

Censoring the Filthy Fifteen: An Examination of Music Genres

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Abstract:

This research project contributes an important component to the field of censorship and freedom of speech in contemporary music by comparing songs of the Filthy Fifteen to top pop songs of the 1980's. It analyzes the potential legitimacy for concerns about obscene lyrics brought by the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) to the 1985 Record Labeling U.S. Senate Hearing. The Filthy Fifteen was used as justification for establishment of the music rating system, which has had lasting impacts on American music culture to this day. Findings show that there were more violent references in songs of the Filthy Fifteen, however, popular music songs contained more sexual references.

Keywords: Censorship, music lyrics, freedom of speech, Filthy Fifteen, Parents Music Resource Center, parental advisory label, music genres.

Introduction

Music and controversy are topics that have been intertwined throughout history due to artists' expressions in instruments and vocals. But the 20th Century gave rise to increased criticism for what came to be termed as "popular music." Mass media disseminated the new music genres of each generation faster and more widely spread than ever before in history.

Bill Haley and The Comets caused riots with their song "Rock Around the Clock" in the 1950's. Radio stations tried to censor offensive lyrics with a rating system in the 1970's. Throughout the 1980's there was concern about the impact that contemporary music had on society such as the potential of Metallica, Ozzy Osbourne and ACDC inciting suicide. (Martin & Segrave et al., 1988, p.291). The public thought that the emerging styles had songs with lyrics that dealt too much with taboo subject matter to a point of excess.

Literature Review

The case of the "Filthy Fifteen" began when founders Tipper Gore, Susan Baker, Pam Hower and Sally Nevius created the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) over concern for explicit lyrics. The group was especially concerned about the potential for rock music to incite suicide among teenagers (McCormick, 1993).

The PMRC thought the issue of offensive lyrics was important enough to take to the U.S. Senate with a goal of inventing a rating system to notify parents about the content on their children's tapes and records (Martin & Segrave, 1988). The rating system would include X for sexual content, V for Violence, D/A for drug/alcohol abuse and O for references to the occult (McCormick, 1993). They sent a letter to the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) requesting support for the rating system (Newsweek, 2017). "The PMRC was also pushing for record stores to print the song lyrics on the album covers or put them behind counters" (Krochmanly, 2017, p. 18).

The Parents Music Resource Center listed 15 songs that they thought were harmful to youth, and subsequently those songs were rated to present their vision of how to save a corrupted America (McCormick, 1993). The PMRC wanted to prevent adolescent violence (Hawkins, 1997, p.243). The PMRC wanted all speech in the artistic realm to meet the standards of speech appropriate to the social and political realm (Long & Nadellhalf, 1997). Tipper Gore explained that she was not censoring free speech, but giving a guide to parents on what certain products contain (McCormick, 1993, p.17).

Corporate influences

Another motivation for these hearings was that the PMRC tried to make music a corporate model instead of an art form motivated by self-expression (Long, & Nadelhaft, 1997, p.152). The collaboration of concerned Democrats and Republicans helped both political parties see each other's point of view when it came to increasing guidelines for entertainment purposes. Liberals were looking at how to engage in business tactics used by conservatives. On the other side, conservatives were looking at the ways of how liberals viewed freedom of speech and how certain speech can have negative consequences.

In the business realm, RIAA was in an awkward situation involving the ties they had with politics. "The Recording Industry Association of America was forced with the dilemma of agreeing with the PMRC because if they didn't, they wouldn't get the bill passed for taxing blank audio tapes" (Fontenot & Harriss, 1987, p. 556). This bill would help bring in revenue for the RIAA. The RIAA figured they had to be on good terms with congress or they would not be able to compensate the recording industry for copyright infringement.

Morals and Values

The PMRC wanted all music products suitable for young children instead of having different levels of artistic value. The PMRC felt that if children's minds get corrupted, then so would the future generations of America.

PMRC member Tipper Gore felt that heavy metal music sold barbarism to kids. She felt that music, like advertising, was accompanied with certain visuals like t-shirts and concerts. The PMRC believed that musical lyrics had the same influential effects that television commercials had on youth (Long & Nadellhalf, 1997).

