



Eye on Culture™



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Listen to Those Lyrics

The Culture and Media Institute goes beyond the beats and melodies to examine the messages of today's most popular songs.

By Colleen Raezler

It's summer, prime time for cars full of rambunctious teens to bomb around town with the windows rolled down and the music cranked up. Sounds like innocent good times—but that depends on what they're listening to.

A 2006 study published in *Pediatrics* found that adolescents who listen to music with degrading sexual lyrics were more likely to initiate sexual intercourse and engage in other sexual behavior.

A University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine [study](#) released in 2007 warned of the dangers posed by songs that refer to substance abuse. The researchers noted, “music is known to be highly related to personal identity; young people often model themselves in terms of dress, character, and behavior after musical figures.”

A professor from the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, the author of two books about profanity, contends that exposure to cursing in the media “may make adolescents more comfortable” using offensive language.

The Culture and Media Institute examined the lyrics of Billboard's Top 20 singles chart as posted by MTV for the fourteen weeks beginning February 29 and ending June 5. The Top 20 are the leading songs from

More than a quarter of the songs that topped Billboard's charts contained sexually degrading lyrics.

Billboard's Hot 100 chart, which ranks singles based on a combination of radio airplay, retail sales and paid digital downloads from such outlets as iTunes and Napster. Billboard's Hot 100 is not genre-specific. It lists the most popular songs from rhythm and blues to rock to rap to country and beyond.

Fifty songs appeared on the Billboard Top 20 chart during the study period, and CMI reviewed them for sexual content, profanity and drug or alcohol references. CMI found that nearly half (22) of the songs contained sexualized lyrics. Seven songs referred to drugs and/or alcohol and six contained profanity.

Sexualized Lyrics

Of the 50 songs that topped Billboard's charts, 22 contained sexually suggestive content, and 13 (26 percent of the total) could be considered sexually degrading, as defined by a [2006 study](#). The study, "Exposure to Degrading Versus Nondegrading Music Lyrics and Sexual Behavior Among Youth," by Martino et al., was published in *Pediatrics*. In the words of the [Associated Press](#), the *Pediatrics* study considers songs sexually degrading when they, "depicted men as 'sex-driven studs,' and women as sex objects." Examples of degrading lyrics include rap artist Flo Rida stating, "I'm a say that I prefer her no clothes, I'm in to that I love women exposed" in his hit song "Low," and rap artist Lil' Wayne celebrating oral sex in his hit song "Lollipop":

I get her on top she drop it like it hot
And when I'm on the bottom she hit the very bottom
Then we in the bed givin getting head
Call me so I can make it juicy for ya

R&B artist Usher's latest singles, "Love in This Club" and "Love in This Club (Part II)," glamorize having sex in public places and infidelity. He sings in "Love in this Club":

I know you scared, Baby, they don't know what we doin,
Don't smoke it, I'm fresh right here
Keep it up girl and I swear, I'm a give it to you non-stop
And I don't care who's watchin
Watchin, watchin,
Oohh, get it shawty, on the floor
Baby was made for love.

What Did He Say?

Shawty: n., derivative of "shorty," a sexy girl

Rap artist Young Jeezy joins Usher in “Love in This Club” and sings:

He got you trapped, I'll set you free,
Sexually, mentally, physically, emotionally,
I'll be like your medicine you'll take every dose of me,
It's going down on aisle 3 I'll bag you like some groceries,
And every time you think about it you gon' want some more of me

“Love in This Club (Part II)” features R&B star Beyonce in a duet that promotes cheating:

[Beyonce]
I know you want it (yea)
I'm hesitating (why?)
You must be crazy
I got a man, you got a lady

[Usher]
I know we here together
So this must be something special

and

[Usher]
Come a little closer, let daddy put it on ya
Need you to know, what happens here stays here

[Beyonce]
And I'm, ready and willing
Mama's got to go
But you're standing at attention
Keep it on the low

R&B artist Ray J's “Sexy Can I” celebrates a stripper:

While you sliding down the pole, no panties, no shirt
Then you climb back up the pole, then you drop and do the splits
How you make that p---y talk,
Baby damn, you is da sh--.

Rap star Webbie, in his big hit, “Independent”:

She a bad lil chick a fly lil chick
Hit me on my phone she like to buy that d---

What Did He Say?

