

America: Is the media to blame?

By: Tom Sweeney

Does violence in the media cause violence in the world today? After every atrocious act of violence, especially when it involves the youth of America, the blame falls squarely on the shoulders of the media. Many people contend that an increase in violent imagery, in everything from video games to music, causes people to commit unthinkable acts of violence. The purpose of this essay is to explore the theory that media is not the cause of the violence, but merely being blamed for actions of others.

Parents need to realize that they are part of the cause of violence in children. When a parent walks into a room and sees a five- year old watching a program on television that is specifically made for an older audience why do they leave it, the program, on? The main reason is that parents today are more concerned about being friends to their kids that they forget that their main purpose is to parent. Young children cannot buy a video game or music CD that has a label stating that the content is explicit and not appropriate for young children. Where do the children get these products? Parents buy them so they are considered the “cool Mom/Dad.” Soon after, when their young ones bring a gun to school, they blame the content on the CD or game for being too violent. Maybe, if the parent had not bought the product, the child would not have been exposed to the content until they were old enough to comprehend right from wrong. Parents in the world today need to stop worrying about if their child thinks they are “cool” or not and get back to parenting and teaching morals that will stay with children forever. Perhaps instead of blaming a “rap artist,” or music label, for the content of their album the parents should look in the mirror and take some responsibility.

Another factor not mentioned is the mental status of those who commit these crimes. It would be prudent to say that the people involved in acts of violence are not as mentally stable as the rest of us, in society. Crimes have sometimes been linked to movies, as certain scenes are recreated exactly as they happen in a film. However, it has been said that “television does not cause “copycat” crimes, but it does plant the ideas in vulnerable and troubled minds” (Klite, 2000). Vulnerable and troubled minds are more easily influenced than sound well-adjusted minds. Also, there are a variety of signs that allow the evidence of aggressive behavior to rise to the surface. Generally these warning signs of aggressive behavior are usually evident well before an act of violence occurs. In the case of the Columbine shootings the signs that were so glaringly obvious, it is remarkable that no one showed a bit of concern. For example, both Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the shooters at Columbine, repeatedly told friends they were planning to “blow up the class room” because they had no reason to live (Cloud, 1999). If a student talks about not wanting to live and blowing up a class room does one automatically assume that that person or people have played to many video games? That is never the first thought that runs through someone’s mind. Furthermore, it has been reported that Harris had begun seeing a psychiatrist and was prescribed psychotropic drugs for mental problems (Skeesis, 2000). Again, he was on drugs to combat a mental problem, his mental status has nothing to do with violence in the media. If he were effected it would solidify the argument that mentally disturbed individuals are easily influenced by the media. The evidence previously presented in this paragraph illustrates that the media is not to blame for people with a mental disability committing violent acts.

In conclusion, media cannot be blamed for the violent acts committed by people. There are so many other factors that blaming the world of mass media as the sole contributor to aggression is not fair to the industry. People today do not want to take responsibility for their actions, thus media becomes the scapegoat. Does watching violent material lead to an increase in aggression? Yes. However, the real question is would the people that commit violent acts still commit them if they had no contact with the outside world? If convincing is needed look no further than the unibomber, Ted Kaczynski, he lived isolated in a cabin in the woods. Yet, he sent bombs in the mail to kill various people. Media did not play a part in that spree of violence. People need to take responsibility for their actions, leave the media alone; if you can kill innocent people you should be able to receive the penalty. The media industry is not perfect, but it should not be blamed for acts committed by people who are not of sound mind.

How Violence in the Media Influences Children's Behavior

By: Sara Tache

Consider a few shocking facts: The American Academy of Pediatrics (2001) found that: (1) American children between 2 and 18 years of age spend an average of 6 hours and 32 minutes each day using media (television, commercial or self recorded video, movies, video games, print, radio, recorded music, computer, Internet etc.) (*Media Violence*, 2001). (2) American children spend more time using media than any other activity with the exception of sleep (*Media Violence*, 2001). (3) It is estimated that by the age of 18, the average young person will have viewed 200,000 acts of violence on television alone (*Media Violence*, 2001).

With children and young adults using media so frequently, and the amount of violence/graphic displays associated with media increasing, it's easy to understand why parents are becoming worried that their child/children may be affected.