The rock and roll community did not become informed until Variety magazine was one of the first companies to publicly announce its concern for what the PMRC was doing (Martin & Segrave, 1988). The PMRC's growing popularity affected record sales because eventually record stores were starting to veto potentially offensive albums (Martin & Segrave, 1988).

Musicians were worried and wanted to act against this rating system proposal because they thought that their records would not sell if they had a warning for parents. Musicians felt that their albums would be moved to an area in the record store where they cannot be seen (Newsweek, 2017; McCormick, 1993).

The Trial

Congress held a hearing on offensive lyrics in rock music September 19, 1985 with a subcommittee derived from the Committee of Commerce, Science, and Transportation (Fischer, 2009). Dee Snider, Frank Zappa and John Denver testified against the rating system (Martin and Segrave, 1988). According to Fontenot & Harriss, “It quickly became the largest media event in congressional history up to that point, all major networks, 50 photographers and dozens of reporters filled the room” (1987, p. 576).

Musicians testified that music can be a positive outlet for teenagers. The musicians also discussed their concern for the censorship of ideas (Martin and Segrave, 1988). The musicians explained how art and entertainment should not only be directed toward a children’s audience, but other demographics as well (Long & Nadelfaf, 1997). Snider argued that “parents should take the time to listen to their children’s records if they are truly concerned” (Record Labeling, 1985, p.79). Snider also stated that the song titles and artwork album should already tell a listener everything about the album.

The PMRC attacked the song, “Under the Blade” by Twisted Sister. The PMRC misinterpreted the lyrics and thought that the song was about “Sadomasochism and bondage” (Record Labeling, 1985, p. 73-75). Dee Snider made those corrections and explained how everybody interprets lyrics differently.

Practically, it seemed impossible to analyze all the songs that came out every week opposed to other media that already had rating systems (Record Labeling, 1985). It also seemed difficult to print the lyrics on the sleeve because of the way the albums were designed (Record Labeling, 1985). Finally, it would be difficult to discern what was considered offensive to whom and what demographics to cater to (Record Labeling, 1985). Still, Congress ruled in favor of the “Parental Advisory” sticker being placed on albums instead of a full rating system. The sticker would be placed at the discretion of the recording studio.

Aftermath

The PMRC hearings affected the radio industry because they had to monitor every song that was played over the airwaves. The record labels also had to monitor the visual representation of the songs on television (Record Labeling, 1985). Certain stores refused to sell those albums with the parental advisory label on them. Today the Parental Advisory sticker is the lasting effect of the case of the Filthy Fifteen.

Media Effects

It has been said that the media can change somebody’s values. In a recent research project, Ferguson (2016) found influences from reggae music on the social values of college students from other countries. The survey first asked people from different countries if they were even familiar with the genre of reggae music. They took those countries and created a ranking system measuring how important certain values were

compared with Jamaica's cultural values (Ferguson, 2016).

The study found that, through socialization, values could be passed on to other people through music (Ferguson, 2016). The project also looked at how Poland and Britain influenced each other's cultural values, finding that there was a substantial amount of evidence that supports how music from another culture can highly influence someone's values (Ferguson, 2016).

Effects on youth

The current study builds upon previous censorship research on potential media effects in how children consume music (Gentile, 2003). Researchers have found that indeed children might have a deranged view about society and become more paranoid.

In 1990, the band Judas Priest were involved in a civil action lawsuit that alleged they were responsible for the 1985 suicide attempts of 20-year-old James Vance and 18-year-old Ray Belknap. The band won the case, but they had to supply evidence that their music wasn't harmful to people (Soocher, 1999). According to Martin, Clarke, & Pearce (1993), fans of heavy metal do have a rough relationship with authority figures (Gentile, 2003). Hansen and Hansen (1991), found that boys listening to the music also exhibited more overtly masculine behavior.

However, a study done on the aftermath of the PMRC hearings actually stated, "that parents didn't use the system for parental guidance" (Winfield et al, 1999 p.196). Parents claimed to check for guidance, but children reported that their parents do not (Gentile, 2003). As shown in another later study, this system did not help protect children because they ended up using the internet to obtain music without parental guidance (Winfield et al, 1999). Thus, the result of these parental advisories are mixed at best.

