https://howtoadult.com/what-influence-](https://howtoadult.com/what-influence-and-effects-does-rap-music-have-on-teens-today-9810841.html)

[and-effects-does-rap-music-have-on-teens-today-9810841.html](https://howtoadult.com/what-influence-and-effects-does-rap-music-have-on-teens-today-9810841.html)

Kendrick Lamar. "ADHD". (2011)

Media, C. on C. and. (2009, November 1). Impact of music, music lyrics, and music videos on children and Youth. American Academy of Pediatrics. Retrieved April 14, 2022, from

<https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/124/5/1488/72119/Impact-of-Music-Music-Lyrics-and-Music-Videos-on>

## References

Ryan, C. O. (2020, January 14). *How certain music genres affect teens*. How To Adult. Retrieved April 4, 2022, from <https://howtoadult.com/certain-music-genres-affect-teens-17466.html>

Saweetie. "Best Friend". (2021)

The effects of music on Childhood Development. Penfield Building Blocks. (2020, July 22).

Retrieved April 14, 2022, from <https://penfieldbuildingblocks.org/early-education/the-effects-of-music-on-childhood-development/>