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Is Today's Young Music Too Obscene? (Or Has My Perspective Changed?)

By Tom Cavanagh
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I know how I am going to sound. Really, I do. And I hate it. When I was younger, I always vowed that when I reached my current age (mid-40s), I would never be *that guy*. But I must face the fact that I am indeed turning into *that guy*.

Seriously, what's wrong with kids' music these days?

I cringe writing those words. I still sometimes struggle reconciling the self of my youth with the guy who now has a mortgage and an SUV. But the minute I became a parent, my worldview shifted slightly on its axis and I began to view everything through new parental lenses.

With a 13-year-old son being continually bombarded by media, I can't help but notice how standards have evolved since I was 13. Look, I get that every generation feels that the next generation has lost its moral standards. The flappers of the 1920s scandalized their parents. Elvis Presley's gyrating hips had to be cropped out of the television screen for the safety of Ed Sullivan's delicate home viewing audience. It has always been thus, going back in history. So I understand that what I am complaining about has a long tradition. I was once a part of it on the other side.

However, I suppose that my issue isn't really with today's youth. Of course they are drawn to what is edgy and placed in opposition to their parents. I don't blame them for being attracted to that, especially when it is produced by artists with real talent and packaged and promoted by the most sophisticated marketing machines in the history of the world.

My real problem is with those in the entertainment industry who aggressively market content clearly intended for an older audience to a much younger audience. There is a

real disconnect when singers such as Katy Perry and Pitbull are featured on the Nickelodeon Kids' Choice Awards. If you have ever listened to their music – and I have – there is a significant amount of profanity and sexual innuendo in many of their songs.

I have no objection to these artists making these choices in their lyrics. That is their artistic right and I am wholly opposed to censorship. However, I do object to such songs being overtly promoted to children under 10 years old. There is already enough pressure on today's children to grow up quickly. They don't need the additional pressure of the allure of adult music to make them cool.

And it isn't just music. When both "Transformers" movies were released, they were relentlessly marketed to elementary school-age children through toys, video games and McDonald's Happy Meals. Yet, those movies were rated PG-13 for a reason. Between language, overt sensuality, and mind-numbing violence, they really weren't made for 7-year-olds. But if you never actually saw the films and based the targeted age of the audience on nothing but the peripheral marketing, you would conclude that it was a film for elementary and middle school-aged kids. I could cite many other examples.

Again, I have no issue with the fact that these films were made. I kind of enjoyed the first "Transformers" (although I couldn't bring myself to watch the sequel). I appreciate the artistic talent of performers such as Perry and Pitbull and Lil' Kim. It's just that an entire entertainment complex has been amassed to tell little kids that this sort of behavior is cool before they can discern for themselves the consequences of bad language and sexual choices.

It also positions parents as the enemies in the culture wars of our times. Parents who don't want their children to be prematurely exposed to adult language and themes must remain constantly vigilant. Because the entertainment and marketing machine refuses to draw what I believe are reasonable age lines for content, parents are now forced to take sides against Nickelodeon and McDonald's and iTunes and DreamWorks and Paramount. That's a hard battle to win. I'm just a guy with an SUV going mano a mano with Optimus Prime and Megatron.

I don't recall the music of my youth being filled with profanity. My recollection is that movies intended for a grown-up audience used to be marketed to grown-ups. These were not major concerns for my parents.

I recognize that to some reading this I probably seem a little prudish. Too conservative.

Lighten up, Tom, times have changed.

Fair enough. But I suspect that most of the parents reading this will agree with me.

We want our children to become better versions of themselves than we are of ourselves. We want them to achieve based on the highest possible standards. That will be hard to do as long as the standards keep getting lower.

I try to monitor the media that my family consumes. I talk with my son about what we feel is appropriate language and behavior, whether he encounters it in a movie or on the schoolyard. I will do my best to set the standards I feel will allow him to become the best version of himself.

And if that means that I have become *that guy*, I can live with that.

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