Taboo Lyrics

Some members of the public believe the heavy metal genre itself causes people to get upset due to specific lyrics. During the hearings, pastor Jeff Ling stated that "Most of the successful heavy metal music projects one or more of the following basic themes: a. extreme rebellion b. extreme violence c. substance abuse d. sexual promiscuity/perversion (including homosexuality, bisexuality, sado-masochism, necrophilia, Satanism) (Record Labeling, 1985p. 123).

Music research shows that people can make assumptions about certain types of genres based on what type of people it is associated with, and its history. The researchers think that because of the prejudice, people might consume the music differently (Susino & Schubert, 2019). The study looked for certain keywords in songs and measured them with heavy metal, rap, and pop songs with inoffensive lyrics (Susino & Schubert, 2019). The researchers found that the specific lyrics did not affect the person listening to the music, but subjects jumped to assumptions because of prior knowledge of the stigmatized culture attached to the music, as explained in the theory of perceived influence (Susino & Schubert, 2019).

The researchers found that the same assumptions would not be made for the pop genres causing positive emotions, and that is why heavy metal is a very stereotyped genre. It was an effect from cultural misinterpretation. Additionally, being pre-exposed to the words beforehand could have altered the study because of triggering

emotions (Susino & Schubert, 2019).

The PMRC had similar concerns about explicit lyrics, particularly those of the heavy metal genre. During the PMRC Hearings the PMRC mentioned, “The Parents Music Resource Center was organized in May of this year by mothers of young children who are very concerned by the growing trend in music toward lyrics that are sexually explicit, excessively violent, or glorify the use of drugs and alcohol (Record Labeling, 1985 p.11).

The PMRC was very descriptive of the type of lyrical content that it was fighting against as well as comparing the content to previous generations. The PMRC may have pre-judged these songs and music genres in a similar fashion. The current study will discern through textual and content analysis whether or not there was a reasonable suspicion that the Filthy Fifteen required censorship due to the content.

Literature about music genres of the time period in the 1980’s combined with testimony from the PMRC hearings and historical documents support hypotheses made in the category of music genre. The mainstream media campaign conducted by the PMRC suggests that the list targets widely influential genres with concerns in specific taboo lyrics.

Based on the aforementioned literature review, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypotheses

H0,1: There will be no more references on average to violence in heavy metal songs than in the other genres of music in the Filthy Fifteen.

H1,1: There will be more references on average to violence in heavy metal songs than in the other genres of music in the Filthy Fifteen.

H0,2: There will be more no references on average to sex in pop songs than in other genres of music in the Filthy Fifteen.

H1,2: There will be more references on average to sex in pop songs than in other genres of music in the Filthy Fifteen.

H0,3: There will be more no references on average to violence, sex, drugs, profanity and the occult in Filthy Fifteen songs than in the highest Billboard Top 100 chart songs of the same years.

H1,3: There will be more references on average to violence, sex, drugs, profanity and the occult in Filthy Fifteen songs than in the highest Billboard Top 100 chart songs of the same years.

Methods

The present study will take the list of the fifteen songs that the Parents Music Resource Center constructed and measure the instances of categorical content in each. It will look at why these songs were considered offensive and measure how many times certain references were used using Microsoft Excel statistical comparisons. These references include offensive language (swear words), sexual content, violence, drug/alcohol abuse, and occult religious references.

The study will compare these numbers between music genres and to that of chart-topping pop songs of those same years. The use of popular music songs is to serve as a standard of the most common music of the time in which to compare the Filthy Fifteen.

The pop songs chosen will consist of the top highest songs in popularity in descending order during the same years as the songs of the Filthy Fifteen. The same number of songs that are present for each year on the Filthy Fifteen chart will be added from the Billboard Top 100 chart. Two coders will use these charts to make comparisons between the number of references for the five main categories of explicit lyrics: violence, sex, drugs, profanity, the occult.

Comparisons will also be made between genres of music in the Filthy Fifteen list itself. These genres consist of popular music, rock music and heavy metal. Billboard places songs into genre categories, which were used for this study.

