

# Songs about sex—how they affect kids

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Do sexualized lyrics in popular music have an impact on the sexual behavior and attitudes of adolescents? Researchers Cougar Hall, Joshua H. West, and Shane Hill from Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, take a look at the trend of increasing use of sexually explicit lyrics in music. Their findings, published online in Springer's journal *Sexuality & Culture*, provide food for thought for educators whose focus is to promote healthy sexual development.

Cougar Hall explained, "Considering previous research establishing an association between sexualized music lyrics and adolescent sexual behavior, our findings unfortunately offer [sexuality](#) educators a stormy forecast."

The amount of music that 8-18 year olds listen to has increased by 45 percent in recent years, rising dramatically with the popularity of MP3 players, such as iPods. Previous research has indicated that there is a strong link between exposure to sexual media (on screen and in music) and sexual activity. Teens tend to overestimate the sexual activity of their peers and one source of this misperception is the entertainment media.

In this study, the researchers analyzed the lyrics from the top 100 songs in the Billboard Hot 100 year-end most popular songs every decade from 1959 to 2009. They found that male and non-White artists were more likely to write songs with sexual [lyrics](#) in the past two decades and that there were more sexual references overall in 2009 than in 1959.

The authors point out that not all sexual references are equal, and degrading and sexualized music can have a deleterious effect on teens. For girls in particular, this can lead them to judge their personal worth on a sexual level only, leading to poor body image, depression, eating disorders, and substance abuse.

The authors advise that their findings raise serious concerns related to the promotion of unhealthy sexual messages in music. They conclude: "Popular [music](#) can teach young men to be sexually aggressive and treat women as objects while often teaching young women that their value to society is to provide sexual pleasure for others. It is essential for society that sex education providers are aware of these issues and their impact on adolescent [sexual behavior](#)."

**More information:** Cougar Hall, Joshua H. West, and Shane Hill (2011). Sexualization in lyrics of popular music from 1959 to 2009: Implications for sexuality educators. *Sexuality & Culture*.  
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