

# Psychology and music violence

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



## The Effects of Violent Music Content on Teenagers

Throughout history the human populous has been attracted to music. Whether it be part of a ritual, an emotional release, religious reasons, or just for listening pleasure music has been at the center of our society. We have used music to express ourselves, tell stories, and let others into our thoughts. However, we often wonder whether what we are saying has an effect on the listening audience.

Recently, in the 1990's references have often been made to link violent and deviant behavior to music and certain music genres. Some such genres include but are not limited to; heavy metal, rock, death metal, rap, gansta rap, industrial, hardcore, and alternative music. During the last decade we have seen music lyrics become more and more violent and sexually explicit. Experts argue that this can cause problems in children and adolescents. Studies show that the average teenager listens to approximately 40 hours of music in a given week. One is to assume that somewhere in the mix a child is going to hear something derogatory or objectionable, as it has become the norm in todays society. In most music today especially rap and heavy metal most of the lyrics contain references to violence, sex, and/or drugs. While many argue that this is dangerous for children to hear we

know that a modern day teenager often faces violence, drugs, suicide, pregnancy, and other aspects of this music.

While we find that lyrics may be dangerous to a child we must ask ourselves whether the child fully understands and comprehends what the artist is saying. Teenagers often do not understand what is being said, in fact in one study only 30 percent of those questioned knew the lyrics to their favorite songs and they all had varied comprehension as to what the message was. It could be argued that if the lyrics were not included in the artists booklet then the audience would never know what was being said. Some lyrics are indeed harsh such as this Nine Inch Nails lyric:

I am a big man yes I am; and I have a big gun; got me a big ole \*censored\* and I like to have fun; held against your forehead I'll make you suck; you know, just for the \*censored\* of it.

Obviously we cannot interpret this as a positive meaning. A sampling of lyrics from Marilyn Manson include Who says date rape isn't fun, ... the housewife I will beat..., and I slit my teenage wrist, among others. Manson concerts are often grounds to bash religion and rip bibles while fan chant we hate love, we love hate. Other songs that have overtones of violence include slap-a-ho by

Dove Shack and another song sung by death metal band Cannibal Corpse in which they make reference to masturbating with a dead womans head. Avid music lovers attest that they words sung in these songs are just words and or no different that poetry printed in literature books. No studies to date have concluded that listening to a song that speaks of death will make a teenager want to go out and kill.

Do these kinds of lyrics breed todays children to be killers and to be sexually promiscuous? Yes, and no, depending on who you speak to. Listening to music does not drive people to kill, and no proof of such has been offered. In fact, one teacher speaks of a student who wore a Metallica shirt everyday to school and wrote lyrics with foul language, but was often seen sitting in the front row at Sunday mass with his mother in a nice suit. The same people who go out to see Black Sabbath and Motley Crue are the same people who handle world finance and international affairs, it is just their choice in music.

Studies that use music videos on the other hand show an increased tolerance in deviant behavior among both males and females. Music videos add reinforcement to what is being heard with the use of visuals. Now an extra sense is being used. Videos often exhibit sexual innuendo, acts of aggression, and gender stereotypes.

Studies showed that men have a tolerable attitude as to what is violent and what is too far in sexual advances. Women have less of a tolerance. Studies have also found that heavy metal music and gansta rap influence mens attitudes towards women and that increased exposure to videos containing interpersonal violence against women tended to increase men's acceptance of rape myths such as she was dressing like she wanted it or she brought it on herself. In contrast, women's beliefs decreased and they felt that men were coming on too strong and being too aggressive.

Another study conducted on college campuses in the northwestern United States involved men and women watching various music videos and then answering a set of questions afterwards. One video was The Way You Make Me Feel by Michael Jackson which depicts a man stalking a woman who then becomes infatuated in his game of pursuit. The other was The Stand by REM which only showed the band on-stage playing instruments. In questions answered after the videos men said it was necessary to pursue the woman to such an extent while women thought it was annoying and/or disturbing. Men scored higher on a attitudes for sexual overtones, while surprisingly women scored slightly higher on the acceptance of interpersonal violence. The studies did conclude that women who were often subjected to

violent music videos were more accepting of violence than those who have not had constant viewing or listening to such lyrics and images. It also showed that men had a greater acceptance of sexual stereotyping and rape myths after being subjected to the videos.

Many methods of behavior modification have been suggested in order to keep this music from causing harm or hurting anyone individuals. Many arguments can be made as to whether the music should be censored or if it is unconstitutional to do. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends different types of behavior modification to combat the harmful effects of this music.

One such idea is as simple as having parents be aware as to what their children are listening to, and to discuss anything they deem objectionable. This would be a positive way to relate emotions to the songs. Another idea proposed is labeling of content in compact discs. It would be labeled outside as to what the lyrics contained (i. e. language, sex, drugs). It has also been suggested that groups as well as individuals approach record companies, music stores, and artists and ask them to consider the ramifications of their music on their audience and market it accordingly and in a favorable manner. Ideas have been proposed to set up research studies to further investigate the effects of explicit

music on the behavior of teenagers. One of the most effective ideas proposed is as simple as people accept that this music is an art form and a means of self-expression and emotional release and treat it as such. Just as with rock and roll and Elvis Presley people will always find something wrong with the music that others listen to.