Chapter 25

Sex, Drugs, and Rock ’n’ Roll: What Shall We Ban Next?

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ABSTRACT

Music, literature, movies, and all forms of entertainment play an important role in the socialization of adolescents. Present everywhere and easily available, this allows children almost limitless access to questionable entertainment alone or with friends. Parents are unaware of the content of what their children are absorbing because of the use of downloaded music, videos, and literature, and the use of headphones. Research on popular culture/entertainment has explored its effects on schoolwork, social interactions, and particularly behavior. Lyrics have become more explicit in their references to drugs, sex, and violence over the years, particularly in certain genres. And, in turn, there have been myriad attempts to censor, ban, and block access to various materials. Justifications for such efforts has been the belief that a teenager’s preference for certain types of entertainment could be correlated or associated with certain behaviors. The purpose of this chapter is to offer an historical examination of the efforts to censor and/or ban what children are exposed.

INTRODUCTION

In 1977, Ian Dury and Chaz Jankel, two punk rock musicians in London, England, sat down one night and reviewed the lyrics to a song by Dury entitled, “Sex and Drugs and Rock and Roll” which Jankel had repeatedly refused to look at for a year or so (Balls, 2008). That night Jankel put music behind the lyrics Dury’s vocals and a punk classic was born. Ultimately, the song did not hit the charts and only sold around 19,000 copies, but would coin a common term which remains today, “Sex, Drugs, and Rock and Roll.”
As is most often the case, the song was misinterpreted as a song encouraging excess as its title and chorus would suggest. The song would then be banned by the BBC, but Ian Dury maintained that he was simply trying to suggest that there was more to life than a 9-to-5 existence for young people. The following is an excerpt from that song (Balls, 2018):

Here’s a little piece of advice, You’re quite welcome it is free
Don’t do nothing that is cut price, You know what that’ll make you be
They will try their tricky device, Trap you with the ordinary
Get your teeth into a small slice, The cake of liberty
Sex and drugs and rock and roll

Throughout history, many have viewed anything even remotely relating to “sex, drugs, and rock and roll” as an evil that pervades society and is a potentially dangerous enemy that needs control and censorship (Ben-Yehuda & Goode, 2009). Others say that some things simply become a scapegoat and an overly simple way to explain human events, behavior, and repugnant acts, which cannot easily be comprehended by the average person. Popular music and entertainment has always been seen by some as “the Devil’s work”. This was very much the case during the “Satanic Panic” (Victor, 1993) that took hold in the 1980s. During this time heavy metal music seemed to be repeatedly linked to horrendous murders and tragic deaths.

From Charles Manson’s blaming the Beatles’ music for his horrific murder spree to modern politicians’ finger-pointing at acts such as shock rocker Marilyn Manson in the wake of a high-school massacre, rock music has always had a long history of alleged links to suicides and murders (Smith & Boyson, 2002). Moreover, various forms of entertainment have been blamed for many things over the years. Some feel that certain genres encourage violence, and a few even believe that the artists themselves are demon-possessed or satanic. Specific works have been blamed for riots, rebellion, and suicide. Murderers have even claimed that works has inspired them to kill.

Therefore, under this “logic”, many argue that in order to save humanity, especially children, we must ban certain things and keep them out of reach. So, what should we ban next?

NEW IS ALWAYS TO BLAME

So many in America love to blame real world crime and violence on various forms of media and entertainment. Whether it’s sexual video games, vulgar song lyrics, or violent movies, we are led to believe that we have no place to be blamed, instead it is the media which creates deviance. But this is far from a new phenomenon in human history.

Moreover, as soon as a new entertainment medium is created becomes available, the hysterical concerns over how it will affect children begin (Ben-Yehuda & Goode, 2009). From paper to the airwaves to fiberoptic cable, the means of delivering music, movies, games, and literature to youth will never cease. Again, these technologies are often scapegoated as the cause of horrific crimes by parents, teachers, and even defense lawyers. Once this situation occurs, the press will immediately be available to write the sensationalist articles, give the nightly news broadcast, and exacerbate the moral panic which is undoubtably close behind.
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