

## New Study Shows Effect of Warning Labels on Records

*Despite Predictions--Teens are Less Likely to Buy Records With Warning Labels*

"Parental Advisory: Explicit Lyrics." That's the warning record companies voluntarily stick on their most blatantly offensive records, tapes and CDs.

"Ask any 10 people how that label affects kids," challenges Peter Christenson, associate professor of communications at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Ore. "They'll say, 'It's obvious. Kids are in the business of rejecting their parental tentacles. Warning stickers will make them want the records more.'"

That's what Christenson calls the "forbidden fruit theory," and it's the common lay theory Christenson heard repeated over and over again.

But it's wrong. At least that's what Christenson found in his most recent research.

"We found a small but significant effect--the presence of a label made kids like the music less--not more. I saw absolutely no evidence that stickers act as a parental rebellion mechanism to make adolescents want the music more," said Christenson.

Christenson has spent years studying popular music and adolescence and the relationship between music and the peer culture and has written numerous papers on those topics. He recently completed his paper on "The Effects of Parental Advisory Labels on Adolescent Music Preferences," the only paper that exists on how labeling actually affects adolescents.

"We know the intent of the people who pushed for labeling was to decrease the extent to which kids are exposed to it," said Christenson. "But

if they think parents are going to do much about this whole thing, they're dead wrong. We know that parents are not going to intrude upon the privacy of their kids' bedrooms, go through every record and listen to the lyrics. Parents consider music to be outside the realm of things they can control.

"If labeling is to affect anyone, it's going to affect kids--their purchasing of and listening to records. It's going to affect them directly--not through their parents," he said.

Christenson's study involved 145 middle school students, grades 6 through 8, ages 11 to 15. The sample was predominantly white, from lower-middle to upper-middle income families.

Subjects were randomly assigned one of two conditions: a label condition, in which the album cover of the music they were asked to judge was shown to them with a parental advisory label affixed to the album cover; and a control condition, in which they heard and judged the same music without a label.

The study used two different target albums: a hard rock (bordering on heavy metal) album by a regional band and a nationally released by unfamiliar pop/urban contemporary dance album.

Each subject heard and responded to four short samples of songs. Lewis & Clark students, ages 18 to 21, conducted the experiment.

"The results confirmed my prediction," said Christenson. "This conflicts with what everyone has said from day one. The evidence is that the fruit is tainted and not made more attractive through labeling," he said.

Christenson's 1989 study on "I Sort of Want My MTV: Children's Use of Music Television," gave him additional insight.

"When you really get down to talking with early teenagers, they are not terribly comfortable with sexual imagery," said Christenson. "When I asked them what they disliked about MTV, for instance, many kids, aged 12 to 15, said they disliked the sex in it.

Christenson pointed out that very few records get labels.

"Kids, by now, know that the ones that get labels are quite extreme in their sexual content and offensiveness. If you would compare it to film ratings, a label would compare to an X rating, not an R. Teenagers want something a little bit racy, they are attracted to movies with a PG or an R rating. But they are famous for rejecting extremes. They want to be in the mainstream. They want to fit in," he said.

"I put all of this together and predicted that what labels really mean for kids is that the record is way out of bounds. I predicted that if the presence of a label does anything, it will make kids like the album less--not more. And that's what the research shows."

Christenson's next step is to study the effect of labeling on two populations: adolescents who do well in school and adolescents who are alienated from the school culture. He and Donald Roberts of Stanford University studied the effects of popular music on both of those groups in a paper he completed last year for the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development: "Popular Music in Early Adolescence."

## Don't Believe The Hype

*Taken from the Peoples' Preacher By Rev. Al Sharpton*

In the recent debate on the nomination to the Supreme Court by President Bush of Clarence Thomas, the usual litmus test hysteria has been introduced again into national politics. Mr. Thomas will not be judged on his judicial record, or lack thereof, but he will be judged on his statements that he admired Louis Farrakhan. This particular part of the debate is most troubling, since no politicians, or public officials, or jurists, other than Blacks, are subjected to such a ridiculous and demeaning form of a litmus test. As one who clearly opposes the Thomas nomination, I am just as unequivocally opposed to a litmus test being introduced here in the name of Louis Farrakhan.

First of all, Mr. Farrakhan is a religious leader of great respect in Black America, and around the world. Mr. Farrakhan has been maligned, distorted and in many ways castigated by the white media for his uncompromising and courageous stands on behalf of Black people and people of color around the world. Because he has done the unheard of by questioning Jewish authority in certain fields of American life, he has been labeled anti-Semitic, which is the way for those who sin and are members of the Jewish faith to try to purge themselves of examination by clouding the issue with a non-issue, when the issue is whether they have acted in an unsavory and unprincipled manner politically and/or economically, and not be discriminated against because of their faith or their heritage.

