

Exposure to lyrics with degrading sex linked to early sex experience

Last Updated: Tuesday, February 24, 2009 | 10:44 AM ET [Comments 35](#) [Recommend 17](#)
The Canadian Press

High exposure to lyrics that describe degrading sex is associated with high levels of sexual behaviour in teens, a new study suggests.

The research, published Tuesday in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, was conducted in three large urban high schools in the Pittsburgh area, and involved asking Grade 9 students about the number of hours a day they listen to music and their favourite musical artists.

"Music exposure is growing ... there is now unprecedented access to music and it's also becoming more direct, more explicit," said co-author Dr. Brian Primack of the Center for Research on Health Care at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

'We can teach what we call media literacy ... so that they know it's not in their best interest to be modelling sexually degrading images.'

— Dr. Brian Primack

"Adolescents are exposed to six to eight hours of mass media messages per day, and since it is such an important exposure, we need to know if this is affecting health."

He noted, for example, that data has shown that up to 25 per cent of American teenage girls have sexually transmitted diseases.

STDs are particularly problematic in poor communities, Primack said, and that was a reason for focusing on three urban high schools where about half the kids take part in a lunch program — indicating they fall below a certain income level.

Listening in

The team divided participants into three groups depending on how much they listened to music with degrading references.

"Those who were exposed to the most were more than twice as likely to have had sexual intercourse, and that's even controlling for all of the other factors that we looked at that we thought might be related to uptake of sexual intercourse," Primack said.

One limitation of the findings was that the teenagers were self-reporting.

"We didn't actually have their iPods in our hands, but what we did was we asked people to report the number of hours that they listen, both on a weekday and a weekend day," Primack explained.

"It's an approximation because we can't ask them every single song that they've ever listened to, but the way it is with young people in this particular demographic, their favourite artist is generally quite

representative of all of the things that they listen to."

Daniel Levitin, a cognitive neuroscientist at McGill University in Montreal, said the study "clearly adds to our body of knowledge about the connection between musical lyrics and ...experiences of young people."

Responsibility of parents, musicians

But Levitin, author of the bestselling book *This is Your Brain on Music*, said the study wasn't designed in a way that it could tell us about any causes of the young people's behaviour.

"The important thing to bear in mind is whatever it is that's causing young people to engage in increasingly risky sexual activity at a younger age — we don't know whether there's some third factor out there in the world that's causing them both to engage in that activity and to seek out this music."

He cautioned against extrapolating the findings to other centres, noting there might be a number of reasons Pittsburgh is special.

Jane Brown, a professor at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, said the findings corroborate a couple of previous studies and supports the notion that there is a relationship.

Parents need to pay more attention to this, and help their teens choose healthier, less degrading music, she advised.

"Secondly, I would like to see the musicians' community take some responsibility for this," she said.

"And thirdly, we can teach what we call media literacy, which is to help kids be more critical media users, or more intelligent media users, so that they know it's not in their best interest to be modelling sexually degrading images."

Primack agreed with the need for media literacy.

"If we give young people the ability to analyze and evaluate all those messages for themselves, so they can hopefully understand a little bit more about the fact that these messages are not necessarily reflecting real life, then they might not be prone to simply imitate what they hear."

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MMFan89 wrote: Posted 2009/02/26

at 10:03 PM ETOK this is pretty simple. Music is music. People have control of there own behaviour and

actions. Now you don't need music to encourage sex. Kids in school yards talk about it. Sex is everywhere. Sex is a part of everyday life not only is it normal but that's how babies are made ...that's how each and everyone of us were created . Now people are responsible for their actions. It's not 50 cents fault why 12 year old girls are getting pregnant. Where are the parents? These things can be avoided. Sex will always be around and music is a way of expressing desires and that's their right as humans. The right to free speech . We need to stop looking for excuses for our own behaviour...relax... as long as you're not a fool and wrap up your tool... no worries.....be happy :)

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Jakespeare wrote: Posted 2009/02/25

at 4:15 PM ET I would be very careful having sex with Hedgehog... ouch. Lady Gaga, the Pussycat Dolls, all the babes stripping and bumping to sell their ringtones and the studs pirouetting on their heads for the honey that drips from the star machine. Much Music is a sexual supermarket... the American Top 40 is the express lane. What goes on at some Highschool parties would blow your head off. Has anyone heard of Rainbow Parties....? We have abandoned our kids to the misogynous violence of gangstas whose basic moves are rape gestures. Sex is great, Hedgehog, but it's not for throwing away or by becoming someone's sex dumpster. It's a damn good way of making babies and cementing relationships for life's journey.

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NeilWilliams wrote: Posted 2009/02/25

at 10:20 AM ET One day I hope we come to the point in human evolution, we will understand sex is a good thing

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jl123 wrote: Posted 2009/02/25

at 9:23 AM ET perhaps it isn't the sex itself that's a bad thing, but the fact that if one is going to engage in this type of activity, one needs to be responsible about it. While I highly doubt that a song advocating condom use would be popular (although you never know, I don't keep up with this stuff anymore- I'm still back in 80's, I guess) why would it be such a bad thing to include being responsible into a song ? The same goes for the idea that every for everything you do in life, there will be a consequence, and there is nothing wrong with taking a minute to stop and think before you do something.

I have also noticed that kids seem to be getting into this type of thing at a younger age (some as young as eleven and twelve) I'm sorry, but that, at least from my point of view, is just too young to be having sex, although it's a good age to start talking about it with your kids.

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masterwatch wrote: Posted 2009/02/25

at 7:59 AM ET What about the "soaps" with people jumping from bed to bed suggesting that adultery is the norm?

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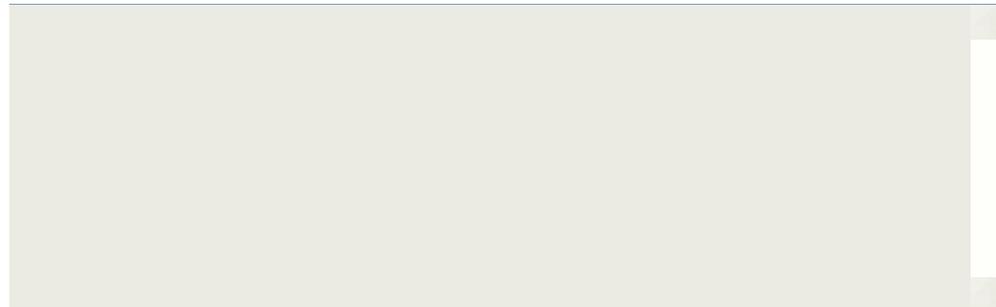
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