According to Jon Lafayette, a respected writer for Newsweek, the average child with a television in their room watches 2.9 hours of TV each day (Lafayette, 2003). This is more time spent in front of a screen than the average child spends on homework. It's scary to think, but The American Academy of Pediatrics (2001) found that the highest proportion of violence was found in children's shows (Pediatrics, 2001). Believe it or not, these ordinary programs can have many negative influences on children.

Although the Hulk and Spiderman may be super heroes to children and young adults across the nation, they also can be portraying aggressive behaviors that could highly influence them. When a child has a role model or someone they look up to, he/she will automatically observe his/her every move, and later imitate his/her behaviors. Although the Hulk and Superman are often "doing good" in their programs/comics by saving the world, they are also doing it by fighting. Unfortunately, many children may get the wrong idea and begin to believe that fighting is the best way to solve problems (as their superheroes portray in their episodes). Personally, working at a preschool, I have

observed many children pretending to be their favorite superheroes, and in almost every case, a child wound up crying or injured. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2001), agrees that children are negatively influenced by violent role models by stating, “Aggressive attitudes and behaviors are learned by imitating observed models. Because children younger than 8 years cannot discriminate between fantasy and reality, they are uniquely vulnerable to learning and adopting as reality the circumstances, attitudes, and behaviors portrayed by entertainment media” (Pediatric, 2001). Here, we are able to see that children not only imitate role models because they want to be like them, but also because they cannot distinguish reality from make believe.

Although role models are very influential, they cannot be blamed solely for all children’s aggressive behavior. Many studies have found that just watching a violent movie or television program can make a child become more aggressive and physical. Felson (2000) concluded after heavy research that, “According to cognitive priming approach, the aggressive ideas in violent films can activate other aggressive thoughts in viewers through their association in memory pathways. When one thought is activated, other thoughts that are strongly connected are also activated. Immediately after a violent film, the viewer is primed to respond aggressively because of network of memories involving aggression is retrieved (Felson, 2000) From Felson, we get a biological/psychological reason for why children may become more aggressive after viewing a violent movie. This response indicates that media violence does tend to elicit violent thoughts, which could then cause the child to become more aggressive.

Media violence in television and motion picture films are not the only negative influences media has on children. Today, songwriters are recording more and more songs with violent/graphic lyrics. The Journal for Quality and Participation (2003) found that songs with violent lyrics increase aggression-related thoughts and emotions (*Violent Music Lyrics Increase Aggressive Thoughts and Feelings*, 2003). Lead researcher, Craig A. Anderson concluded, “Aggressive thoughts can influence perceptions of ongoing social interactions, coloring them with an aggressive tint” (Lafayette, 2003). With increasing evidence of a causation pattern between listening to violent lyrics, and aggressive thought patterns, worried parents developed a group called the PMRC (Parents Music Resource Center). The record industry’s response to the PMRC placed warning labels on the front of albums and CD’s to make buyers and listeners aware of potentially offensive lyrics (Baran, 2004).

Although I have presented many negative influences violent media has on children, others argue that some violent media may have a positive affects on children. Walling (2002) adds, “Violent video games may provide a safe outlet for aggression and frustration” (Walling, 2002). Here, Walling suggests that some violent video games may be a way for children to relieve stress and built up anger, therefore making it a positive influence.

While some people believe violence in the media can have negative influences, there will always be others that will agree with Walling, in that violent media can have a positive affect on children as well. The question has been an on-going debate containing studies that support both sides. Until profound research determines one or the other (whether media violence really does influence children negatively), it will be up to the parents or guardians to take careful steps in monitoring their child’s/children’s behavior in response to violent media.



Violent Games By: Josh Spain



With the technological advances in video game systems, it is no surprise that video games are becoming more and more realistic. With the newest video game systems such as Nintendo Gamecube, Playstation 2, and Microsoft Xbox, all the games are able to hold over one and a half gigabytes. With such games as *Grand Theft Auto*, *Resident Evil*, and *Mortal Kombat*, violence is glorified and the sole purpose of the game. Violent video games are becoming more and more abundant amongst the video game market. Thirty-three video games were sampled from Nintendo and Sega, and 80% of them portrayed violence, and 21% portrayed violence towards women (Dietz 1998). With violence easily at the finger tips of kids, they tend to act out violently to imitate the games.