This research project follows methods used by Susino & Shubert (2019) in their analysis of lyrics in the heavy metal music genre. Like that study, this project will conduct a textual analysis to find obscene lyrics; however, this work will compare songs to culturally accepted pop song hits from 1980 to 1985 (Susino & Schubert, 2019). It will provide a textual analysis of lyrics in the Filthy Fifteen songs coded via audio and textual recording, detailing mentions of obscene language, sexual content, violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and anti-religious references. It will also include a content analysis comparing the number of offensive lyrics in the Filthy Fifteen to the number of offensive lyrics in chart-topping pop songs.

The study will use Microsoft Excel statistical methods from Ferguson (2016) to see if the content of the Filthy Fifteen music lyrics have potential to change the internal values of youth during that time period, exploring whether this music could cause youth to defy authority and commit crimes as purported by the PMRC.

Coders will identify items in the lyrics according to the word that represents the variable listed in the Microsoft Excel codebook. If a group or phrase of words that individually do not have meaning that fits the item, but together creates meaning, that is counted as one reference for the variable. For example, words in the phrase “church of darkness” do not each reference the occult, but do so when together. Phrases that do not explicitly use a keyword, but reference a previous word in another way are also noted. For example, “stab him with a knife, stick it in” would count as two references for the item violence. Each individual word and/or phrase counts as a unit of analysis and are not mutually exclusive. The intercoder reliability level of agreement for violence is 92.5 percent. The level of agreement for sex was 90.3 percent. The level of agreement for profanity was 96.3 percent.

The item violence refers to violent words or expressions that involves physical use of force toward another human being or describes the point of view of a person perpetrating and or receiving a violent act. This item sex includes any activity or body part with sexual connotations, including innuendos and slang for the time period. For the item drugs, specific references to drugs, drug use, and slang that refers to the drugs themselves or paraphernalia are included. The item of profanity includes key words that would offend the reasonable person due to societal standards of the time or would be considered offensive in the presence of children, which is the standard set by the PMRC.

Results

Background information was collected about each song on the Filthy Fifteen list, as well as the most popular songs on the Billboard Top 100 list for each year in comparison. The information shows that the songs were released between 1980 - 1985.

They were mostly produced by companies in the United States; however, some came from overseas in England, Denmark, Australia and Canada.

Table 1 about here

No musical artist was listed more than once on the Filthy Fifteen list; however, several songs were released the same years in 1983, 1984 and 1985. No song was released in 1982 on the list. A majority of the songs in the Filthy Fifteen were not listed in the Billboard Top 100, except for two. Record labels for the songs varied widely with just two recurrences for Motown Records and Warner Records.

Table 2 about here

The study compiled a list of the popular songs ranked at the top of the Billboard 100 Chart for each year of a Filthy Fifteen song. The first song to create the list is the number one song atop the charts. If more than one Filthy Fifteen song was released in a year, the subsequent next lowest ranking song was listed.

Reflecting the Filthy Fifteen list there was no song included for the year 1982. Similarly, the years 1983, 1984 and 1985 produced the most songs for comparison. One artist, Michael Jackson appeared three times on the list.

A majority of the Filthy Fifteen songs were not on the Billboard Hot 100 for the entire year, except for “Sugar Walls” by Sheena Easton and #63 In my House by Mary Jane Girls. The results show that the songs were only from the genres of popular music, heavy metal, and rock and roll.

Table 3 about here

The band’s lyrics have rebellious anti-social phrases such as “we’ll fight the power that be just, don’t pick our destiny cause” and “you don’t know us, you don’t belong.” Heavy metal also discusses dark or violent subject matter. A typical example is the song Possessed by Venom released in 1985 by Neat Records with phrases such as “we suck the blood of the beast.”

Rock and roll music is more appealing to the mainstream audience than heavy metal, discussing topics that revolve around having a good time and partying. An exemplary song is “High N Dry” by Def Leppard, released in 1981 by Vertigo Records. Their lyrics discuss social topics such as sex and drugs with phrases like “I’ve got my whiskey, I’ve got my wine,” and “I’ve got a date, a midnight ride, I had to give it away.”

