

1 STATEMENT OF GEORGE GERBNER, PH.D., BELL ATLANTIC
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3 PENNSYLVANIA

4 Dr. Gerbner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 I would like to recognize a pioneer in the field here,
6 and I hope you will have an opportunity to listen to her, C.
7 Dolores Tucker, sitting right behind me. She has been
8 fighting and working on these very same issues that your
9 investigation is concerned about.

10 Senator Brownback: Mrs. Tucker and I are quite familiar
11 with each other. She has done excellent work in this field.
12 Thank you for recognizing her.

13 Dr. Gerbner: So much of my testimony which I would like
14 to submit for the record is really confirming what has been
15 said particularly by the first panel, so I am not going to
16 repeat that, except with just a few exceptions. But let me
17 say that listening to the testimony and listening to some of
18 your comments, I was really struck by your suggestion that
19 there is no legislative solution.

20 I think that the whole business of marketing lyrics
21 occurs on the public airwaves. That is a major way of
22 marketing these records. The public airwaves are there by
23 virtue of not ownership but licenses -- licenses awarded by
24 the Federal Communications Commission and the Congress. And
25 why is it the fact that in the United States alone, of all the

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1 democratic countries, that licenses are awarded for the
2 ability to market goods rather than the ability of a diversity
3 of views and an ability of introducing different perspectives
4 into the airwaves?

5 So, the problem is not the existence of all of the things
6 we are complaining about here today. Their existence is the
7 price we pay for having a relatively free country. And the
8 problem is that they are disseminated by major global
9 conglomerates, that they are inescapable, that they pervade
10 our airwaves, and they are part of a discharge into the
11 atmosphere of common consciousness, that they become part of
12 the inescapable cultural environment into which our children
13 are born. And that is a public matter. That is not a private
14 matter. It is not a matter of a few records. It is a matter
15 of a wholesaler of all this phenomenon, which is the public
16 airwaves.

17 So, I submit that there is an imperative need to revisit
18 the monopolization of the cultural environment, the
19 monopolization and conglomeratization of all the stories that
20 our children hear and see and that provide the environment in
21 which we all live.

22 You know, for the first time in human history, most of
23 those stories are not told by the parent or by the school or
24 by the church or by anyone in a community who has anything to
25 tell, but a handful of global conglomerates that have

1 something to sell. The issue of labelling is just a small
2 part of this very large issue of the pervasiveness and the
3 monopolization of our culture in which the material, sir, I
4 think is acceptable as a bizarre marginal side issue and as a
5 small price to pay for a relatively free culture, but that
6 inundates the areas that becomes inescapable and that is
7 introduced into the mainstream.

8 Having said that, let me then make just a few comments in
9 general. The labelling system that this investigation is
10 concerned about is basically an uninformative scheme that
11 deceives the public and protects the industry from the
12 parents, rather than the other way around. That is, once it
13 is labelled, they say, well, it is no longer my problem. Let
14 the consumer worry.

15 It is like the polluters of the environment saying, do
16 not worry, I am going to sell some gas masks to people; if
17 they can afford it, then everything will be all right. It is
18 really switching the terms of the debate.

19 The sexually explicit and clearly obscene lyrics are
20 played repeatedly during daytime hours on music television,
21 with the occasional correction or occasional deletion of
22 certain key words that, from other sources, everyone knows
23 what they are and it is a very easy game to fill in those key
24 words. Do these labels inform parents?

25 Well, only a small group of upper middle-class parents

1 have the information, the motivation and the initiative to
2 supervise their children's music purchases and uses. And an
3 even smaller fraction of parents, from our experience, have
4 organized efforts to have local store managers observe and
5 follow those advisories. The retailers report that labelled
6 music, in fact, sells faster, sells higher volume. As I am
7 sure you know, to some extent, the labelling system not only
8 fails, but backfires.

9 As with "R" ratings in a motion picture today, even if it
10 is irrelevant and it is not part of the plot, you introduce a
11 scene in order to get an "R" rating, because you know that the
12 "R" rating has a much larger audience. So, the labelling
13 system is not only ineffective, but it backfires and it may,
14 and often does, have the opposite effect from what is
15 intended.

16 In an analysis of the top hits of 1995 and 1996, our own
17 studies found that only 12 percent of the songs had no
18 tobacco, alcohol, illicit drugs, crime, violence, or sexual
19 lyrics. And in songs about growing up, about friendship,
20 about social issues, about religion, home life, or school --
21 school, that is, without crime, drugs, sex, or violence -- all
22 of these put together make up only about 7 percent of the
23 songs.

