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### Mute Button

The mute button. In other words, a muzzle on the musician. When it comes to things like sex, graphic violence, language, dark or obscene themes, and morally questionable content, censorship in music videos will always be a controversial issue. On one hand, the practice of censoring music videos limits artists and can obscure their message. It's an infringement on their freedom of speech, can block important messages that people should hear about, and can prevent a rising artist from getting publicity. On the other hand, censorship protects people from inappropriate content. This can range from keeping pornography away from young children to avoiding darkly themed music and imagery because of a religious or moral standpoint. It boils down to an important question: Should the government enforce censorship? Should there be laws restricting the availability of artistic content in music videos?

Many people emphatically cry, "No!" These people believe that music censorship is an infringement of our freedom of speech and expression. They also think that parents are responsible for their children and what they can access, not the artists or the government. Everyone should have the right to say what they want, and not allowing artists to express their emotion and meaning

the way they want presents moral problems of its own. These people stand by the law as it is, and argue that music should be sold and listened to without infringement.

For every person that fights for freedom of artistic expression, however, there is another that defends the innocence of our children. Censoring our music protects people from stumbling upon images and songs that can be almost impossible to forget. These people claim that violent music is connected to aggressiveness and crime, and that music with disturbing content can have a bad influence on young people's futures. In his book *The Modern Parent's Guide to Kids and Video Games*, Scott Steinberg explains,

A recent Dutch experiment has come close to proving a causal link, according to Bushman. Again, noise blasts were used as the measure of aggression. In the study, a group of 14-year-old boys played either a non-violent or violent video game for 20 minutes. After playing, they then performed a competitive task, and the winner was given the ability to send a noise blast to the loser's headphones, and they could choose the intensity on a scale of 1 to 10. The kids were warned that levels 8, 9 and 10 could cause permanent hearing damage, even though in reality they would not. The boys that identified with the violent characters chose to blast their opponents with levels they believed would cause permanent hearing damage. This type of research, however, is exactly the kind that the ECA's Halpin thinks doesn't prove anything. "Exclusionary studies amount to

little more than hitman research,” he says. They have “less than no value, to my mind. They harm the impact that truly valuable studies will have going forward by creating bias on both sides. It’s unfortunate that politics and funding play such a significant part of what directs most of these matters, but then again, you can certainly see what motivates them as a result (Steinberg, 8).

Even if explicit material were proven not to spark aggression, many songs that are censored portray violence, drug abuse, degradation of women, and racism in a positive light. Hearing these things can unconsciously affect our perception of the world, and should not be left available to people who don’t want to hear it.

There are scientific reasons why enforced censorship would be beneficial for young children. Many crude songs about sex and women are degrading and portray an unrealistic standard for females of any day and age:

A report of the American Psychological Association (APA) released today found evidence that the proliferation of sexualized images of girls and young women in advertising, merchandising, and media is harmful to girls' self-image and healthy development. ... Sexualization and objectification undermine a person's confidence in and comfort with her own body, leading to emotional and self-image problems, such as shame and anxiety. ... Research links sexualization with three of the most common mental health problems diagnosed in girls and women--eating

disorders, low self-esteem, and depression or depressed mood. ... We have ample evidence to conclude that sexualization has negative effects in a variety of domains, including cognitive functioning, physical and mental health, and healthy sexual development (American Psychological Association).

Sexualization in this instance was specified as when a person's value comes only from their sexual appeal to the exclusion of other characteristics, and when a person is sexually objectified (made into a thing for another's sexual use).

A few years ago, a team of researchers looked at the most popular porn films—the ones bought and rented most often. From that group, they randomly picked 50 and analyzed them. Of the 304 scenes the movies contained, 88% contained physical violence. On top of that, 49% contained verbal aggression. In total, only one scene in 10 didn't contain any aggression, and the typical scene averaged 12 physical or verbal attacks. One action-packed scene managed to fit in 128.

Unlike violence in regular movies where someone gets punched, gets mad, and fights back, 95% of the victims of aggression in the porn scenes either were neutral or responded with pleasure. And while the targets were women 94% of the time, when a man was the victim, he was four times more likely than his female costars to be upset at his attacker (Porn Leads to Violence, 2).

Music videos that tell a growing child that women are an object and violence is okay isn't healthy for anyone involved, and teaches lessons that can't be completely forgotten. Graphically sexual music and videos are also addictive- and they're found everywhere. If we're not careful as a society, children and adults alike won't be able to avoid this kind of content even if they want to.

“Advertising in general has become so pervasive I think most simply hate it because we can hardly escape it” (James, 3).

Despite the quickly growing concern about the safety of media, many argue that enforced censorship is an infringement of our Freedom of Speech- and they're right. Emily Zemler, in her article “No Offense: Music Videos Are Still Prone to Censorship, But Does It Matter?” paints this topic vividly:

Does anyone really have the right to determine what is ‘appropriate’ for someone to see or hear? This debate has been raging for years, especially since Tipper Gore helped found the Parents Music Resource Center in 1985 to protect children from content found in music and music videos. After all, what is offensive to one person is perfectly fine to another” (9).