No white religious or political figure, no matter how extreme their views are perceived to be, has been a litmus test for white politicians or white officials. Ronald Reagan was endorsed by the Ku Klux Klan, and announced his election campaign in Philadelphia, Mississippi. Philadelphia, Mississippi's only claim to fame, is the place where Goodman, Chaney and Schwerner were killed during the civil rights movement. Yet no one asked him to repudiate Philadelphia, Mississippi, where he strangely chose to announce his candidacy, nor to repudiate the KKK's endorsement. Nor has anyone asked the National Republican Chairman to repudiate David Duke, or George Bush to repudiate David Duke's support. And these people are clearly practicing, violent racists, whereas Louis Farrakhan clearly is not.

I think that it is again the double standard and triple play of the white media to try and reinforce this "bogey man" image on the Farrakhans of this world, and to make those in the Black community who want to rise to positions of power feel that in order to do that, they must make sure they distance themselves from those that dare to cry for freedom. The subtlety here is that if you want to advance, you've got to have nothing to do with liberation of liberation fighters. For that precedent to be established and unquestioned is dangerous to Black America, dangerous to white America, and dangerous to the freedom and liberty of all people.

Mr. Thomas *should* admire Farrakhan because Farrakhan represents a self-empowered, self economic, and

self-sufficiency program unequalled by any national Black leader today. It is nothing that Thomas ought to apologize for; it is probably the only positive thing I've heard about him since his nomination. But the issue is not even Thomas, the issue is the white media and white power structures continual branding of certain forceful, aggressive, uncompromising leaders as unacceptable, or as some anathema that must be shunned by those who seek power and positions and postures of influence in this society. This must be unilaterally rejected and not accepted by all conscious, thinking Americans.

I'd much rather see us operate across the board or not at all. When the people are not maligned for identifying with fascists like Jerry Falwell or admitted racists like Daved Duke, then how can they in any way try to use as a litmus test a man who has taken junkies and alcoholics and transformed them into responsible family men and citizens? It would seem to me that if there are some who ought to be shunned based on their demagoguery, their racism, and their ill effects on society, we ought to re-evaluate all those who ran around and enjoyed the endorsement of the Moral Majority from some TV evangelists, half of which are now finishing their second year in federal prison for defrauding the public and ripping off old ladies.

But if they will not be questioned for being aligned with some gospel thieves and some religious rip-off artists, then certainly we cannot bear this litmus test using a man who has operated above the worship houses of ill repute.

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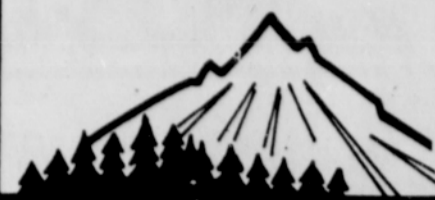
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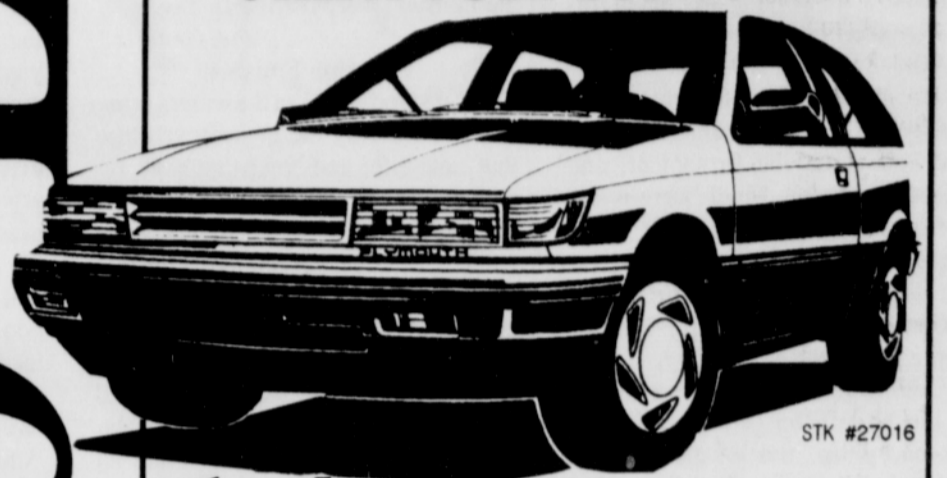


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