The PMRC was concerned about controversial subject matter in the song lyrics. As suspected, findings show a high amount of lyrical content with a violent nature.

Table 4 about here

The first hypothesis posited that there would be more violence in the heavy metal songs than the pop songs, which was confirmed. On average there was more violence in heavy metal songs than in the other genres of music in the Filthy Fifteen. There are 55 references to violence in all genres, however, the violent lyrics were only found within

heavy metal music. This would mean that in heavy metal music there is an average of 3.7 violent references per song leaving the heavy metal with 100 percent of the references to violence and 0 percent for the other two genres. Closer analysis reveals that only a few especially violent songs skewed the results higher. Specifically, “Bastard” by Motley Crue which contained 15 violent references and “We're Not Gonna Take It” by Twisted Sister which had 31 references. Otherwise, the numbers were much lower on average with only two heavy metal songs having three violent references and three songs with just one violent reference.

The strength of violent lyrics varies among songs. “Bastard” by Motley Crue the 15 references are overt acts of killing. These references include “in goes the knife, pull out his life” which leave little to the imagination. Milder forms of violence in Twisted Sister “We're Not Gonna Take It” include lyrics such as “we’ll fight the powers that be.” Here, the violence embodies more of a spirit of rebellion. Whatever the degree, findings show overall that there is more violence in heavy metal songs than the other genres of the Filthy Fifteen, supporting the hypothesis.

The PMRC was also concerned about sexual content in music lyrics. Findings show that the Filthy Fifteen pop songs did have more references to sex than the rock and roll or heavy metal genre songs.

Table 5 about here

The second hypothesis posited that there would be more sexual references in the pop songs than in the heavy metal and rock and roll genre songs. It was confirmed with 424 sexual references in all songs including all genres of music in the Filthy Fifteen. There were 272 sexual references in popular music songs, and 103 sexual references in heavy metal songs and 47 sexual references in rock and roll songs. The average number of sexual references for popular music titles was 45.3. These numbers were much higher than the average for heavy metal at 14.7 sexual references, as well as for the 23.5 sexual references in rock and roll songs. In terms of percentages, pop songs had 64 percent of the sexual references, while 25 percent were in the heavy metal songs, leaving 11 percent for the rock and roll songs.

Most of the pop references came from Madonna and Cyndi Lauper because of the repetition of certain keywords. The word “bop” in Cyndi Lauper’s She Bop is repeated multiple times where the lyric “fuck like a beast” from the song Fuck Like a Beast by heavy metal band Wasp is only repeated three times. “Eat me alive” from the song “Eat Me Alive” by heavy metal band Judas Priest was repeated a significant amount of time, but not as much as the lyric “bop.” The rock songs only had 47 references to sex. Closer analysis reveals that most of those references were from the song “Let Me Put My Love into You” by AC/DC.

The PMRC thought that the music on the Filthy Fifteen list deviated from the norm in terms of lyrical content. There was speculation that new values were being introduced to youth at the time through explicit content in song lyrics that might cause problems in society. The findings show that the Filthy Fifteen contained more explicit references than the Billboard Hot 100 songs of the 1980’s.

Table 6 about here

The third hypothesis posited that there would be more explicit references to violence, sex, drugs and profanity in the Filthy Fifteen than in the Billboard Top 100 songs of the same years, which was confirmed. There were 55 references to violence in the Filthy Fifteen and 24 on the Billboard charts. There were 422 references to sex on the Filthy Fifteen and 253 on the other list. There were 33 references to profanity on the Filthy Fifteen and 0 on the other list. There were 48 references to drugs on the Filthy Fifteen and only one on the Billboard Top 100 list. There were 33 references to the occult and 0 on the Billboard list. Countries other than America had references to the occult and drugs, while a majority of American music did not.

All around the Filthy Fifteen songs ended up being 10 percent of violent references 70 percent of sexual references, 8 percent of drug references, 6 percent of profanity references and 6 percent of occult references.

