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Explicit lyrics on TV bombarding kids

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In the 1970s a popular poem taught us that children "learn what they live," and in recent years, we've seen the truth of that maxim played out in schools and on playgrounds across the country. An entire genre of music, popularized and pushed into the mainstream by greedy corporations, has taught a generation of children that the road to success is paved with drugs, violence and disrespect of women.

The Parents Television Council, in cooperation with the Rev. Delman Coates' Enough is Enough Campaign for Corporate Responsibility in Entertainment, recently released an analysis of adult content appearing on "Rap City" and "106 & Park" on BET and MTV's "Sucker Free" on MTV — music video programs popular with young audiences — and found that offensive/adult content appeared at an alarming rate: one instance every 38 seconds.

That means every 38 seconds, children watching these programs are exposed to sexually charged images, explicit language, violence, drug use or sales, or other illegal activity. They were exposed to the "n" word, which was used 136 times in just one week. They were exposed to depictions of weapons, deaths, explosions, rioting, drug use and other illegal activity.

You may ask, "What about the V-Chip? Isn't it supposed to allow me as a parent to block offensive content?" It could, except that almost every episode in PTC's study carried only a TV-PG rating with no content descriptors. MTV's "Sucker Free" carried only a TV-14 rating. Shouldn't the government entity responsible for assigning the ratings to the various programs be held accountable? There is no such government entity! The producers of these programs rate their own shows.

It doesn't take a Ph.D. to see the impact that this level of explicit content has on the minds and worldviews of children. How do these powerful impressions alter the values, goals and beliefs youths and children will formulate about the world, their neighborhoods, their communities and most importantly, themselves?

Many a researcher has shown that listening to music with degrading sexual lyrics is related to advances in a range of sexual activities among adolescents, because it communicates cultural messages about expected and normative sexual behavior. Researchers believe that reducing the amount of degrading sexual content in popular music or reducing young people's exposure to music with this type of content could help delay the onset of sexual behavior.

Likewise, a recent analysis by Dr. Michael Rich, director of the Center on Media and Child Health at Children's Hospital of Boston, found attractive role models as aggressors in more than 80 percent of music video violence.

According to Rich, music videos may be reinforcing false stereotypes of aggressive black males and victimized white females, giving rise to concerns about the effect of music videos on adolescents' normative expectations about conflict resolution, race and male/female relationships.

Experiments have demonstrated that exposure to sexual violence in music videos and other media desensitizes male viewers to violence against women and heightens a sense of disempowerment among female viewers.

Other research has also demonstrated that songs containing violent lyrical content can increase aggressive thoughts and feelings.

Why does this matter, especially during the summer months? Because our children are watching.

We need to be concerned about the messages our children are exposed to in all forms of media, throughout the day, as this data proves. Parents need to be more involved in monitoring their children's media consumption, establishing and sticking to household rules about media use, and discussing media content with their children.

Advertisers need to be held accountable for the content their advertising dollars pay for. Those companies that advertise on programs like "106 & Park," "Rap City" and "Sucker Free" on MTV can and should use their unique influence with BET and MTV to push for greater responsibility where program content is concerned.

Consumers must demand and receive the right to pick and choose — and pay for — only the channels they want coming into their homes. It is unconscionable that parents who wish to protect their children from this content are nonetheless forced to subsidize it with their cable subscription dollars.

Finally, we must demand from the networks an accurate, transparent, and consistent ratings system that will give parents adequate tools to protect their children from inappropriate content.

Brian Urie is the director of the Salt Lake City chapter for the Parents Television Council.

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