24 What this is, is an exploitive marketing tendency that
25 dominates the market because of the domination of a few

1 monopolies, and the fact that these companies that dominate
2 the market are subsidiaries of well-known and highly
3 respective global conglomerates makes it even worse. They are
4 reachable and, as Mrs. Tucker knows, they can be visited and
5 occasionally they can be shamed into at least admitting what
6 they are doing, if not necessarily changing it. And I hope we
7 will hear some of those anecdotes from her.

8 So, in many ways, the counter-effects, the opposite
9 effects, are achieved by the system from what is intended.
10 You find, for example, the labels on ratings for sex and
11 violence content open the door for alcohol. We have done a
12 study and found that the programs -- and I think this applies
13 to music, as well -- that are rated for sex and violence
14 increase the number of scenes that a child sees in music
15 videos and in television programs that have tobacco, that have
16 smoking, that have alcohol, and all addictive substances used,
17 with never any mention of consequences. They are used as
18 risk-free activities.

19 Well, a child viewer of music videos today will be
20 exposed to worse than these lyrics, will be exposed to vivid
21 images of attractive role models singing about or using
22 alcohol every 15 minutes, tobacco every 30 minutes. And this
23 is more in children's viewing time than it is in adult prime
24 time or daytime serial drama.

25 So, I would like to conclude this by simply submitting

1 that the problem that we are investigating and that we are
2 focusing on, indeed, does have legislative implications. The
3 legislative implications are to break up the monopolies or to
4 diversify ownership, to diversify employment, diversify
5 representation, and not allow this material to permeate the
6 mainstream, let it be on the margins, where it is hard to
7 find, instead of potentially being in every home.

8 And, secondly, to support citizens who take seriously the
9 notion of the public airwaves, who take seriously the notion
10 that citizens have to take control and diversify the primary
11 medium on which the records that we are focusing on and are
12 sold -- namely, the airwaves -- diversify their ownership, not
13 to allow the same music companies, for example, to have a
14 major say or in fact a major stake, a major investment or
15 strategic ownership in the very industries through which their
16 products are propagated.

17 If you have any questions, Mr. Chairman, I would be
18 perfectly willing to try to reflect on it from the point of
19 view from which I am speaking, which is the point of view of
20 30 years of research in media, particularly in broadcasting,
21 but also in motion pictures and, to some extent in the last
22 few years, in music, from which we can derive many, I think,
23 interesting findings and observations.

24 Thank you.

25 Senator Brownback: Thank you very much, Dr. Gerbner, for

1 Senator Brownback: Well, I appreciate your work, and
2 your pioneering work in this field. The disappointing thing
3 that I have certainly concluded from this hearing, and which
4 appears from all the evidence, is that the labels just have
5 not worked. Indeed, they have been a counter-impact.

6 Or, as Dr. Gerbner has said -- you put this in your
7 testimony that the labelling system protects the industry from
8 parents rather than the other way around. I thought that was
9 an interesting way to put it. What exactly do you mean by
10 that? Could you expand on that statement, Dr. Gerbner?

11 Dr. Gerbner: That instead of cleaning up and
12 diversifying and changing their business practices, they say,
13 well, we can conduct this business as usual. We label it and
14 now it is not our responsibility. That means the labelling
15 becomes a shifting of responsibility. It enables the business
16 to continue business as usual. And it shifts the label to the
17 weakest link in the chain, which is the parents, most of whom
18 have no opportunity sometimes, as you have heard, even to
19 know, let alone to supervise the purchases of their children.

20 Senator Brownback: So, it abdicates any responsibility
21 on the record company, then?

22 Dr. Gerbner: That is right.

23 Senator Brownback: Would we be better off without any
24 labels at all, then, than where we are today?

25 Dr. Gerbner: The labels are counterproductive. Just

1 removing the labels by itself, of course, is not a step
2 forward. That would be a step backwards. But diversifying
3 production, acting in an antitrust manner -- and this is where
4 I think legislation can and should come in -- to make sure
5 that there is a morality, there is a diversity of voices, that
6 what we are talking about does not permeate the mainstream,
7 that it exists on the margins, as indeed it ought to, and that
8 what we find that the production of songs that have to do with
9 friendship, that have to do with social issues, that have to
10 do with all the positive tendencies, from religion to the
11 issue of violence against women and so on, should not be only
12 6 to 7 percent of the total production. That should be the
13 bulk of the production.

14 So, there is a major policy role, both of exhortation but
15 also legislation. Legislation is not a first amendment issue.
16 Legislation is not to limit, not to censor, not to control
17 content. Legislation is to make sure that there is a greater
18 diversity of voices in the mainstream.

