

The Impact of Rap Music on Children

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Rap is a music genre that has seen its popularity explode over the past few decades. Its lyrical content includes a wide range of topics from social commentary on the struggles of being from the hood to explicit content about sex, drugs, money, and even murder. The mass exposure of rap has been felt by people all around the world and of varying ages, including children. It is said that a child can be shaped to be whatever the parents envision, since they are so easily influenced by their surrounding environment. (University, 2021) With rap introducing vulgar language to such a young audience, it is no wonder why some believe the music also influences children to become more violent and develop bad habits such as drugs and alcohol. For these reasons, many believe that rap music should be strictly off-limits, but there are some upsides to it as well. Rap music has a particular way of connecting to the youth about issues in the world that is very difficult to duplicate with other forms of media. Rap fans find it as an enjoyable way to express their struggles and sorrows. Mental health professionals agree with this sentiment and even use rap as a therapeutic measure. On top of this, some teachers use it as well to teach the material to their students. In addition, fans of the music genre or even specific artists tend to stick together and bond over something they all love.

Firstly, many categorize rap music as nothing more than inappropriate and tasteless. Despite the clear overgeneralizing of this opinion, there is some merit to it. The fact of the matter is that rap music exposes and possibly even introduces profanity to the very malleable minds of young children. In an interview with 247HH.COM, Termanology, a rapper, was asked about his thoughts on young children listening to rap music. He is firmly in the camp that believes that children shouldn't listen to it because of the inappropriate nature of it. He mentioned how "you go on Instagram and there's videos of little two year old kids like: "we got baking soda, we got

baking soda,” and maybe they don’t know what they saying but it’s being drilled into the youth’s mind.” The introduction of the negative lyrical content in rap rubs off on the youth and they will learn new vocabulary, such as the example that Termanology cited with kids screaming “baking soda,” which is slang that refers to cocaine. A good example of this is on the Kanye West & Lil Pump collaborative track “I Love It” Pump (2018) raps “Fucked that bitch up out in London (Up out in) Then I fucked up on her cousin Or her sister, I don't know nothin' (Uh-uh, woo).” These lyrics are utterly obscene and depict women as nothing more than sexual objects. No only do these lyrics include profanity that a child could learn, but it could also encourage children to mistreat and oversexualize women.

In addition, it has been proven that children who listen to rap music are more likely to become alcoholics and/or drug abusers and even become more violent. The explicit lyrics in rap songs could influence the youth to adopt bad habits, including sexual violence. There is a stigma about women in rap being used as a sex symbol and nothing more. This is not true for every rap song, but a song that captivates this is the song “R.I.P” where Playboi Carti (2018) raps “I go psycho, bitch, watch me sock your bitch Watch me thrash that bitch, then I pass that bitch.” The content of these lyrics are indisputably horrid and most definitely should not be consumed by a younger audience. Here, Playboi Carti is quite literally bragging about hitting a woman and then abandoning her. There could even be an argument made that he’s encouraging this behaviour. Nevertheless, the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluations Prevention Research Center in Berkley, California determined that rap songs “are strongly linked to alcohol addiction, drug use, and violence among young people.” (Gordon, 2006) According to the research, a young and impressionable kid who listens to music with lyrics such as these, is more likely to become more violent than a child who does not listen to rap music.

On the contrary, rap music could also be beneficial to the youth because it gives them an outlet to express their feelings. For example, a child in the hood could listen to music that describes the struggles of living in poverty. In his song “i” Kendrick Lamar (2015) raps “They wanna say it's a war outside, bomb in the street Gun in the hood, mob of police Rock on the corner with a line for the fiend And a bottle full of lean and a model on the scheme, uh.” Here, Lamar is shedding a light on how his hood in Compton was, in an effort to connect with others who were stuck in poverty just like he was. This connection builds an inspiration and bond of sorts that gives the listeners hope of a better life. Another song that seems to have inspiration in mind is “Hard Work Pays Off” by Juice Wrld and Future (2018) where Juice raps “Twenty-four seven, every day, we get it in, yeah (Yeah, yeah) Started living out my dream, feel like I was born again They say hard work pays off, I've been feeling paid, oh.” These lines encourage the listener to work hard and try their very best because it pays off. This is a positive message that the late Juice Wrld wanted to convey to his fans, almost like a father figure would with his son. Eric Reese (2019) said it best in his “Hip Hop’s Connection to the Youth” article when he stated: “The connection between a rapper and his fan is not just the instrumental and the rhythm; but also the experience and feeling.”