Fly: adj., cool

“Elevator,” another hit by rapper Flo Rida, describes a group sex act involving a stack of women. “Elevator” is perhaps the most degrading song on the list:

Got you stuck on my
On my elevator
Get it up, on my elevator
Check it out!

My first floor, stuck on the gold digger
Second floor, stuck on the dime piece
Third floor, stuck on the hood rat
Fourth floor, freak it I don't know cuz.
(This girl is) She's stuck on my ella, e-ella-vator

What Did He Say?

Elevator: n., a sex act between at least three people in which the “receivers” lay on top of each other so the “giver” can visit each “floor.”

Singing sexually degrading lyrics is not the exclusive province of male performers. R&B stars Janet Jackson and Mariah Carey both rival the men.

Janet Jackson, “Feedback”:

So here's my demonstration, a peep show
Tonight my body's an exhibition baby
Though it's on display don't be scared to
Touch it It said so, so come and get it babe.

Strum me like a guitar blow out my amplifier
When you hear some feedback keep going take it higher
Crank it up give it to me come on
I'm gonna feedback, feedback.

Mariah Carey, “Touch My Body”:

Touch my body
Put me on the floor
Wrestle me around
Play with me some more
Touch my body
Throw me on the bed
I just wanna make you feel
Like you never did
Touch my body
Let me wrap my thighs
All around your waist

Just a little taste
Touch my body
Know you love my curves
Come on and give me what I deserve
And touch my body.

Drugs and Alcohol

The 2007 University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine study mentioned previously found that a third of the most popular songs in the United States referred to substance abuse. Surprisingly, only six of the 50 songs at the top of Billboard's charts this spring referred to alcohol and drugs.

What Did He Say?

Weight: n., cocaine

Five of the six were rap songs. They ranged from fleeting mentions of "sippin' some gin" in rapper Snoop Dogg's "Sensual Seduction" to glamorizing drug dealing in rapper Rick Ross's "The Boss": "I made a couple million dollars last year dealin' weight."

Usher's "Love in This Club" refers to "sippin'" on drinks, and Carrie Underwood blamed tequila for a quickie marriage in Las Vegas in her hit "Last Name."

Profanity

A February 28 *Sacramento Bee* [article](#) reports that teenagers are swearing more than ever. Timothy Jay, a psychology professor from the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and author of *Why We Curse* and *Cursing in America*, told the *Bee*, "elementary school teachers report that children are using more offensive language at school than they have in the past." And while Jay believes parents' language habits are the biggest influence on kids' use of swear words, he acknowledged that the "Internet, television and other media may be making adolescents more comfortable with swearing."

Seven of Billboard's 50 songs used profanity. Seven out of 50 may only be 14 percent of the songs, but the words are some of the most profane in the English language. Appearing principally in the rap songs were: b----, f---, a--, sh--, G-- d---, and n-----, along with slang terms for male and female genitalia. Ray J's "Sexy Can I" is the only R&B song that contained profanity, including many of the words found in rap songs. Taylor Swift's "Teardrops on My Guitar" used the word "damn."

Frequent exposure normalizes profane language, making the words less shocking and more likely to be used again and again. Profanity also degrades the speaker's message itself. P.M. Forni, director of the Johns Hopkins Civility Project, noted in the same *Bee* article cited previously that "profanities are the fillers. They take the place of a more sophisticated way of speaking."

What the Media Have to Say

Not surprisingly, media reviews fail to mention the impact these lyrics have on the people listening to the songs. Reviewing Janet Jackson's latest album, *Discipline*, which features the sexually suggestive song "Feedback," *Rolling Stone* [said](#) Jackson "sounds more like a sex droid than a blow-up doll, which is way hotter – for starters, sex droids show more initiative." *Washington Post* reporter J. Freedom du Lac [praised](#) Lil' Wayne's "Lollipop" for "show[ing] that [he] could frolic in the crossover commercial sandbox without reining in his own impulses to be outrageous and unconventional" and called the rapper "magnetic." *Rolling Stone* [hailed](#) him as the "best rapper alive." If album sales are any indication, the public loves Lil' Wayne just as much as *Rolling Stone* and *The Washington Post*. His album sold over one million copies in the first week it was released.

More than one million copies of Lil' Wayne's latest album, *Tha Carter III*, which features "Lollipop," a song about oral sex, sold during the first week of its release.

