

# Does Rap or Rock Music Provoke Violent Behavior?

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This study examined whether or not watching a violent music video would provoke individuals to answer questions with violent responses. Eleven participants watched a violent music video, 11 participants watched a non-violent music video, and 11 participants were in the control group and did not watch any videos. It was found that watching the violent music video containing violent lyrics, aggressive behavior, and degrading behaviors toward women did make an individual feel and react more violently with regards to responses to questions about fictitious scenarios. The conclusion was that watching violent music videos does negatively affect behavior.

Many researchers have examined the effects of how music provokes violent behavior. This is an important issue because of how much time people spend listening to music. These studies can help uncover whether or not violent and aggressive music lyrics do in fact provoke individuals to lash out in a violent way.

Anderson et al. (2003) studied whether or not media violence influences youth. They randomly assigned youths to watch either a short violent or a short nonviolent music video and then observed how they interacted with other people after viewing the music video. After each participant watched the music video for approximately 15 minutes, both physical and verbal aggression towards others was assessed using a 10-point scale: with 1 showing nonviolent behaviors and 10 showing a lot of violent behaviors. A correlational analysis was used to see if there was a relationship between a participant watching the violent music video and acting violent, or watching the nonviolent music video and not acting violent. The results showed that exposure to media violence had a statistically significant association with aggression and violence among youth. This research clearly demonstrates that exposure to media violence heightens the chances that a youth will behave aggressively and have aggressive thoughts in the short run.

Arlin (1996) examined the "influence of exposure to violent rock videos on participants' appraisals of their own aggressiveness". Participants were preselected based on their scores on a

measure of locus of control. After completing a measure of Buss and Durkee's Hostility Inventory, they were randomly assigned to view either a violent music video or a nonviolent music video. After viewing the music video, participants once again completed the Hostility Inventory. The results revealed a main effect of locus of control, such that individuals with an external locus of control showed lower self-reported aggressiveness after viewing a music video than individuals with an internal locus of control.

Johnson, Jackson and Gatto (1995) studied whether exposure to rap music could cause violent attitudes and delayed academic performance. Forty-six African-American males (ages 11 to 16 years) from an inner city boys club in Wilmington, North Carolina were recruited to participate in this study. Participants were randomly exposed to violent rap music videos, nonviolent rap music videos, or no music videos. They read two vignettes involving: (a) a violent act perpetrated against a man and a woman and (b) a young man who chose to engage in academic pursuits to achieve success, whereas his friend, who was unemployed, "mysteriously" obtained extravagant items (i.e., a nice car, nice clothes). The results showed that participants who saw the violent rap videos reported greater acceptance of the use of violence. In addition, participants who saw the violent rap videos reported higher probability of committing similar acts of violence and greater acceptance of the use of violence against women.

St. Lawrence and Joyner (1991) examined the effects of sexually violent rock music on males' acceptance or violence against women. The experimental manipulation involved exposure to sexually violent heavy-metal rock music, Christian heavy-metal rock music, or easy listening classical music. One month prior to the experimental manipulation, participants were administered several attitudinal scales about religious orientation, sex roles, rape myths, and interpersonal violence. The results indicated that

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males without a religious background were more accepting of sexist and rape-supportive beliefs. The researchers also came across an unexpected finding which was greater self-reported sexual arousal in response to classical music.

Kalof (1999) examined the effects of gender and music video imagery on sexual attitudes. A group of 44 U.S. college students were randomly assigned to 1 of 2 groups that viewed either a video portraying stereotyped sexual imagery or a video that excluded all sexual images. A two-way ANOVA revealed that exposure to traditional sexual imagery had a significant main effect on attitudes about adversarial sexual relationships. There seems to be some confirmation of a relation between sex and exposure to conventional sexual imagery on the acceptance of interpersonal violence.

Barongan and Nagayama Hall (1995) examined the effects of cognitive distortions men had towards women. The men in this study viewed women in a sexually aggressive way. The men's behavior was observed in a laboratory setting. Twenty-seven men listened to misogynous rap music and 27 men listened to neutral rap music. Participants then viewed neutral, sexually-violent, and assaultive film vignettes and chose the vignette that they found appealing. The results showed that "participants who viewed the sexual-violent stimuli indeed felt sexually violent towards women, even having thoughts of raping and abusing women" (Barongan & Nagayama Hall, 1995, p. 200).

Viemerö and Pajanen (1992) examined whether or not viewing violent television actually does increase the aggressive behavior of those who view it. There were 391 eight-year old and ten-year old children participating in this study. These children were tested on their aggression, their fear fantasies, and their dream and fantasies about these shows. Two measurements of aggression were made: peer-nominated aggression and self-related aggression. TV viewing habits were measured by the amount of TV viewed during the week. Violence was depicted by how regularly violent TV shows were watched. They found that there was significant positive correlation for the boys between TV viewing variables and aggression. There was also a significant positive correlation between the amount of TV and televised violence viewing and fear and aggressive fantasies about actual shows that were seen by the children. These children seem to have been strongly impacted by the violence seen on the television shows they were watching, and then acting in a more aggressive way after watching the violence.

Mahiri and Conner (2003) have examined whether or not it is true that our black youth is more violent than other nationalities and why. Is it the rap music that they may listen to? The researchers assessed the perspective on violence of 41 middle-school students attending a unique school in a low-income section of a large northern California city. The researchers probed ways that these students interpreted or reflected upon rap music and hip-hop culture, particularly its representation of violence, crime, and sex. A brief questionnaire was handed out to each of these participants, which consisted of scenario questions (what would you do if...). Based on the responses to the questions researchers were able to come to the conclusion that these particular students were unfortunately looking up to these negative role models. The constant talk of female assault, sex, and violence

was being imbedded into these children's minds.