The totaled numbers for violent references on the Filthy Fifteen list make an average of 4.47 and 1.6 for the total numbers on the Billboard songs of the eighties. The total numbers for profanity in the Filthy Fifteen make 2.2 for the average and 0 for the top Billboard songs. For the average of sex for the Filthy fifteen there is an average of 28.13 references and for the Billboard songs there is 16.87 on average. For the number of drugs referenced on the Filthy Fifteen list, the average is 3.2 references per song and for the Billboard songs, the average is just 0.2 per song. For occult references there is an average of 2.2 mentions on the Filthy Fifteen list, and zero for the average mentions on the Billboard list.

Overall, the prediction was correct when it came to explicit references as well. “Bastard” by Motley Crue and “We’re Not Gonna Take It” by Twisted Sister had the most violent references and these songs can be compared to the Billboard Hot 100 song “Beat It” by Michael Jackson, which had quite a bit of violent references such as “they’ll kick you, and they’ll beat you.” Motley Crue had 15 violent references in their song “Bastard,” which had phrases such as “got his neck in the noose.” By comparing the two chart’s sexual references, on the Filthy Fifteen such as songs like “Fuck Like a Beast” by Wasp with phrases like “Pelvic Thrust as my sweat starts to sting you” can compare to some lyrics on the Top 100 Billboard charts. One of the phrases from a song on the Billboard Hot 100 was “like a virgin, touched for the very first time” by Madonna which had 32 references to sex compared to Wasp, which had 54 references.

When it came to drug references, The Billboard Top 100 songs could hardly compare to the Filthy Fifteen. On the Filthy Fifteen “Trashed” by Black Sabbath had 20 references to drugs with phrases such as “The bottle took a beating.” This song can be compared to a Billboard Top 100 song “Down Under” by Men at Work which had just five references to drugs with phrases like “On a hippie trail, head full of zombie.”

In the profanity category there was a large difference when comparing the song “Bastard” by Motley Crue with 27 references to profanity and phrases such as “not gonna fuck with me” to the Billboard Top 100. There were no artists with profane references on the Billboard Top 100 charts.

The final category of analysis was the occult. Filthy Fifteen songs like “Into the Coven” by Mercyful Fate had 16 references to the occult thought phrases like “howl like

a wolf, and a witch will open the door.” The Billboard Top 100 songs, however, had zero references to the occult.

Discussion

This study is a close-up snapshot in time of this important legal music censorship case. This event shows how freedom of speech can be challenged in the wake of changing times and a developing culture. Often when a new type of media, such as the rock and roll or heavy metal genres, is introduced there is initial hesitancy and fear among the public, which can lead to censorship. This study looks at potential circumstances for media content that could lead to censorship such as in music lyrics. It questions whether the resulting censorship by the U.S. Senate was justified in its assessment of the Filthy Fifteen.

This study had its limitations, and one important factor was that this list was a very specific case when it came to what was considered offensive at the time and to whom it was considered offensive. There was not enough data that would measure enough references to show statistical comparisons between what is considered explicit and what is considered acceptable to mainstream society. The credibility of the studies relies heavily on commercial music lyrics and audio versions of the song. The study did not include music videos or other versions of the songs.

The results of coding the Filthy Fifteen provide a clear representation of those songs, however, the results cannot be extrapolated to represent all music during that time period or certain genres. While the study contains high internal validity in the measurement of provocative lyrics, it lacks external validity being representative of the music of the time.

The PMRC picked songs for its list of Filthy Fifteen that were outliers and did not represent actual mainstream music that would have broader influences on society. The songs chosen were along the edges of music genres and pushed the boundaries of accepted lyrics for even the newer emerging and edgier genres such as heavy metal.

The PMRC put borderline heavy metal songs on the list to ramp up its case for censorship and focus on certain values more than others, such as the use of language and societal norms as opposed to the ones that were displayed in the milder pop songs such as sexual references. The heavy metal songs had violence, sex, drugs, profanity, and the occult as opposed to the pop songs, which had borderline romantic sexual lyrics and no other categories. According to Long & Nadellhalf, “the PMRC wanted to control the culture and be a mother to the certain groups they looked down upon” (1997, p.153). The values in the heavy metal songs overtly went against the conservative values during the Reagan era.

