

What Effect Can Rap Music Have on Children?

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Rap music is one of the most controversial types of music in America. The lyrical content and the music videos can show/explain so much explicit content that children should not be exposed to at a young age, but also give people a creative outlet to express themselves. Such rap music can influence children to do drugs, drink alcohol, and be involved in gang-related activities at a much younger age than normal. It can also normalize violence and have them grow up with no reactions to what is going on around them. The misogyny in the lyrics and videos can also be a huge impact on how they treat each other and even themselves. But, at the same time, rap music can be used to seek justice, peace, and love in the middle of injustices and give these children a voice and a way to express themselves creatively. It is all about the content in the music we allow our children to listen to and influence them.

Mixing both the heavy content behind rap music and children is not a great mix. Many children are exposed early on to adult topics by them just turning on the radio. The huge mental, physical and emotional impact that can have on a child can completely force them to “mature” at a younger age and get them involved in things they have no business being involved in like drugs, alcohol, and gang-related activities. According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, “many of the rap lyrics contribute to the suicide, violence, and inappropriate sexual content in lyrics that also influence and contribute to teens taking part in drugs and alcohol in a younger age.” (2019) We spend most of their school lives teaching them to “say no to drugs” or “stop sexual violence,” but allow them to be influenced by “pop culture music” around them. We allow songs like “L\$D (LOVE x \$EX x DREAMS)” (A\$AP Rocky, 2015) that say “Girl, I really fuckin' want love, sex, dream,” and the main topic is about him not

being able to profess his love for a girl because he's more into drugs. This can teach children so much but since their mind is not fully developed, they won't be looking past the lyrics, they'll be looking at that line and would want to relate to the artist because they are "rich and famous."

Aside from drugs and alcohol, one of the biggest things talked about in rap music by male artists is having sex with women, wanting to have sex with women, or sexually harassing them. And the thing is, that it is completely normalized and sung in a tone of "chillin" or "having a good time", almost like attacking the respectability of women all for the sake of having fun. An example of this can be seen in many songs but one specifically is "Amityville" by Eminem (2000) where he raps, "I fucked my cousin in his asshole, slit my mother's throat / ... / My little sister's birthday, she'll remember me / For a gift I had ten of my boys take her virginity / And bitches know me as a horny-ass freak / Their mother wasn't raped, I ate her pussy while she was 'sleep," casually bringing up topics such as incest, rape, sexual harassment and much more. To think that we as a society still listen to his music when he has a song like this; makes me question the character of the world and society, since this is what we call "pop culture." It doesn't matter if he believes that he doesn't hate women, what is being said through his music portrays a strong message of misogyny and real hatred and disliking towards them. Young boys listening to these lyrics will influence them to think that it is normal to objectify women and influence girls to objectify themselves for validation in this society. It can also increase toxic masculinity in young boys, convincing them that to be a man they have to behave superior to women and make them feel inferior. In an article about how to prevent misogyny and sexual harassment among teens, it mentions that "in [their] recent national survey, 87% of 18 to 25-year-olds reported that at some point in their lives they had been the victim of some form of sexual harassment." (Ditkowsky,

2021) For 18 to 25-year-olds women to have experienced this in their lives, men at the same or younger age would have to be learning these types of behaviors at an early age. Later in the same article, it explains that when listening to music with misogyny and sexual degradation, “it is vital that... parents speak up and help our children become mindful, critical consumers of this information—even if speaking up makes us uncomfortable.” (Ditkowsky, 2021) Doing so can prevent sexual violence, sexual abuse, rape, toxic sexual behavior, self-esteem issues, and even suicide at a much younger age.