19 And if private industry is not willing to do it, I think
20 it would be the responsibility of government to subsidize it.
21 There is no reason why, as in every other democratic country,
22 there should not be a government subsidy, for example, for
23 public broadcasting to produce and market music, dramatic
24 programming, a greater variety of cultural fare and of
25 entertainment.

1 There is a very clear opportunity for Congress, instead
2 of intimidating and reducing public broadcasting to a kind of
3 a secondary and marginal role, to beef up public broadcasting
4 to enable it to produce and to market music, to enable it to
5 produce and to market dramatic programs which draws the
6 audience, to be a competitive service as in every other
7 democratic country. If you go to England, France, Germany,
8 Scandinavia, you find that the total viewing time is
9 essentially divided evenly between public and private. And
10 the reason why that is possible is that the dramatic program
11 brings in the audience, and it requires a much higher level of
12 financing than public broadcasting today gets.

13 Senator Brownback: Mrs. Wyatt, I want to look not so
14 much at the labels themselves, but the standards of the
15 albums, which are labelled and which are not. I have seen
16 some records have been provided to me. One, there is a single
17 by Prodigy, a song, "Smack My Bitch Up," which the recording
18 industry did not label. This one is not labelled at all, in
19 spite of what I would sure consider and what most would
20 consider pretty violent tendencies.

21 Mrs. Wyatt: That is a problem. There is no consistency.
22 So, the parents cannot rely on that label to begin with.
23 Also, when you are looking at the young people and saying,
24 does an 8-year-old hear this or does a 17-year-old? This is
25 why perhaps changing the -- and I agree with what Dr. Gerbner

1 will remain open for the requisite number of days for
2 additional inserts if people would care to update or put in
3 more factual information to their testimony. I think it has
4 been a powerful and useful and good hearing. Thank you for
5 your work.

6 Dr. Gerbner: Thank you.

7 Senator Brownback: The hearing is adjourned.

8 [Whereupon, at 4:35 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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Highlights of testimony on the effectiveness of parental advisory labels on music for the Senate Commerce Committee hearing, Sen. Sam Brownback chairing, Tuesday, June 16, 1998

In general, the labeling system is an uninformative scheme that deceives the public and protects industry from parents rather than the other way around.

Sexually explicit and even clearly obscene lyrics are played repeatedly during daytime hours on music television with the occasional correction or deletion of certain key words, easily surmised.

Do lyric warning labels inform parents?

Only a small group of upper middle class parents have the information, motivation, and initiative to supervise their children's music purchases and uses. An even smaller fraction have organized efforts to have local store managers observe and follow the advisories.

Do labels affect consumer behavior?

The evidence is mixed, and contradictory. Record store owners in some localities report even higher sales of labeled music. They say that children are likely to pick up a labeled tape, read the song titles and talk about the "dirty" songs.

Do labels affect retailer behavior?

Retailers report that labeled music sells faster, and sells higher volume. Furthermore, for a large group of parents and children who buy their music from used record stores, there are no labels; the plastic outer wrapping has long been torn off.

In an analysis of the top hits of 1995 and 1996, we found that only 12% of the songs had no tobacco, alcohol, illicit drugs, crime, violence, or sexual lyrics. Songs about growing up, friendship, social issues,

religion, home life or school without crime, drugs sex or violence made up only 7% of the songs.

Are labeled albums marketed to the group (children) they are supposed to warn?

The six major record companies, all of whom are divisions of large global conglomerates, market their top music over their airwaves to stations known for having a young viewership. The primary marketing tool for popular music is the music video which is made for distribution on a global network of stations.

When played on television, songs with obscene words, and references to violence or drugs in the music are censored in a manner that provokes curiosity (see examples below). Television censorship has neutralized the effect of anti-drug messages in songs by deleting the names of illicit drugs the singers speak against.

Do labels or ratings on sex and violence content offer protection for children?

On the contrary, we have found that they open the door for the implicit promotion of risk-free tobacco and alcohol. For a viewership of 8-12 year olds, Bacardi, Hennesey, Old English, Dom Perignon, Cisco, Tanqueray, Martini and Rossi, Heineken, and Bombay gin are all given clear mention in lyrics, alongside generic references to beer, champagne, cognac, wine, Chardonnay, Martinis, and just "drinks".

A child viewer of music videos will be exposed to vivid images of attractive role models singing about and/or using alcohol every 15 minutes, and tobacco every 30 minutes. This is more than in adult-oriented prime time and daytime-serial drama.