The study looked at the comparison between content in the heavy metal and pop genres in terms of violent and sexual content. Findings would prove true that in fact pop music does not have as many offensive songs compared to rock and metal. Then the two genres were compared in terms of sexual content, which actually found more sexual content in the Billboard Top 100 songs than in the Filthy Fifteen. The PMRC must have prejudged the heavy metal genre in terms of content when referring to “porn rock” as the main concern. The PMRC complained about a lot of sexual content in heavy metal, but mainstream music contained much more references.

The study also compared the pop and heavy metal songs in terms of violent

content. The pop songs did not come close to the amount of violent references in heavy metal songs, but they discussed some of the same subjects. The reason why there are such high numbers in the heavy metal category is that the line “We're Not Gonna Take It” by Twisted Sister was repeated 24 times, as noted in the Senate hearing. There was also a larger number of heavy metal songs overall, which is why the small number of references from certain categories still accumulated in songs like that of violent references from Venom and sexual references from Motley Crue.

This study about censoring the Filthy Fifteen analyzes a special moment in history during the “Age of Excess” when boundaries were pushed (Traeger, 2014) and consumerism values ruled. The rock music industry then became the poster child for corruption in America in the late 20th Century and heavy metal pushed the envelope even further. This research project provides an important piece to the puzzle for explaining the story of continued censorship in America, despite the claim for freedom of speech under the First Amendment.

In the future, there should be more research on the topic of the PMRC hearings and the Filthy Fifteen songs. It would be important to look at visual communication and to have a study on some of the music videos that were mentioned in the hearing because music videos were on the rise at the time. It could be advantageous to compare the heavy metal music videos to the pop music videos to see if there was some type of musical bias by the PMRC. Researchers might also examine the visuals and album covers presented with the Filthy Fifteen to look at all the factors that would have struck a chord with the PMRC.

The eighties were a very conservative time during the Reagan administration and certain subject matter might have been considered more taboo opposed to other generations. The political climate can dictate whether certain media is considered suitable for children or not (Traeger, 2014). Certain values are portrayed depending on who is in office and that constructs a big part of our culture.

Ultimately the core of the censorship debate lies at the very heart of the American legal system. Whether at the federal, state, or local level, communities have power in determining the boundaries of what they deem acceptable speech (Traeger, 2014). Throughout history parties bent on restraining new creative, provocative, or controversial communication have made the case for censorship. The Filthy Fifteen is just one historic example of the ongoing battle for freedom of speech. Even in a free democratic society with values of individuality and entrepreneurship, America still finds itself grappling with the limitations of convention.

Conflict of Interest:

The authors reported no conflict of interest.

Data Availability:

All of the data are included in the content of the paper.

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Appendix

Table 1. Filthy Fifteen

Song Title	Music Artist	Year	Billboard Top 100 Rank	Record Label	Country
Let Me Put My Love Into You	ACDC	1980	No	Albert, Atlantic	Australia
High n Dry	Def Leppard	1981	No	Vertigo, Mercury	England
Bastards	Motley Crue	1983	No	Elektra Sire, Warner	USA
Dress You Up	Madonna	1983	No	Bros	USA
Trashed	Black Sabbath	1983	No	Vertigo	England
She Bop	Cindi Lauper	1983	No	Epic	USA
Into the Coven	Mercyful Fate	1983	No	Roadrunner	Denmark
Were Not Gonna Take It	Twisted Sister	1984	No	Atlantic	USA
Fuck Like a Beast	W.A.S.P.	1984	No	Capitol	USA
Darling Nikki	Prince	1984	No	Warner Records	USA
Sugar Walls	Sheana Easton	1984	#100	EMI	Scotland
Eat Me Alive	Judas Priest	1984	No	Columbia	England
Strap on Robby Baby	Vanity	1984	No	Motown	Canada
Possesed	Venom	1985	No	Neat	England
In My House	Mary Jane Girls	1985	# 63	Gordy, Motown	USA

Note: The percentage (%) represents the frequency compared to the total N units of analysis.