The normality of violence among young people has also had a huge, negative impact on our society. Teens and children are now being taught that gun violence, street violence, and every other type of violence are normal because of how often it is used in rap music and rap music videos. Today we also see them posting videos and pictures of themselves holding guns and saying stuff like “watch out” or making jokes saying “don’t come to school tomorrow.” The fact that many people are ok with these types of jokes, children yielding guns around, or even not being phased by the violence is terrifying. Some “evolved” and “mature” children dare to say that they listen to 90’s rap that “isn’t as bad” when that cannot be further from the truth. The rap song “One Less Bitch” by N.W.A (1991), brings up sexual violence, rap, and murder so casually with the lyrics, "I tied her to the bed, I was thinking the worst / But yo, I had to let my niggas fuck her first / Yeah, loaded up the 44 yo / Then I straight smoked the hoe;" it’s sickening. A study conducted by the American Academy of Pediatrics (2009), showed that exposure to gratuitous violence led to a reduced willingness to help people who were in pain. The study saw that “participants in two different experiments take longer to come to the aid of an injured victim, saw a violent act as less serious, and were less likely to even hear that a fight was occurring

when compared with those who [were exposed to non-violent content.] Additionally,... prolonged exposure to violence increases agreement with the idea that violence is an acceptable way of solving problems. It also promotes acceptance — in children — of the "mean world" syndrome: a belief that the world is a dark and sinister place.” The poor children are being convinced that the world is such a bad place that they can’t just grow up and appreciate all the good like art, people, and anything else.

An article published on The Conversation called “The healing power of hip hop”, has taken a more positive route to rap music saying that, “the lyrical content [of rap music] is a vehicle for building self-reflection, learning, and growth.” (Crooke & Travis Jr., 2019) Rap music can bring awareness to issues currently happening in our society such as protests, racial discrimination, civil rights movements, and many more issues. With the recent events of the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement, people are learning more and more about the injustices in black and brown people’s everyday lives and have influenced singers and artists of color to come out and bring more awareness through what they do best, create music. The song “I Can’t Breathe” by H.E.R. (2020), is a perfect example of using the rap platform to shake people to their core and enable strong reactions and actions from their music. H.E.R.’s lyrics, “I can't breathe / You're taking my life from me / I can't breathe / Will anyone fight for me? / How do we cope when we don't love each other? / Where is the hope and the empathy? / How do we judge off the color? / The structure was made to make us the enemy,” makes people question, will anyone fight for black Americans? Will anyone look inside themselves and find love, hope, and empathy for each other? The song not only triggers reactions from people but educates them on what is happening

in our world right now. These types of lyrics can raise a whole generation to seek justice, peace, love, happiness and so much more.

Another positive view on rap can be seen through the power to give people, more importantly, children, hope that there is a better life than the life of crime, sex, violence, and drugs. Songs like “Gangster’s Paradise” by Coolio (2010), call out the industry itself for raising our children to grow up with “too much television watchin’” that “got [them] chasin’ dreams.” Coolio also talks about the regret he has for living a life of crime with the powerful lyrics saying, “As I walk through the valley of the shadow of death / I take a look at my life and realize there's nothin' left / ‘Cause I've been blastin' and laughin' so long, that / Even my momma thinks that my mind is gone.” These types of songs are what young people should be listening to, still with some precaution of sensitive topics. Rap not only can give them hope for a better life but also give them an outlet to express themselves through something creative like music. “Music gives them the chance to express how they’re feeling in a way that’s slightly detached from just talking about it.” (Purvis, 2017) It is a great tool to step out of the outside world and focus on what they’re feeling; a sort of therapy for anyone.

When it comes to rap music, the effects all depend on the meanings, lyrics, and music videos. Saying “rap is bad” or “rap is good” is relative to the song. Judging or stereotyping rap based on a group of songs won’t change the effects rap can have on children. The fact of the matter is, songs that contain lyrics, pictures, videos, etc., of something sexual or drugs, guns, and violence will have negative effects on children and their mindsets while songs that have a more positive outlook that brings people hope, send a message of freedom, and don’t bring up such sensitive topics will have a better effect on them. We can’t control the reactions anyone will have

from specific songs, movies, videos, posts, or anything of that sort, but we can control what we allow them to be exposed to. As a parent or guardian of a young person, their main responsibility is to protect their children even if it means monitoring the media around them until they are of age to learn about more mature topics and can have conversations about the bad and of the good in music.

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