

Following is an example of a research review. This was a complicated paper, consisting of five experiments. I encourage you to choose your article carefully to pick a source that will be shorter and more straightforward. To give you a point of comparison. Between reading the article and writing up the summary, I spent probably about three hours total. Assuming you find a shorter and less complicated article, I would guess that about 3-4 hours total is a reasonable estimate of how long this assignment should take to complete.

Anderson, C. A., Carnagey, N. L., & Eubanks, J. (2003). Exposure to violent media: The effects of songs with violent lyrics on aggressive thoughts and feelings. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(5), 960-971. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.5.960>

The introduction presents information about increasing societal and scientific concern about the possible negative effects of exposure to songs with violent lyrical content. They cite the creation of the PMRC and the policy of labeling content of music to identify violent content as well as growing scientific evidence that exposure to violent media causes increases in aggression over both the short and long term. Most of the research that has examined this issue has examined the connection between aggression and violent movies and TV programs, although recently investigators have started to examine the connection with video games as well. The results related to video games have been similar to other media. In spite of the growing concern and scientific consensus, the authors point out the fact that large segments of the population continue to believe the ancient “catharsis hypothesis.” Popularized by Freud after being proposed by the ancient Greeks, this hypothesis states that our impulses toward aggression can be effectively discharged by viewing or singing about violent themes or acting in ways that basically role play aspects of aggression. This hypothesis has no real research support according to the authors, though they point out that little research has examined the effects, if any, of music with violent lyrics. They point out that in contrast to visual media, where violent messages and themes are overt and clearly stated, in music, many songs with violent lyrics may be unintelligible to the majority of listeners. They cite research that seems to indicate that the lack of clear imagery in music, in contrast to visual media may actually encourage transfer to real world situations, as they put it, “may well allow listeners to imagine audio antagonists similar to real world antagonists.” Thus, there are reasonable cases for considering musical lyrics either more or less influential in terms of connections with aggressive behavior. A brief overview of research looking at various forms of music is provided showing a variety of effects and correlations between music exposure of various types and behavioral variables.

The five experiments reported in this paper (all using undergraduate students as participants) are rooted in the “general aggression model” which specifies the mechanisms by which exposure to violent media content can lead to aggressive behavior. The five experiments assess different aspects of the model and will be discussed in turn. Experiment one (with 59 participants, 30 males) assessed the effect of violent lyrics on state hostility. The main measure was responses on the State Hostility Scale, which consists of 35 sentences which the respondent agrees or disagrees with on a five point scale. “I feel furious” is an example of an item from the scale. To control for possible differences in music, two songs were used by the same band (Tool) one of which was violent while the other was not. They found that listening to the violent song resulted in more state hostility than the nonviolent song did. Experiment two (with 61 participants, 31 males) assessed differences in the presence of aggressive cognitions based on whether the participant had listened to a violent or nonviolent song. The measure was based on ratings of similarity of pairs of words, and specifically whether ambiguous words were perceived as being similar to aggressive words. The results were that the violent song led to a stronger tendency to perceive ambiguous words as aggressive than the nonviolent song. Experiment 3 elaborated on the previous two by adding a variety of songs, eight, including four each of violent and non-violent songs. Participants were 162 (79 male) students. In this study speed of reading aggressive vs. nonaggressive words was the measure of aggressive cognitions. The state hostility scale was used here as well, as was a measure of arousal. As in experiment one, violent songs were associated with higher scores on the SHS, for those who completed the SHS immediately after hearing the violent lyrics, but not when those who completed another

questionnaire in the interim. This indicates that the effect can be pretty easily counteracted by engaging in some other activity. The participants who listened to violent music also read aggressive words more quickly than those who did not. Experiment four adds humorous songs to the design, comparing violent humorous songs with both nonviolent humorous songs and a no-song control condition. There were 139 participants (74 male). The three song conditions had means that were essentially the same on the SHS, meaning that the humor and violence essentially cancelled each other out as predicted. The word completion task yielded higher aggressive word scores in the violent humorous than the nonviolent humorous condition. Experiment five was basically a combination of aspects of experiments 1-4. It examined the effects of violent lyrics with both humorous and non-humorous songs and trait hostility on state hostility and aggressive cognition with 151 participants (69 males). As in the previous experiments, the violent songs resulted in the highest SHS scores and there was a marginally significant effect of humorous content, with slightly lower SHS scores. Those who heard violent lyrics also had higher levels of aggressive cognitions, as measured by the word completion task.

The researchers conclude that the results of the five experiments indicate that the lyrical content of violent songs results in increases in aggressive cognitions and emotions and that this effect was demonstrated in multiple ways across the experiments. They conclude that violent lyrics have the potential to produce cognitive and emotional states associated with aggression and in the short term these aggressive thoughts and feelings may color interactions in an aggressive way. In terms of long-term effects, the authors believe that repeated listening to violent lyrics may contribute to developing an aggressive personality. Overall, they argue that this is an issue that warrants our concern due to the potential impact.