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Study: Pop Music Heavy On Drugs, Booze

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(WebMD) The songs may change, but one theme remains the same: Popular songs often portray alcohol and drug use in a positive light.

The latest study of the issue comes in an analysis of the 279 most popular songs of 2005 by Brian A. Primack, M.D., and colleagues at the University of Pittsburgh.

A third of the songs portrayed alcohol and drug use. And more than two-thirds of these portrayals were positive, the researchers found.

"Previous research has shown that exposure to substance-use messages in media is linked to actual substance use in adolescents," Primack says in a news release. "That is why we need to be aware of exposures such as these, especially when they are associated with highly positive consequences and associations."

In 2005, when Kelly Clarkson's substance-free "Since U Been Gone" topped the charts, other top songs filled airwaves and earbuds with an average of 35.2 substance-use references per hour.

The substances in question, as a percentage of songs portraying substance use, were:

- Alcohol, 24 percent
- Marijuana, 14 percent
- Other drugs or unknown substances, 12 percent
- Tobacco, 3 percent

Motivations for substance use were:

- Peer/social pressure in 48 percent of songs portraying use
- Sex in 30 percent of songs portraying use
- Money in 25 percent of songs portraying use
- Mood management in 17 percent of songs portraying use

Substance use was associated with:

- Partying in 54 percent of songs portraying use
- Sex in 46 percent of songs portraying use
- Violence in 29 percent of songs portraying use
- Humor in 24 percent of songs portraying use

Only four songs contained explicit anti-substance-use messages, and only one referred to limit setting. None of the songs portrayed substance refusal.

Some genres were more likely to portray substance use than were others. Substance use was portrayed in:

- 86 percent of rap songs
- 37 percent of country songs
- 29 percent of R&B/hip-hop songs
- 14 percent of rock songs
- 12 percent of pop songs

Primack reported the findings in a presentation to this week's annual meeting of the American Public Health Association in Washington, D.C.

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