It seems very obvious that there is a significant relationship between listening to violent music and watching aggressive and violent music videos and one getting into more fights, using inappropriate language, inappropriate gestures, and a tendency to think less of women. All of the researchers identified in this paper studied this exact relationship and found significant results. It is apparent that there is a direct correlation between violent music videos and people behaving violently. An operational definition of violent behavior is physically and verbally hurting others, cursing, stealing, inappropriate gestures and negative views of women. Whether it is the lyrics, the beat, or watching the entertainers act violently, people in general who are viewing these music videos are behaving in an inappropriate way. The hypothesis in this experiment was that there would be a positive relationship between the music one listens to (violent and aggressive music) and how aggressive one behaves.

## Method

### *Participants*

The participants in this study were 33 undergraduate students from a northeastern public university. These subjects were at least 18 years old. For participating in this study, the participants were compensated with partial course credit.

### *Materials*

The materials that were used for this study included an informed consent, a 12-item questionnaire containing scenario questions and music questions directly related to the music videos shown (See Appendix for questionnaire), two different music videos (DMX and Will Smith) and a form to fill out so the participants could receive credit for participating in this study.

### *Procedure*

The time, place and location of this study were posted in a common area. Students met in the experimental room and were given an informed consent to fill out. The dependent variable was violent behavior. Eleven subjects viewed rap artist DMX and answered the 12-item questionnaire. Another 11 participants viewed rap artist WILL SMITH and answered the 12-item questionnaire. The control group did not watch any music videos, but were asked to fill out the first page of the questionnaire containing the scenario questions. The entire participation time was less than fifteen minutes. After completing the questionnaire, the participants returned the questionnaire.

## Results

The four questions of interest were questions 1-4 on the questionnaire. The questions were scored on a scale of 1-4 (1 = low aggression and 4 = high aggression). Scores between 12-16 means the subject is highly aggressive, while scores below 6

shows low aggression. The scores were analyzed with a one-way between subjects ANOVA. The one-way between subjects ANOVA results were  $F(2, 30) = 5.168, p = .012$ , and these results were significant. A post hoc Tukey test was done, which showed a significant difference between the violent and the nonviolent group. The violent group's scores were much higher than the nonviolent group's scores. Also, the control group's scores were higher than the nonviolent group's scores. This shows that the participants who viewed the violent music video were negatively affected when it came to answering the scenario questions, as opposed to the group who watched the nonviolent music video, showing little to no signs of aggression.

## Discussion

The significant results of this experiment were as expected. Listening to violent music has an effect on aggression. This information is useful for parents of young children who are growing up watching these music videos. This specific study's results and that of previous researchers reveal a serious problem. Our society as a whole should consider this a severe problem, especially with all of the school bombings, the high rates of angry, gang affiliated, weapon carrying young people, and the millions of dollars being spent on this violent and degrading (mostly to women) kind of music. When the angry, violent, aggressive, vulgar videos were shown, participants portrayed a massive amount of hostility; their moods were changing as the video continued as did their behavior. They also answered the scenario questions with the most violent answers. The participants who watched the nonviolent video showed amazingly different answers to the questions, the majority of them answering the questions with the nonviolent answers. This study shows clear evidence that watching violent music videos (like DMX) has a strong effect on violent tendencies.

It can also be said that the reason the results were significant in the violent group is because of the extreme difference between the two videos. The violent video was extremely violent showing fighting, car jacking, yelling, cursing, and hitting women. Meanwhile, the nonviolent group watched a music video that showed people dancing on the beach and having fun. The extreme differences between the two videos could be the reason for the significant results obtained. It may be wise in future research to use videos that are not so tremendously different.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire

Male or female (please circle one)

How old are you \_\_\_\_\_

Do you normally watch the music video that you just saw?

- a. Yes
- b. No

1. Placing yourself in this scenario, what would you do?  
You just found out that a close friend was talking bad about you behind your back. What would you do?

- a. Ignore it
- b. Talk to them about it
- c. Start spreading rumors about them
- d. Wait for a good opportunity to fight him/her

2. Placing yourself in this scenario, what would you do?  
You fail a really important test. What would you do?

- a. Do nothing
- b. Approach the teacher
- c. Drop the course
- d. Slash the teacher's tires

3. Placing yourself in this scenario, what would you do?

You're driving home, minding your own business, traveling at a descent speed, when the person next to you abruptly cuts you off. What would you do?

- a. Ignore the person
- b. Report them
- c. Give him/her the finger
- d. Throw objects at the vehicle

4. Placing yourself in this scenario, what would you do?

You have been in a serious relationship for two years; you come home early to surprise your girlfriend/ boyfriend, to find him/ her cheating on you with your best friend. What would you do?

- a. Talk about it
- b. Walk away
- c. Hit your best friend
- d. Hit both your best friend and your boyfriend/girlfriend

5. What type of music do you listen to?

- a. Rock/Metal
- b. Rap/Hip hop
- c. Pop
- d. Dance/Techno

6. What are your feelings towards the music video that you have just seen?

- a. I loved it
- b. I liked it
- c. I hated it

7. Do you think this music has a positive or negative impact on those who listen to it?

- a. Positive
- b. Negative

8. Has this music impacted your mood?

- a. I feel great
- b. I feel sad
- c. I feel angry
- d. I feel hostile/ aggressive

9. While listening to music, what best describes your mood?

- a. In high spirits
- b. Angry/Aggressive
- c. Relaxed
- d. Positive/Fulfilled

10. Have you ever received a speeding ticket? If yes, how many?

- a. Yes \_\_\_\_\_
- b. No

11. Upon receiving the speeding ticket, were you listening to music?

- a. Yes
- b. No

12. If you were listening to music, was it aggressive/violent lyric music?

- a. Yes
- b. No