“Two studies examined violent video game effects on aggression-related variables. Study 1 found that real-life violent video game play was positively related to the aggressive behavior and delinquency. The relation was stronger for individuals who are characteristically aggressive and for men. Academic achievement was negatively related to overall amount of time spent playing video games. In Study 2, laboratory exposure to a graphically violent video game increased aggressive thoughts and behavior (Anderson, Dill 2000).”



The problem with violence in video games is that, in games that involve shooting some real shooting skills can be learned. Someone who gets good at handling a gun in a video game can easily turn those skills to a real person. Also with prolonged exposure to death in video games, people can become desensitized to the horror of real killing, so if the person ever does kill anyone, it is done without any empathy for the victim. In 1998 a study was done with 33 of the most popular games, and 80% of those games were



considered violent.

The main purpose in the years best selling game *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* is to find the cocaine that was stolen from your boss. To get through the people that stole it, you are provided with a variety of weapons, from guns, and hammers, to chainsaws. Not only is violence glorified in this game, but there is also a situation in where the character you control has sex with a prostitute, and then kills her so he doesn't have to pay her (Frommer). Many parents are outraged that such a game would be made available for young kids to play. Just this past year a teenage boy forced a man out of his truck with a shotgun, shot and killed the man, and drove the truck away. His reason for doing such a heinous thing, he saw it in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*. Violent video games will continue to be made since they sell the best, but is it really worth it to be showing America's youth how to violent, at the same time showing them that it is possible to get away with it?

Cartoon Violence

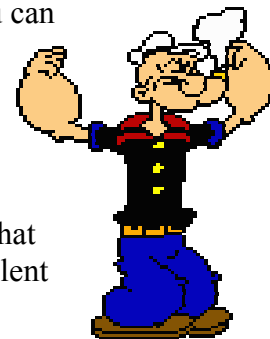
By: Jonathan Talley

Human nature is one that is aggressive and is manifested in our everyday lives. Because scientifically we are classified as animals, it is expected that there will always be a certain amount of violence or aggression that will always be inside of us. Humans are born with some form or another of competitiveness that for some is a method that drives us through life. We live by the rule “survival of the fittest”. Examples of this can be shown in the way when gathered socially, there are those persons who seem to be more popular or more dominate than others. In pre-modern man and into modern man of ancient times; this dominance was exerted through violence. The strongest became the leader and order was kept by intimidation. Even though man has evolved our nature has stayed the same. Because our nature is aggressive, there are triggers that can set this off. In most cases this allows us to form a social order, which is good. But there are extreme cases where these triggers can cause us to lash out or to behave in an aggressive manner. Violent cartoons are one of these many triggers that can lead to this type behavior.

The biggest problem with violent cartoons is that “cartoons don’t show consequences” (Beham, quoting Jeff Cole, director of UCLA’s Center for Communication Policy). When Wile. E. Coyote’s nuclear bomb fashioned “ACME”, fails to eliminate his arch enemy, the Roadrunner, it obliterates him instead, taking out half the Arizona desert in the process. Surly in rational thinking, the insane Coyote was not only killed, he was killed with excessive violence. By the mysteries of cartoon magic the Coyote appears burned to a crisp but still alive. Even more disturbing is the fact that in the next frame, Wile. E. Coyote is back up to his old tricks, completely unharmed, devising another plan to kill the illusive Roadrunner. We see this cartoon as funny, or comical, but there is ever any evidence of any consequence of this type of behavior.



Another example is in the classic cartoon “Tom and Jerry”. The creators have taken the theme of a cat chases a mouse and developed a cartoon that appeals to a viewed audience of people. This is a light hearted cartoon with no intentional message of using violence, but still when you break it down, there are many very violent messages being sent out through the actions of the characters. As you can see in the picture on the left, Tom is thinking of weapons he can use to capture Jerry. Tom is planning to use all these weapons, which have negative connotations standing alone, to kill Jerry. This is a clear message that young children will understand. Do all children realize that the violent



images they are seeing are fake? Why is Popeye the sailor man always show smoking a pipe? Negative messages have been around in cartoons from the beginning and they are only going to get worse.

