

The Recording Industry Should Take Responsibility for Violence in Lyrics

Michael Rich

Michael Rich is a pediatrician and a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Although scientific studies have failed to prove that violent and exploitative lyrics in music are direct causes of negative behaviors or violent acts, the recording industry should take more measures to prevent susceptible young consumers from being exposed to inappropriate content. Popular music plays a role in how adolescents shape their identities and attitudes, and because censorship is not desirable, the recording industry and retailers should devise a system that identifies the contents in music and makes lyrics readily accessible. Moreover, artists and broadcasters should show sensitivity in the content they produce, perform, or air, and the recording industry should place more encouragement on child-positive music.

My name is Michael Rich, and I am testifying on behalf of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and its 57,000 pediatrician members. I am a member of the Academy's Committee on Public Education. I practice pediatrics and adolescent medicine at Children's Hospital Boston, and teach

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at Harvard Medical School and Harvard School of Public Health. In my research, I study the effects of various entertainment media on the physical and mental health of children and adolescents. I actually began my professional career as a filmmaker. I love audiovisual media and continue to work in video and radio production, developing pro-child and health-positive media as tools for child health research, education, and advocacy. Finally, and most importantly, I am the father of a 16-year-old daughter and a 14-year-old son.

Parents alone cannot stem the tidal wave of images their children are exposed to throughout a given day. They need help, particularly from the entertainment industry and retailers.

Impact of Media on Health and Behavior of Children

Starting from when we are very young, we get the majority of our information from media, which includes television, movies, music, magazines, the Internet, video games, books, videos and all forms of advertising. While media offers us, including children, many opportunities to learn and to be entertained, how people interpret media images and media messages also can be a contributing factor to a variety of public health concerns. Among children and adolescents, research shows that key areas of concern are:

- Aggressive behavior and violence; desensitization to violence, both public and personal
- Substance abuse and use
- Nutrition, obesity and dieting
- Sexuality, body image and self-concept
- Advertising, marketing and consumerism