

Drug-using teens fond of related songs

By Tom Fontaine
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Teens whose favorite music is laden with marijuana references are twice as likely to use the drug as teens who don't listen to pot-related music, according to University of Pittsburgh research published this week in a British scientific journal.

It remains unclear, however, whether songs with marijuana references drive teens to use the drug or if users are drawn to such music.

"It's almost certainly a mixture of both," said Dr. Brian A. Primack, associate professor of medicine and pediatrics at the University of Pittsburgh. Primack led the study, published Tuesday in the journal *Addiction*.

Researchers surveyed nearly 1,000 ninth-graders in the Pittsburgh area.

In an average day, the study said, teens listen to 3.1 hours of music with 40 marijuana references. About 45 percent don't listen to music with any marijuana references, but on the flip side, more than 100 teens surveyed were inundated daily with at least 100 references to marijuana, the study said.

Primack said impressionable teens don't have to look hard for drug references in music -- one in seven songs on the Billboard charts mentions pot, he said. Popular music long has dabbled in drugs, Primack said, but "today it's much more blatant -- the lyrics are more explicit."

But marijuana-themed music is nothing new. Trumpeter Louis Armstrong and jazz singer Cab Calloway recorded songs about the drug before it became illegal in the 1930s, and songs about pot and other drugs became increasingly popular by the 1960s. While many songs had subtle references to drugs, some left nothing to the imagination. Bob Dylan's 1966 song, "Rainy Day Women #12 & 35," included the chorus, "Everybody must get stoned."

Overall, 12 percent of teens said they smoked marijuana in the past 30 days, and 32 percent said they tried it at least once. More than 18 percent of teens whose music included at least 43 marijuana references each day used the drug in the past month, while 8.6 percent whose favorite music was free of drug references got high in that span.

"That's a pretty significant difference," said Dr. Neil Capretto, medical director of Gateway Rehabilitation. "But it's common sense: If you get bombarded with any message, it's going to affect some people. A lot of songs glorify (marijuana

use), but you don't really hear ones saying it's harmful or could increase the likelihood of developing schizophrenia."

Capretto said parents should pay attention to what their children listen to, but there are tell-tale signs other than what's in their iPods.

"Are their grades going down? Are they more secretive? Is money missing? Are they suddenly changing friends?" Capretto said. "Music should be on the radar screen, but I don't think they need to become overly reactive or restrict music."

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