Anime cartoons have become a staple for the viewing pleasers of millions of kids in their ever day after school activities and in the Saturday morning line up. A popular character on Cartoonnetwork, is the gun fight Vash the Stampede. The whole idea behind his show is that he has to use his prowess with guns to kill off all those who seek to destroy him. Not only does this show expose children to weapons, it masks to consequence of killing a person by doing with cartoon characters. "The two most popular, Digimon and Dragon Ball z, reach more than a million U.S homes" (Benham, quoting Epilogue: The good guys escaped.) Dragon Ball z is a high action packed kung fu spectacle, who's character perform supernatural fighting moves on one another without ever truly being hurt. They use their powers to shoot power beams that blow other character into oblivion, destroying massive areas of land in the process. Digimon is a show about children who travel around with mystical monsters in a digital world. These monsters fight to protect by battling other monsters. In one version of the show, the children take on the spirits of monsters and battle in a half man half monster form themselves. One instance of viewing violence may not have enough influence to affect the behavior of a child but these cartoons have story lines. The fact that a violent cartoon has a story line will prompt a child to come back so he or she can see what is going to happen next. This following those violent cartoons has leads to constant and repetitive exposure to violence which over a long period of time can lead to aggressive behaviors. Adding to the problem is the fact that because of the popularity of these shows, the produces have expanded that market to trading cards, action figure, and video games. Now if a child is not watching the show, there is a possibility that the child will be acting out the violence the show teaches them on other platforms of media.



Personally my favorite show is a show aired on Cartoonnetworks' Adult Swim called "Family Guy". In my opinion the writers of the show are comical geniuses, but some of the messages in this cartoon I feel might be to intense for younger viewers. If at the age of eight-teen, I am saying, "I can't believe this baby just said that to his mother", how are younger viewers who are not as mature as I am taking in this type of message. There are those who agree that the show may be to controversial for the viewing of the general audience. Fifty episodes were created of the show, but only forty-nine were ever aired on FOX before the show was canceled for being to controversial. The show itself features a talking alcoholic dog who struggles with a past drug addiction, a mind numbingly dumb father who signifies everything negative a father could be, and a baby who is an evil genius and plans one day to kill his family and take over the world. Just the actions of the baby alone are cause for concern. In his behavior pattern he constantly is using derogatory langue



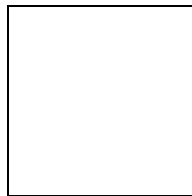
towards women while he addresses his mother. When told to do something he lashes out in not only in physical violence but he is also verbally abusive to the other characters. He always holding weapons of mass destruction and threatening to use them to kill every one. To many this is funny but this is still a cartoon baby. It would be ignorant for us to say that younger children do not watch this show. What message does a violent baby who laves back to his mother give to young children? What will that same child do when he or she is in disagreement with parent?

Violent cartoons do have a major effect on today's media. Because they are so popular, producers do not only give us what we want, they give us more then we need. Charters from these violent cartoons have spilled over into other forms a media. An example of this is the Simpson's Christmas album. In the middle of a classic Christmas song you hear Homer Simpson choking his son Bart. There are countless video games that feature these characters in situations doing what they do best, being violent. Children ask for posters, action figures, and costumes so they can imitate them for Halloween. These cartoons do have a strong influence which can be seen in how many media formats they are on and how much money they make. I say the violence in cartoons does have an influence on children over a long period of time. With the advancements in media the influence will only get stronger. Is this something we need to watch out for?

Movies: Entertainment or Cause of Violence?

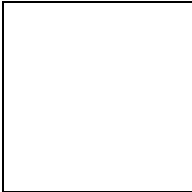
By: Mike Soeder

If a young child goes to see a film, and in this film, there is a murder, or suicide, or rape, will this make the child become more likely to go out and commit these offenses? Some people are trying to say that just because children see violent acts in movies, they will go out and try to reenact to what they saw. People say that watching violent movies increase anti-social and aggressive behavior, increase the want to see violence in real life, and increase the chance that violence will be used to solve conflicts later in children's lives. So is this true? Can violent movies really cause our children to turn into murderers and sex offenders? Will fictional acts of aggression cause our kids to grow up and be fearful of all other people?

