

## Youth music videos: a communication opportunity

Watching music videos has become a popular activity for millions of teenagers. One study finds teenagers watching videos an average of two hours a day, fascinated by the mixture of popular music, fast-moving pictures and simple story lines.<sup>1</sup>

Many adults, however, are concerned about the effect videos have upon young, impressionable minds. Most agree that television is a powerful teacher which shapes the attitudes, values and behavior of its viewers. A recent statement by the American Academy of Pediatrics stated that "music videos [contain] an excess of sexism, violence, substance abuse, suicides and sexual behavior."<sup>2</sup>

What do pediatricians recommend that parents and teachers do? One suggestion is to "watch television with their children and teenagers [and] discuss the content with them."<sup>3</sup>

Teachers and parents who respond to this suggestion will have to prepare themselves to enter a world of lively music, fast edits, varied film techniques and plenty of messages. The music comes in the form of traditional ballads, hard-driving rock 'n' roll, and the latest in computer-generated sounds.

Traditional and experimental film techniques, camera angles, imaginative uses of lighting and film speeds, animation and special effects are common features. Stage sets, costumes, characters and fragmented plots highlight a certain dramatic quality in many videos.

The messages of the videos are varied. Some promote an awareness of political causes such as the farm crisis, environmental issues and an anti-nuclear stance. Others tell stories about personal experiences of loneliness, lost love,

parental conflict or the joy of living. Some studies suggest that a majority of concept or theme videos depict sexually explicit and violent material.<sup>4</sup>

Having spent some time experiencing the world of music videos, adults are better able to interact with young people about the subject. The next step is to discuss music videos with teenagers in a home or classroom setting. How much time each day do they spend watching the videos? How do they think the videos influence their lives and the lives of their friends? What are the important values held by their families in areas such as sex, material possessions, relationships with others, respect for the environment?

Now it's time to watch some videos together. Here are 10 discussion starters that should keep the family or class busy for weeks!

1. Have the group make a list of feeling words (i.e., sad, happy, confused, bored, aroused, disturbed, relaxed). After watching a video together, have each person check the different feelings he/she experienced and discuss how the video prompted those feelings.

2. Jot down some of the powerful images projected by the video and make lists of values, opinions and lifestyles it seems to promote or tear down. Compare this list with one's list of family or peer group values.

3. Notice the kinds of people in the video: age, sex, race/ethnicity, social class. What does the video say about how certain groups should live or act? What groups are missing from the video (i.e., the elderly, the poor or handicapped)?

4. Note the ways sexuality is portrayed: male/female roles, what it means to be a man or a woman,

the kinds of sexual behaviors promoted or discouraged.

5. Notice the material values in the video: the kinds of clothing, the age and models of cars, the style of housing, and the look of the story settings.

6. What is the video saying about the use of alcohol and/or drugs?

7. If the video portrays a conflict, how is it resolved? How is any violence portrayed?

8. List issues raised by the video: abortion, nuclear war, teen pregnancy, loneliness. How did the video affect the viewers' opinions about those issues?

9. Do the lyrics of the song match the video images? What other images might be used to illustrate the song? When the video story doesn't seem to match the lyric story, how does that add to or detract from the message?

10. How is the outlook and experience of the singers different from or similar to a typical teenager's?

Watching and discussing music videos with teenagers can be an eye-opening experience that increases communication about values and minimizes any negative effects upon the young viewers' ideas and lifestyles.

### Notes

1. "Impact of Rock Lyrics and Music Videos on Children and Youth," *Pediatrics*, vol. 83, no. 2, February 1989, p. 314.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 315.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 314.□

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