Themes and elements in Contemporary Music

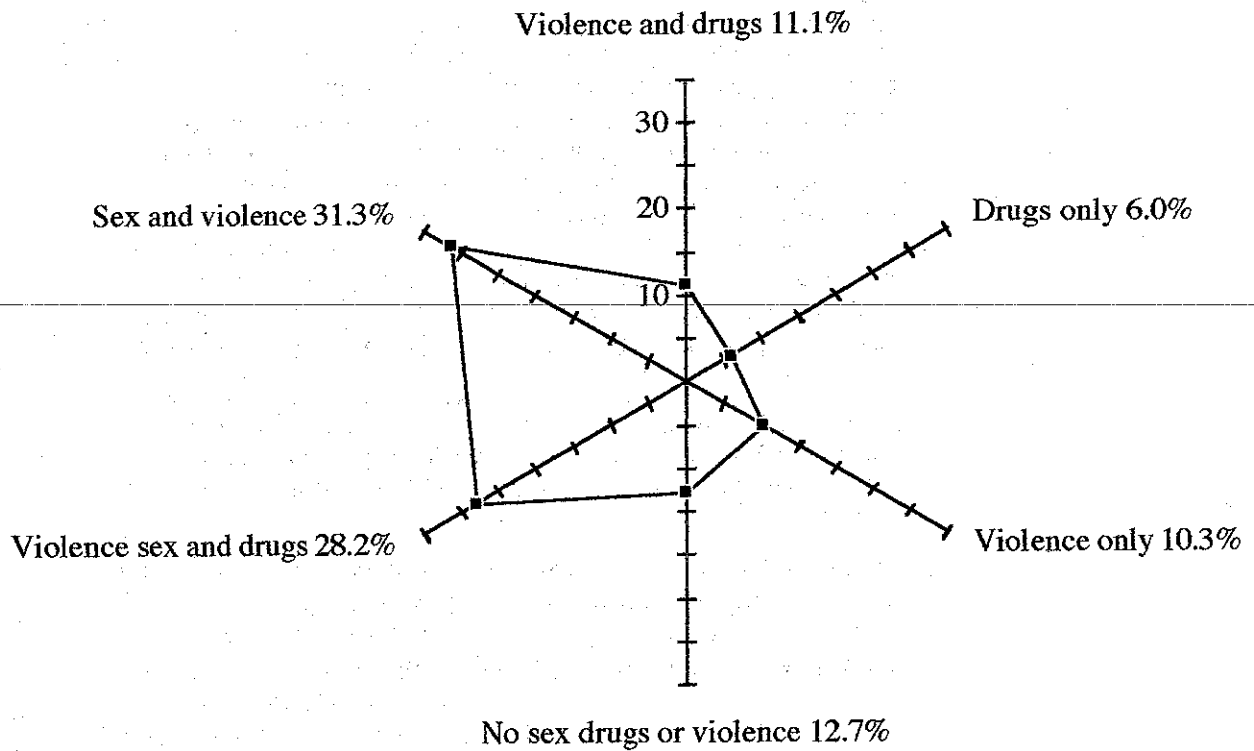


Figure 1. From a content analysis of 262 songs produced and distributed by 6 major record companies and randomly selected independent labels. Percent of total songs with given themes.

Table 1.

Sex, violence, and alcohol tobacco and illicit drugs in music	Portion of TV characters
Violence and drugs	11.1%
Drugs only	6.0%
Violence only	10.3%
No sex drugs or violence	12.7%
Violence sex and drugs	28.2%
Sex and violence	31.3%
Sex and drugs	0.0%
Sex only	0.0%
Total	100%

Samples of music lyrics

"I'll remember the drink that you gave me."
"I like to kick back with a 40 on his lap".
"call up my crew and tell them to bring the brew and some
Hennessey for the beach party"
"Sit back with your six pack"
"Baby you still got the drinks?"
"I like sipping VSOP Hennessey from foam cups".
"Pour wine on me."
"I warm up a room like a bottle of Bacardi".
"Baby down this Mamosa"
"Sipping on Sloe gin."
"If I bought a drink you wouldn't toast,"
"They Tried to slip him a Mickey in his Bombay." (Gin)
"I'm drunk but I'm sober."
"We had a drink, We had a smoke."
"We pop the cork on and give the champagne to the stork that
brought the light to my momma in New York."
"Buy me a drink"
"it ain't nothing but a new day drinking Tanqueray with OJ sip it
slow way down low hey!"
"I need beer and a lot of noise in my ear and a rowdy atmosphere to
even think clear."
"Now that I got me some Seagram's Gin. Everybody got their cup but
they ain't chipped in."
"Later on that day my homey Dr. Dre came through with a gang of
Tanqueray and a fat-ass CENSORED of some bubonic CENSORED that
made me choke. This ain't no joke."