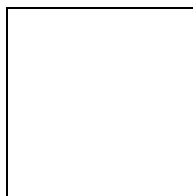


My answer to that is: WAKE UP! Our kids are not as dumb as we think they are and if the kid is going to grow up to be violent, then there are two people responsible for that and their names are mom and dad. These are the people who allow their children to go out and watch violent movies or R-rated movies when the kids just aren't ready for that kind of mature content. The whole violence in the movies topic really isn't as big of a deal as people make it out to be. We do not need more restrictions and harsher ratings on our films. They are just fine the way that they are. The only thing we need to worry about is parents being responsible. Less and less parents these days will say no to their

kids. When the kid wants to watch an R-rated movie, even though the parent knows there will be violence and obscene material in it, the parent will still go out and buy the movie ticket for the kid. It isn't the movie company's fault, it is the parents who allow their children to go out and view these films. People who enjoy these films should not be punished because parents want harsher restrictions, when these same parents are allowing their children to watch these movies. There are plenty of non violent movies out there, for example, Finding Nemo was a smash hit among all age groups. All the parent has to do is ask the kid which movie they are going to see and tell the kid no if he or she wants to view an inappropriate movie.



Children are the main reason that people are trying to limit the violent material that film producers are putting into their movies, but they are not the only reason. People try to argue that violent movies make our society a bad place. They say that violent movies weaken our morals and cause us to be violent. Michael Bay, the producer of such films as Pearl Harbor and Armageddon, had this to say about violent horror films, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre in particular, "These types of movies are supposed to take you on an emotional, visceral ride. I could go on about violence in movies and how it affects people in America, whereas right over the Canadian border, studies they've done on the very same movies (show a) zero murder rate. For us, to think as a country that we need to water down everything is ... wrong." (Portman, 2003) People like violent movies; they like to see things that are horrible and sadistic, because they know that these events are fake. These are movies and everyone knows that. Most people would not walk out of a gory, bloody, evil horror film and feel like they have to go kill someone. People just use the movies as an excuse for people acting violently. They blame everyone else before they blame the people who commit the act. Movies are the scapegoat for violence that occurs in our society, and the actors, producers, directors, and everyone else who helps to make a movie do not deserve that kind of blame.

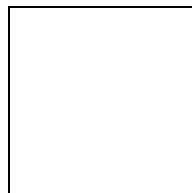
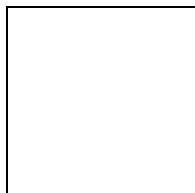


By: Julie Strauss

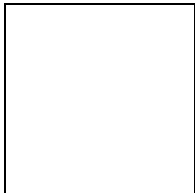
Recently, more and more movies have become so realistic we often have to pinch ourselves in order to remind us that what we are watching isn't really happening. What happens when movie industries take it one step too far? Many believe that violence in movie media affects society today but some beg to differ, especially the industry itself. The entertainment industries always state "no" when asked if they are overstepping their boundaries, but when the government believes that movies are adding a bit too much reality, they ask the entertainment business to tone it down a bit.

Critics claim it all depends on what type of person you are, and to some degree real life does imitate the fictional movie world. The only difference is good people follow the positive characters and bad people follow the negative role models in media. "Violence in movies might make some kids aggressive, but they can learn about the world from that. If there is no violence in the media, everyone would have to learn only from real experience." (Ozawa, 1997) Although many people complain that violence is influencing our country and our youths, society still has to realize that people who commit these crimes often have a violent past or present exposure to violence in their homes. Real life killings are not due to movies we watch and video games we play, killings and hatred come from anger, hurt, and aggressive attitudes with short tempers.

Movies with explicit violence not only realized that it attracts a bigger audience, but at the same time, tries to reverse the affect on people. "Rather than desensitizing one to violence, it can show you how terrible it is." (Butler, 1999) In Steven Spielberg's "Saving Private Ryan", the gore and disturbing images was a reenactment to show how horrifying war really was. The movie was not intended for people to leave the theatre and try to start World War III.

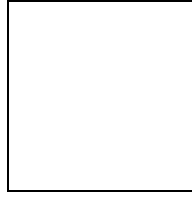


There are several different solutions to try and solve this media problem society states we are having. One solution is called the rating system. If movie industries believe that a movie is too violent or too aggressive for certain ages, they label it "rated-R" which means only teenagers and adults 17 years of age or older are able to view this film. The rating system is a good way to reduce the percentage of violence that youths watch. The less violence children see the less imagination they will create.



Does TV Violence Affect Kids?