In a *USA Today* [story](#) headlined "Usher makes a 'Stand' for marriage, family," Usher said his latest album, *Here I Stand*, "is about the transformation from a guy who was a hustler, a player – a guy who could have any woman he wanted and chose to take advantage of certain situations." He further stated his intent was, "to give the modern man some sort of guidance, something that isn't just talking about sex, about being loose and irresponsible." While Usher deserves praise for his good intentions, the fact remains that the first two singles released from this album, "Love in This Club" and "Love in This Club (Part II)," are about hooking up and cheating. It remains to be seen whether the songs about responsible masculinity will be promoted as heavily as his racier works, or will resonate as powerfully with his fans.

Conclusion

Researchers stated in a [report](#) released in 2003 about the effect of violent music on young people, "for better or worse, then, lyrics are often attended to, processed, discussed, memorized, and even taken to heart."

Usher's "Love in This Club," which is about public sex, made the most appearances at the top of the charts this spring. It was number one for three weeks and appeared in the top five for 11 of the 14 weeks analyzed.

Researchers also noted that another study found 16 percent of high schoolers ranked music among the top three sources of moral guidance. Many teens in American society are receiving the message that the sexual degradation of women is something to be celebrated, not to mention that profanity and alcohol and/or drug use is glamorous.

CMI encourages parents and other adults who closely work with today's youth to pay close attention to the music their children are taking in. The Internet provides easy access to lyrics, a great help to adults concerned about which messages children are receiving from popular music.

Appendix A: Sexual Content in Songs

Buckcherry, “Sorry”

I love how you kiss
I love all your sounds

Chris Brown, “Forever”

- Tonight is the night
To join me in the middle of ecstasy
- Double your pleasure
Double your fun
- Feels like we’re on another level (ohh ahh)
Feels like our loves intertwine
We can be two rebels
Breakin the rules

Chris Brown, “With You”

- Hot little figure, yes you a winner
- And together baby there is nothing we won’t do

Colby O’Donis, “What You Got”

No matter how hard the man hold back he’ll end up callin’ you baby
And they never really know what to do once you expose that thang you
do
Ya had him crawlin on hands and knees and
ya find a way to get him out the cheese

What Did He Say?

Cheese: n., money

Flo Rida, “Elevator”

My first floor, stuck on the gold digger
Second floor, stuck on the dime piece
Third floor, stuck on the hood rat

Fourth floor, freak it I don't know cuz
(This girl is) She's stuck on my ella, e-ella-vator

Flo Rida, "Low"

That's when I threw her legs on my shoulders
I knew it was over
That Heny and Cola got me like a soldier
She ready for Rover, I couldn't control her.
So lucky, oh me, I was just like clover
Shawty was hot like a toaster
Sorry but I had to fold her
Like a pornography poster

What Did He Say?

Rover: n., a sexual position in which the woman lies on her back and puts her legs on her partner's shoulders while he kneels in front of her.

J. Holliday, "Suffocate"

- I can't wait for shorty to come through
From your lips and back up
To your eyes, my hands on your hips when we grind I'm fantasizing
'Bout what I'm gon do to you
- I can't breathe when your touching me
- Whenever we up in this bed and my fingers all in your hair
I wonder if you feel me watching you
Cause I can't go a night without your lovin'

Janet Jackson, "Feedback"

- So here's my demonstration, a peep show
Tonight my body's an exhibition baby
Though it's on display don't be scared to
Touch it It said so, so come and get it babe.
- Strum me like a guitar blow out my amplifier
When you hear some feedback keep going take it higher
Crank it up give it to me come on
I'm gonna feedback, feedback
- Before we go any more further
Let me put you up on this secret babe

I got novelties so appeasing
Feed my fetish please, satisfy me babe.

