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Do teens get it?

**Can they separate
the demeaning,
violent rap lyrics
from the catchy?**

My turn



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Writing about radio stations, lyrics and DJ banter in Bakersfield really bothered me at times. It bothered me because I felt like a prude. A Vassar-educated, uptight, feminist, over-bearing, hyper-analytical prude.

"Don't you see how explicit these lyrics are?" I asked programmers, DJs and parents. "Doesn't it shock you?" Some conceded it did, but I was also met with many blank stares.

I don't understand why I should be shocked, either. But it seems that nowadays I flip back and forth between bobbing my head to the beat in utter abandon and evaluating lyrics like a 50-something music critic for *The New York Times*.

I grew up with rap, hip-hop, whatever you want to call it. KRS-One, EPMD, Eric B and Rakim, Big Daddy Kane, Public Enemy, 3rd Bass and, of course, A Tribe Called Quest.

I also grew up with Easy E and NWA, and I remember blithely humming along to Easy's lyrics as a skateboarding 15-year-old while he described how he robbed a bank, selected a woman to violate, was dismayed to find out she was a he, and then beat "her" up.

Lyrics are a funny thing. One minute you can be nodding in agreement and thanking someone for finally saying it. The next, you can be seething in disgust.

When I was 15, I didn't think of myself as a "woman" yet, a female who could be sexually assaulted. I was a girl, a kid, a skateboarder.

For many kids, this is the way it is. The hard words on the radio aren't about true violence, true maliciousness. They are about posture, about rhythm. They are about mood and cadence

and beat and a carload of people on a Saturday night.

I couldn't help wonder, however, when I moved to Bakersfield and started listening to the radio, what it's like to be a 14-year-old girl and hear a woman promise to "make it hot" as long as her cheating boyfriend comes back to her.

"I got what you want," sings Nicole Ray. "Oh, really?" replies Timbaland, voice smooth, like he couldn't care less.

It's a song about desperation, in a way. What a woman will do to keep a man, even if he's cheating on her. Hopefully, a 14-year-old would not be able to relate.

Hip-hop songs that are played on the radio, even the most mainstream songs, deal with a bold sexuality that often mixes with power.

"Can I Get A..." by Jay-Z features a commanding woman talking about how "my coochie remains in a Gucci name" ("coochie" is muted on the radio) and how "ambition makes me so horny."

OK, put on the grainy glasses and hair net, and repeat along with me in a quaking, indignant voice: "What kind of message are we sending to our young girls?"

I'd like to borrow from Davey D, a hip-hop journalist and DJ at KMEL of San Francisco, who recently wrote a long, insightful article about violence toward women in hip-hop.

Davey D was talking about something a little different — the treatment of women at hip-hop shows in the Bay area, about how some have complained about getting grabbed and asked to dance and then punched if they said no.

Davey D suggested men might be threatened by all the sexuality in hip-hop. Because

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