It's hard to say if any person should be allowed to decide what's okay and what's not. In a country of extremely diverse moral standings like the United States, it's safe to say it would be impossible to get everyone to agree to one form of censorship or another. In 2010, M.I.A. created a music video called “Born Free” which sparked a lot of controversy. In “Born Free” a graphic genocide against red haired people is the main conflict in the video. In response to the backlash they

received from the public, M.I.A. was quoted as saying to NME, "I find the new Justin Bieber video more violent and more of an assault to my eyes and senses than what I've made" (Zemler, 9).

Aiden frontman Wil Francis believes music videos are something an artist should be able to make without worrying about offending anyone. Francis' video for "Beautiful Loser," was an example of this sentiment in 2008. Francis doesn't believe any of his fans were personally upset by the video, which contained nudity. However, the clip has been banned in several countries and has not received play on MTV or Fuse. "It was a weird concept to begin with," Francis says. "It's not your typical 'sing into the camera with a story about a boy who loves a girl' type of video" (Zemler, 7).

While artists are certainly free to create what they want, it doesn't mean that public sources like YouTube and MTV have to present their work, nor does it mean that the fans of the artists should be forced to consume it. There is a lot of concern by fans in regards to NSFW videos; it can be difficult at best to tell if a band is advocating those things or not. In 2010, Mayday Parade released a music video titled "Kids In Love" that featured graphic sex and drug usage by minors.

In addition to being removed from YouTube, the video has also upset many of the band's fans--who likely had a hand in flagging the video in the first place. It raises the question of whether viewers think the content in an artist's video is a reflection of what that artist believes and does, or whether it's merely an artistic statement. Are Mayday Parade condoning

the use of drugs and sex with multiple partners? Or does this video merely offer a visual narrative to accompany one of their songs? (Zemler, 5)

There's another, perhaps more important, question that needs to be asked in situations like this: *Does it matter?* "In a time when the internet has blown away any gatekeepers of content, does censorship really affect artists in the same way it did when MTV played videos" (Zemler, 10)? It's easy to find things on the internet. If an official site has banned unsafe content, a quick search will bring it up somewhere else. It's very hard to keep media and information away from a determined person with access to a computer, even if that person is a minor – perhaps especially so.

For those that decide censorship is a good thing, it's very difficult to achieve without some sort of regulation on the internet. Parents who try to keep their kids safe are attempting to tackle a problem that is impossible for them to solve without outside help. The Recording Industry Association of America began labeling controversial albums 25 years ago. The RIAA's guidelines for the label warnings were clearly stated on their website:

All music is not always appropriate for all ages. The music industry takes seriously its responsibility to help parents determine what is and is not appropriate for their children. That's why the record companies created the Parental Advisory Label Program. This program is a tool to help parents make the choice about when-- and whether--their children should be able to listen to a particular recording. Music can be a tremendous tool

in fostering dialogue and understanding across generations. Through music, parents or other adults can tune into what kids are thinking and feeling. We need to pay attention to the music children choose and ask questions: Why do they like a certain song or album? What do they think the artist is saying? When these opportunities to talk openly are seized, parents, kids and music are best served.

This was in a time before the internet was widespread, or even available for public use. Labels used to be a great way to warn parents about potentially unsafe content, but now they're largely ignored. It can be even more difficult when songs are paired with graphic images that haven't been labelled and are much more powerful than just audio. Regarding attempts to censor inappropriate content from minors, Charlotte Andrews says, "At best, age certificates seem ineffective. Young people will always find a way to circumvent the restrictions their parents place on them, and age certificates will only serve to make the forbidden more alluring" (5).

The problem is made even worse when artists refuse to take responsibility for their creations. It is a well known fact that rock stars and other musicians have been role models for ages- it's not something you can just ignore. You can justify songs with explicit content all you want, but it doesn't change the fact that to a child you're advocating underage drug usage, sex, and violence. Telling a parent, "If you don't want your kid to watch it, don't let them" is a flat argument that just doesn't make sense in today's age. Even if you install some sort of safe

search on your child's computer, there's going to be a different computer somewhere else- a friends house, school, someone's phone.

We support songs glorifying violence and other inappropriate behavior for teens and youth a lot, and enough is enough. In regards to a video uploaded by hip hop star Rihanna, Pastor Delman Coates, founder of the Enough is Enough campaign, said,

Violence is a pervasive problem in all corners of our society and today's youth need more positive strategies for dealing with conflict ... This video is one among several frequently played on Viacom music video networks that lyrically or graphically glorifies violence and other behavior inappropriate for teens and youth.

Censorship is a morally debatable topic, but the allowance of minors and the leniency we show towards mature and explicit material is even more so. There are ways to censor explicit music videos and still allow access for those who want it- Youtube, Fuse, and MTV are all careful to try and regulate content where needed. If there were a program that required age verification before intake of inappropriate media, or if such videos were only allowed on certain sites that already had such verifications in place, it would be much safer for those who don't want to see explicit imagery. If such a program were compounded with a search engine screener like Net Nanny, which performs background checks and censors content that you specify in personalized settings, the internet

would be a much safer place. Micah Mattix, in their essay *In Defence of Censorship*, said:

Originally to censor meant to assess, to value. It's a form of the much touted but rarely practiced "critical thinking," which used to be called "judgment" before that term was sullied with a purely negative connotation. It protects the innocence of the young and, in moderation, is one of the oils of a civilized and pluralistic society. Where to apply that oil, of course, is difficult to determine in a society of widely divergent morals, but that doesn't mean it shouldn't be applied at all" (7).

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