Music Censorship Essay, Research Paper

What is music censorship? Music censorship can mean a lot of things to a lot of people. Basically it is the attempt or action taken by any agency to limit or curtail anything in music that a community may find offensive to its beliefs or values (college park: March 28). Music censorship has been around since the beginning of music itself. Up until recently, music was written in order to please royalty and the wealthy. If they did not like the music, they would just have it altered or destroyed altogether. For instance, in the 1850 s, Giuseppe Verdi s opera, La Traviata was changed many times because the lyrics were said to be too passionate by the citizens of Naples and Rome (college park: March 28).

It is much different today, however, mainly due to the development of rock and roll in the 1950 s. It all started with the Ed Sullivan Show and Elvis Presley. In January of 1957 when Elvis starred on the Ed Sullivan the camera only focused on everything above his waist because his hip movements were said to be too crude and offensive to many viewers. Also, songs such as I can t get no satisfaction by the Rolling Stones were banned from many radio stations due to what was taken as pornographic and sexual in nature (college park: March 28).

The censorship of music has continued since, but the most famous case of censorship came in the early 1990 s with the rap group, 2 Live Crew. They found that their sales were be restricted in Florida as police were arresting anyone under the age of 18 for purchasing their provocative hit, Me So Horny (college park: March 28). They were also arrested for performing this song at a concert, although after a long debate were released and the song was allowed to be purchased.

As shown from above it can be seen that music censorship has become a big problem in today s society. The censorship of the music industry is far too extensive and effects how and what we can listen to by both parents as well as society and there must be a stand taken to fight against this problem.

Music Censorship as it relates to the individual

It is believed by many that the issue of music censorship should be left to the individual themselves to choose what is right and wrong for them. It should not be up to organizations and the government to tell individuals what they can and cannot listen to. The choice should be based on the person s beliefs and morals, that way the person s freedom is not taken away. Music can be a way of releasing built up tension or anger for a person and having a limited source of music they can listen to can hinder this. I know that when I am stressed out or angry, listening to music helps me forget what is going on in my life and gives me some time to relax. That was what music was intended to be for and if someone is going to take away that freedom, then it will come with consequences. If children are not allowed to buy certain music then they will just steal it. No matter what kind of laws are put on music to prohibit it, if the children want to listen to it they will get it. It may also come with even more drastic affects as gun violence and teen violence has become a big problem of society. If someone s rights are taken away it is going to upset people, and if it is their right to listen to a certain kind of music that is taken away then they will sometimes imitate what they hear on these CDs and will turn to violence.

Music Censorship as it relates to the family

Although it very rare for someone to turn to violence over the issue of music censorship, it can still cause many problems in a family. Generally, the idea is that the children listen to their music, the parents do not like the music, the children are not allowed to listen to that music anymore. This is music censorship taking place right in our own homes and this is not acceptable for many children anymore. This causes problems to occur among families because the children do not like their rights and freedom taken away from them. They may become rebellious and listen to their music anyway or they may even go further and start imitating some of the artists that they are not allowed to listen to and turn to violence. It is believed that the best way to solve this problem is for the parents to sit down with their children, listen to their music and tell them what they do and do not like about their music. This way the children will get an understanding of the parents point of view and maybe even decide not to listen to them anymore because they see why their parents disapprove of it. In my family, however, I have not run into this problem as my parents allow me to listen to what I want to because they trust my judgement. My parents know that I am not going to listen to anything that offends me, which makes them approve of my choices in music. This route of action is much better then just not allowing the children to listen to whatever they want because this way the children have no reason to become angry and turn rebellious. This in turn makes the family run more cooperatively and as a whole. If any parents do not approve of their children s taste in music and feel that their children will not benefit from listening to it, it is because they do not trust that they have done a good enough job bringing them up and giving them the morals and beliefs that they should have.