Jesse McCartney, “Leavin’”

- Man that thing you got behind you is amazing, amazing amazing
- And I’m leavin’ never lookin back again
So go on shawty and tell him you found a new man
The one who’s so so fly, the one that keep you high
Have me singin all night night night

Lil’ Wayne, “Lollipop”

- She say he so sweet make her wanna lick the rapper
So I letta lick the rapper
- Shawty wanna thug
Bottles in the club
Shawty wanna hump
And ooo I like to touch ya lovely lady lumps
- No man I ain’t never seen a a-- like hers.
And that p---y in my mouth had me at a loss for words
Told her to back it up like erp erp and make that a-- jump like schzerp,
schzerp
And that’s when she said I look like a lollipop
- I get her on top she drop it like it hot
And when I’m on the bottom she hit the very bottom
Then we in the bed givin getting head
Call me so I can make it juicy for ya

Madonna, with Justin Timberlake, “4 Minutes (to Save the World)”

- Madonna:
I want somebody to speed it up for me then take it down slow
There’s enough room for both

Justin Timberlake:
Girl I can hit it back just gotta show me where it’s at

Are you ready to go? (Are you ready to go?)

Both:

If you want it
Come and get it
If you thought it
It better be what you want
If you feel it
It must be real just
Say the word and
I'ma give you what you want

- Justin Timberlake:
And I know that I can tell that you like it and that it's good
By the way that you move

Mariah Carey, "Touch My Body"

- If there's a camera up in here
Then it's gonna leave with me
When I do (I do)
If there's a camera up in here
Then I'd best not catch this flick
On YouTube, (YouTube)
- Touch my body
Put me on the floor
Wrestle me around
Play with me some more
Touch my body
Throw me on the bed
I just wanna make you feel
Like you never did
Touch my body
Let me wrap my thighs
All around your waist
Just a little taste
- Touch my body
Know you love my curves
Come on and give me what I deserve
And touch my body.

- Boy you can put me on you
Like a brand new white tee
I'll hug your body tighter
Than my favorite jeans
- I want you to caress me
Like a tropical breeze
And float away with you
In the Caribbean Sea
- Imma treat you like a teddy bear
You won't wanna go nowhere
In the lap of luxury
Laying intertwined with me
You won't want for nothing boy
I will give you plenty of joy

Piles featuring Ne-Yo, "Bust It Baby (Pt. 2)"

- Like your sex but more love what cha do
Turn me on how you stare at me when we through
When you give to me, I don't wanna turn ya loose
Scared to moan around you, alls I can say is 'ooh,'
My favorite panties of yours the ones that see-through
One wit the pink trim on 'em and they light blue
- I juss gave her a nick name, it's wet-wet
Cause when we finished she mess up all the bedsets
She got sommin' to relax me when I'm under stress
Never told her, but to let her know it but she the best
She like to spell her name wit her tongue on my chest
If you had told me it was this good, I'd a never guessed
She full of surprises I don't know what she'll do next
But while she sleep I sneak and put hickies on her neck

Ray J., "Sexy Can I"

Sexy can I, just pardon my manners.
Girl how you shake it, got a player it like (ohhhh)
It's a Kodak moment, let me go and get my camera
All I wanna know is, sexy can I.
Sexy can I, hit it from the front

Then I hit it from the back
Know you like it like that.
Then we take it to the bed, then we take it to the floor
Then we chill for a second, that we shake that a-- some more.

Rihanna, “Don’t Stop the Music”

Baby are you ready cause it’s getting close
Don’t you feel the passion ready to explode
What goes on between us no one has to know
This is a private show (oh)

Rihanna, “Take A Bow”

Grab your clothes and get gone (get gone)
You better hurry up
Before the sprinklers come on (come on)

Rick Ross, “The Boss”

- I don’t make love baby we make magic
Come home with a thug, let’s get s--- crackin
Always wear plastic baby cause s--- happens
She leaves the backseat just to freak in da magnum
- Fresh outa jail already in ya hoe’s sheets
- Spanish broads no bra
- Baby slow it down cause you movin too fast
Ya a-- too fine to be movin too fast

Snoop Dogg, “Sensual Seduction”

If ya don’t know right now, doggy-dog is a freak, freak, freak!
I keep a bandage (condom) with me seven days of the week, week,
week!

Usher, "Love in This Club"

You see you searching for somebody
That'll take you out and do you right
Well come here baby and let daddy show what it feel like

Usher, featuring Lil Wayne and Beyonce, "Love In This Club (Part II)"

- Usher:
You know by now I want it more than anything"

Beyonce:
But we can't have all these people staring standin' around
This right here is only for your eyes to see
But you getting carried away saying we can do it wherever
The way you touching me
Like no other"

- Lil Wayne:
I gave her neck a kissy kiss
She gave my neck a kiss back
I said we could do it like a stack
I mean we could do it like a G,
On the couch in VIP
Shawty we can get it on...