Next, rap can be very beneficial to the human mind because it allows for a relaxing escape from reality. The music is used by mental health professionals to help their patients and even educational teachers to teach their students. Therapists consider rap music to be a great tool for them to use because the themes that are typically included in positive rap songs, are often rather taboo or difficult to discuss otherwise. It is even considered by some to be “the perfect form for music therapy.” (Crooke & Travis Jr., 2017) The mass amounts of children who listen to rap music benefit from the soothing instrumentals and the positive subject matter that is put

forth in some songs. Another thing that rap music has going for it is its sheer inclusivity. As Crooke and Travis Jr. duly noted, “At its simplest, you can make a beat with your mouth – beatboxing – or on a school desk, and create or recite lyrics about anything without singing.” (Crooke & Travis Jr., 2017) This gives the youth an outlet to not only listen to the music, but also create their own. Also with ease of accessibility to apps such as GarageBand and other music making softwares, it has never been easier for a young person to pursue their own music career. Not only can a rap fan be invested by listening to their favorite artists, but they can also decide to make the art of their own.

Furthermore, rap music creates a sense of community for the youth. The majority of kids listen to rap nowadays, so they will have something in common together. Whether than feeling socially isolated, they can come together and get along because of their similar taste in music. Someone’s taste in music says a lot about them, so it is not uncommon to discover that some personality traits and/or beliefs are common amongst fans of a certain genre of music. A great example of this is “Thank You” featuring Lucy Rose and The RattPack by Logic. (2018) After a verse about his rise to fame and a beautifully assisted chorus by Lucy Rose, there is a very long interlude by The RattPack, his fans. Before the release of the fourth installment of his Young Sinatra mixtape series, he made social media posts to encourage his fans to call a number he set up to leave voicemails they would like to hear on one of his songs. Many fans left voicemails and it was up to Logic and his team to decide upon which he wanted to include on the track. Of the voicemails that were put in the song, they were all very positive and good spirited. The fans also made sure to mention where in the world they were from, and places from Texas to Egypt and all around the world were named, proving how one musician’s work can unite hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people. All of the voicemails Logic’s fans left were thankful in

nature, they showed their gratitude for how much his music meant to them and how it helped them get through tough situations in life. A couple voicemails on “Thank You” by Logic (2018) that stand out to me are: “Aye, what's up Logic, big love out here from Jonathan U.S. Navy out here in Japan. Much love for my boy Oscar. Keep us going every day,” “Yo, what up Logic. It's Max calling from Alberta, Canada. I just wanted to say your music has really inspired me and has always got me feeling up when times were down,” and “Hey, I'm Deborah from Hong Kong, and I just want to say that your music has lifted my soul in such tough times and it told me that anyone from anywhere could be anything they want to be.”

In conclusion, rap music could have a positive or negative effect on a child, it is a case by case basis. Rap notoriously includes very inappropriate and vulgar language in its lyrics which could influence children to adopt harsh words, and possibly even encourage their violent side to get the best of them and turn to substances such as alcohol and/or drugs. Not all rap is negative however, there're much easily digestible rap artists out there who spread a message of positivity and motivate their fans to do what they love in life. Children who listen to rap music use it as a form of expression as an outlet for their emotions. On top of that, the youth also benefits from the music's use in education and mental health therapy. Fans of rap will also have a much easier time getting along, and thus making friends easier for them because they have something they can bond over. I believe it ultimately all comes down to the children's parental figures and how they monitor the media they are being exposed to. A child who listens to artists who spread negativity like Lil Pump should be completely fine if they are told about the ignorance they are listening to. Children should be taught by their guardians that they should not seek to look up to violence, drug use, and other illegal acts, instead they should condemn it. And once they understand, the child should have no problem having fun listening to rap music.

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