Music Censorship as it relates to society

Although this aspect of music censorship does not have as many drastic effects to the family, this issue is still very close to the hearts of society, whether they support it or not. This is shown through the vast array of pro-censorship groups like the Parents Music Resource Group (P.M.R.G.) (college park: March28), and anti-censorship groups like Rock Out Censorship (R.O.C.) (sunsetstrip: March29). However, all of these groups are looking out for society as a whole rather than as individuals. They figure what is right for one person must be right for everybody which is not always true and they can even take things too far. Take, for example, the story of a Texas teenager who was arrested for wearing a Marilyn Manson T-shirt. He was arrested while with his mother in a grocery store because one of the other shoppers complained to store security that they found his shirt offensive. The teen was wearing the shirt with Manson s face on the front wearing lipstick and on the back it said I am the God of F\*\*\* . He was charged with making an obscene display and was fined $500 (ultranet: April2). I do not believe that this course of action was correct. The only reason why music and apparel is censored is because of its content. This is because people figure if someone listens to music or sees a picture with a violent or sexual theme then they will respond to it by imitating what they heard or saw. Music does not create violence or sexism just by listening to it or reading its advertisements unless they are prone to these actions or beliefs already. This is just one case of people assuming this and going too far, taking things too seriously. Another case of this is the protests against the Prodigy song Smack My B\*tch Up . The National Organization for Women (NOW) denounced the band Prodigy as well as their record label Time-Warner for producing and releasing a song that they found offensive to women. The song is totally offensive, it s degrading to women, it s trash it condones violence against women, and we don t need to see that portrayed as entertainment (ncfe: April 1). This is the opinion of someone that has not looked into the real meaning of the song but has just taken his or her first impression of it of what is on the top. Liam Howlett, the leader of Prodigy denies that the song is about violence against women and says that if people think the song is about smacking women up, then they are pretty brainless (ncfe: April 1). One of the biggest attempts at music censorship is Wal-Mart attempting to stop selling music with lyrics and artwork it says is objectionable and offensive. Wal-Mart stores sell violent R-rated movies such as Lethal Weapon, Dirty Harry and Halloween unaltered, but albums with “questionable lyrics” are not stocked or heavily censored. The most famous case of Wal-Mart censorship is pop singer Sheryl Crow, whose 1996 self-titled album was banned because of lyrics accusing Wal-Mart of selling guns to children. Even R+B singer Lauryn Hill, who won many awards at the 1999 Grammies, isn t immune from the Wal-Mart censorship board. Her album, The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill, which doesn t need a Parental Advisory label in its uncut form, has several lyrics cut out from its Wal-Mart release. The really bad part about this is that you won t find that out until you ve already opened and listened to it because the CD is not marked in any way to show you that it is edited (epinions: April 4). These are just some reasons why society is taking this issue too far and something must be done about it.

Social Accountability of Music Censorship

Pertaining to the issue of music censorship, everyone must take responsibility to do his or her part in order to bring it to a halt. The government must enforce stricter laws regarding this issue as it is now getting very out of hand. Stores such as Wal-Mart should not have the right to suspend sales or edit the music, as that is someone s expression of how they feel. If someone comes along and edits it, then it is no longer theirs but rather someone else s. There should be no need for music censorship if the record companies do their part in advertising the fact that the music or artwork may not be suitable for everyone. They have tried to do this by issuing the Parental Advisory Program. Music censorship had run rampant until 1985 when the Parental Advisory Program was instated (riaa: April1). Under this program, record companies would voluntarily identify and label newly released sound recordings that may contain strong language or expressions of violence, sex or substance abuse. Then, in 1990, the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America) implemented a uniform Parental Advisory logo that continues to be used today. The Parental Advisory Program allows the record companies and the artists under their label to exercise their rights of free expression, while still fulfilling their social responsibilities to consumers and to the public (riaa: April 1). It is also the responsibility of the parents to become involved in their children s lives, as they are the ones that will affect what the children will do, not the music that they listen to. If the parents show proper beliefs and morals to the children then the chances of the children growing up unaffected by the music that they listen to is much higher. Finally, it is the responsibility of the individual themselves in order to make the right decisions for them. If the individual has strong morals and beliefs then the need for music censorship is obsolete. The person will either choose not to listen to that music or they will be strong enough and smart enough not to be influenced by it.

Solutions to the Problem

There are no immediate solutions to this problem for if change is to occur within this issue it will come at a slow rate. One solution may be in the way people are bringing up their children. If their children are brought up in respectful and loving homes in which everyone gets their fair say, then the problems that arise from music censorship would not occur. The only reason why problems occur in this issue is because of the way the children who are listening to the music are brought up. Without a good moral system to live by, these children are going to become more influential to what they see and hear. Another solution to this problem is stricter laws against retail stores. The music retail stores should not be allowed to suspend the sales of certain items unless authorized by a government organization. Stores like Wal-Mart just want to look like the good guys in the whole situation when really they are restricting the rights and freedoms of others by not selling certain products. There are stickers on all the CDs with objectionable content so it is not necessary to edit the CDs for content. If the people do not want to listen to the objectionable content then they will not buy the CD because of the sticker on the front. Another solution is the boycotting of music retail stores that are restricting the sales of certain CDs or are editing them for content. If everyone boycotted the Wal-Mart music section then they would have no choice but to return to selling unedited CDs and then everyone s freedom would then be returned to them. Another solution to this problem would be a public rating system much like in motion picture films. Everything would get a rating like G or PG or R. It would be hard to get used to in the beginning but over time it would become second nature. You never hear about people talking about film censorship in the movie theatres, although it is apparent when these motion pictures are shown on television. These are just some of many solutions that could correct the problem of music censorship.

Music censorship is a very important issue in today s society. It questions people s belief system and restricts people of many of their rights and their freedom. Until something is done about it, it will just continue to grow in size and in its effect to society. It affects everybody in some way and is just another reason to become involved in the issue. I do not understand why people cannot see what they are doing to other people by censoring their music. It is not music s fault that society is the way it is today. It is the people s fault who live in society who take music the wrong way, so stop blaming the artists. After all, they are only trying to make a living.