By: Ashley Stiver

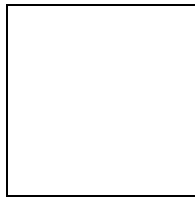
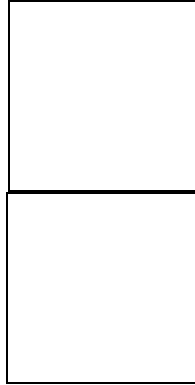


Television has been around since 1923 and everyday it has new shows being thought up. What exactly are these shows though? The people in charge of thinking up new shows might think they are coming up with shows that will keep us entertained, but what about the children watching these television programs? Should they be watching some of the programs being created? I am not sure how much TV children watch nowadays, but I would roughly say three to four hours of it everyday (maybe more, maybe less). In those three to four hours, kids are seeing sex, hearing bad language, and watching this extreme violence being shown as if it were nothing. Parents magazine writer Anita Diamant says “in those hours, children are seeing more than 100,000 other acts of violence by the time they finish elementary school.” (Diamant 40) That would be considered a large amount of violence to see in such a short period of time. However, when children are young, they see this violence, and it could very easily shape who they become as adults.

When children are young and start to watch these violent programs, they start out with no morals or values. Who is to say, that these programs will not start to shape their values for them? It would be very simple to have a child sit down and watch a TV show, and that child could easily start to pick up habits or ideas about what is right and what is wrong. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry finds that “after hundreds of surveys, it has been shown that after watching violence, kids become immune to the horror of violence, they gradually accept violence as being normal, and they identify with the victim or victimizers.”

Violence is used in many ways. It is used to hook viewers into watching their shows. Viewers see a preview on TV for a new episode coming up, and what they see is someone doing something violent. This make them want to watch the episode to see what will happen. However, who are watching these previews? Is it the intended audience of the producers? In addition to having adults watch these clips; their children are watching them too.

Through Television, kids can take a trip to the moon, have dolls and toys come to life, they can even walk along a yellow brick road if they want to. I am sure, most kids when they are young, play a game like cops and robbers, or they knew other kids who played this game. Where did these kids get this game though, they got it by mimicking what they watch on television? Children get sucked into the storyline; all storylines. Good or bad, calm or violent, it doesn't matter what type of situation; kids are always watching it, having their own ideas on the subject.



While DMX says his lyrics are drawn from the lives of those around him, as well as his own, are they still acceptable and do they promote violence? *"And if you got a daughter older than 15, I'm [going to] rape her," DMX intones. "Take her, on the living room floor, right there in front of you/ Dick action seriously, what you wanna do?/ Frustrating isn't it? Wanna kill me, but I'm [going to] kill you/ Now watch me fuck just a lil' while longer please, will you?"*

With the many different genres of music today, it's no big surprise that some of the lyrics can be explicit. Recently researchers have found that the lyrics are not only explicit, but can be toxic to young people's well-being. According to Craig Anderson, an Iowa State Psychologist, "Anything that increases the extent to which a person is thinking in aggressive terms will tend to increase aggressive behavior" (Do violent lyrics beget violent thoughts, 2003). And According to the American Psychology Association, this increase in aggression is related directly to the violent lyrics (Violent music lyrics increase aggressive thoughts and feelings, 2003).

Recently a study was done on college students to examine the effects of seven violent songs from seven artist, and eight non-violent songs from eight artists. Students were asked to listen to each song, and then were given a series of psychological tasks to measure aggressive thought and feelings. Results of the experiment showed that violent songs led to more aggressive interpretation of ambiguously aggressive words, and more aggressive feelings. Even humorous violent songs led to more aggressive feelings (Violent music lyrics increase aggressive thoughts and feelings, 2003).

Researchers are confident with their results, stating, "When you do all that and get the same results each time, that pretty solid evidence" (Do violent lyrics beget violent thoughts, 2003). However, Researchers are also saying that this aggressive behavior is not from just listening to the song once, but over exposure to such violent lyrics. They also say that content of the song matters; it matters in everything, not just music.

As you can see lyrics play a big part in aggression as well as the rest of the media. When people are exposed to one ting for a long time, they tend to act that way. It's like that with anything. According to Anderson, "One major conclusion from this is that content matters" (Do violent lyrics beget violent thoughts, 2003). Though researchers are

confident with their results, they are still conducting further research to fully understand the link between music and violence.

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