...Girl, we could act like two damn fools
Have everybody think we doin' a dance move
Call me, so I can make it juicy for ya,
Meet me in the bathroom and you could be my secret lover girl,
And it started with a hug but now we making' love in this club"

- Usher:
Come a little closer let daddy put it on ya

Beyonce:
And I'm ready and willing
Mama's got to go
But you're standing at attention
Keep it on the low

Usher:
Ain't nobody watching

Don't worry they can't see us
I know I got you hot now let me in

Carrie Underwood, "Last Name"

- Last night I did things I'm not proud of
- It started off "Hey cutie where ya from?"
And then it turned into "Oh no what have I done?"
And I don't even know his last name

Webbie, "Independent"

- Gutta like Keisha
Work that meat up
She a good freaker
She stay on her s---
She got her own s---
All she want is that d---
She bossy flossy
- She a bad lil chick a fly lil chick
Hit me on my phone she like to buy that d---

Appendix B: Profanity in Songs

Lil Wayne, “Lollipop”

- But man I ain’t never
Seen an a-- like hers
That p---y in my mouth
- And I made that a-- jump
- Shawty said the n-----
- Needa bring that n----- back
- I make her bring that a-- back
And she bring that a-- back

Ray J., “Sexy Can I”

- Then we chill for a second, then we shake that a-- some more
- How you make that p---y talk
Baby d--, you is da s---
- You already know s---
- And if you ain’t f-----‘ tonight

Rick Ross, “The Boss”

- Plus I got a Chevy with 4-54 in da hood dat b---- got 1-25 in da dash
- Cause it’s just another day in the life of a G-- d--- boss
- Come home with a thug, let get s--- crackin
Always wear plastic baby cause s--- happens
- Who gives a f--- what a hater gotta say?
- I know you n-----s on the side line like ain’t that a b----
- Ya a-- to fine to be movin too fast

Snoop Dogg, “Sensual Seduction”

Light brown eyes lookin’ like Ms. O.P. and a n----- know if I take her
Home with dem wide a-- hips and you d--- right I’m gon’ be so
Hot-uh!
Goes da chick with da real pretty face, big a-- booty and ity-bity
Waist I whispered in her ear little mama what you drink? I know you a
Freak, but you now I ain’t gon say s---, see my game is
Outrageous I got it tippin’ crippin’ exchange and f--- faces

Taylor Swift, “Tear Drops on My Guitar”

- I laugh cause it’s just so d--- funny

Webbie, “Independent”

- She tell you she don’t need
Not a G—d--- thing you a hot d--- thing
If you think you finna get her wit a G-- d--- chain
You insane boy you betta get some G-- d--- change
- Flip-flop n----- depend on how the cheddar look
- She stay on her s---
She got her own s---
She don’t never trip
All she want is that d---
- And she break a n----- off got a n----- spoil
- Hit me on the phone she like to buy that d---

What Did He Say?

Cheddar: n., money

Appendix C: Drugs and Alcohol in Songs

Flo Rida, “Elevator”

Roll up machilles don't smoke Arizona

Flo Rida, “Low”

- Drinking X&O
- “That Heny and Cola got me like a soldier”

Rick Ross, “The Boss”

- Bottle after bottle and I'm sure you count 'em all
- Back to the thuggin' now I'm sippin' sy-z-urp
- I made a couple million dollars last year dealin' weight

Snoop Dogg, “Sensual Seduction”

- Smoke us a cigarette
- I was all in da club sippin some gin smokin' on a Benadrome when I peeped this little hoe out
- I whispered in her ear little mama what you drink?

Usher, “Love in the Club”

You know all you gotta do is tell me what you sippin' on
And I promise that I'm gonna keep it comin' all night long

Carrie Underwood, “Last Name”

- Last night I got served a little too much of that poison
- I blame it on the Cuervo

Webbie, “Independent”

They buy the bar too

Glossary

Arizona: n., a type of marijuana

Heny: n., short for Hennessy, a type of cognac

Thuggin': v., living or pretending to live a criminal lifestyle

Sy-z-urp: n., alcoholic drink consisting of vodka and cough syrup

Benadrome: n., high quality, high priced marijuana