Table 2. Billboard Top 100 Songs

Song Title	Music Artist	Year	Billboard Top 100 Rank	Record Label	Country
Call Me	Blondie	1980	No	Albert, Atlantic Mercury,	Australia
Betty Davis Eyes	Kim Carnes	1981	No	Vertigo	England
Every Breathe You Take	The Police	1983	No	Elektra	USA
Billie Jean	Michael Jackson	1983	No	Sire, Warner Bros	USA
Flash dance	Irene Cara	1983	No	Vertigo	England
Down Under	Men at Work	1983	No	Epic	USA
Beat It	Michael Jackson	1983	No	Roadrunner	Denmark
When the Doves Cry	Prince	1984	No	Atlantic	USA
Whats Love Got to Do with It	Tina Turner	1984	No	Capitol	USA
Say Say Say	McCartney	1984	No	Warner Records	USA
Footloose	Kenny Loggins	1984	#100	EMI	Scotland
Against All Odds	Phil Collins	1984	No	Columbia	England
Jump	Van Halen	1984	No	Motown	Canada
Careless Whisper	George Michael	1985	No	Neat	England
Like A virgin	Madonna	1985	# 63	Gordy, Motown	USA

Table 3. Artist and Genre

Song Title	Music Artist	Year	Popular Music	Heavy Metal	Rock and Roll
Let Me Put My Love Into You	AC/DC	1980	0	0	1
High N Dry	Def Leppard	1981	0	0	1
Bastard	MotleyCrue	1983	0	1	0
Dress You Up	Madonna	1983	1	0	0
Trashed	Black Sabbath	1983	0	1	0
She Bop	Cindy Lauper	1983	1	0	0
Into the Coven	Mercyful Fate	1983	0	1	0

We're Not Gonna Take It	Twisted Sister	1984	0	1	0
Fuck Like A Beast	Wasp	1984	0	1	0
Darling Nikki	Prince	1984	1	0	0
Sugar Walls	Sheana Easton	1984	1	0	0
Eat Me Alive	Judas Priest	1984	0	1	0
Strap On Robby Baby	Vanity		1	0	0
Possessed	Venom	1984	0	1	0
In My House	Mary Jane Girls	1985	1	0	0
			1985		
N			6	7	2
			(40)	(47)	(13)

Table.4 Violence and genre

Song Title	Music Artist	Year	Violence in Popular Music	Violence in Heavy Rock and Metal Roll
Let Me Put My Love Into You	AC/DC	1980	0	0
High N Dry	Def Leppard	1981	0	0
Bastard	Motley Crue	1983	0	15
Dress You Up	Madonna	1983	0	0
Trashed	Black Sabbath	1983	0	0
She Bop	Cindy Lauper	1983	0	0
Into the Coven	Mercyful Fate	1983	0	1
We're Not Gonna Take It	Twisted Sister	1984	0	0
Fuck Like A Beast	Wasp	1984	0	54
Darling Nikki	Prince	1984	0	0
Sugar Walls	Sheana Easton	1984	0	0
Eat Me Alive	Judas Priest	1984	1	44
Strap On Robby Baby	Vanity	1984	0	0
Possessed	Venom	1985	3	0
In My House	MaryJane Girls	1985	0	1
				0
				0
N			4 (3)	115 (97)
				0 (0)

Note: The percentage (%) represents the frequency compared to the total N units of analysis.

Table 5. Sex and Genre

Song Title	Artist	Year	Sex in Popular Music	Sex in Heavy Metal	Sex in Rock and Roll
Let me Put My Love into You	ACDC		0	0	43
High N Dry	Def Leppard	1980	0	0	4
Bastard	Motley Crue	1981	0	3	0
Dress You Up	Madonna	1983	75	0	0
Trashed	Black Sabbath	1983	0	0	0
She Bop	Cindy Lauper	1983	82	0	0
Into the Coven	Mercyful Fate	1983	0	1	0
We're Not Gonna Take It	Twisted Sister	1984	0	0	0
Fuck Like A Beast	Wasp	1984	0	54	0
Darling Nikki	Prince	1984	28	0	0
Sugar Walls	Sheana Easton	1984	32	0	0
Eat Me Alive	Judas Priest	1984	0	44	0
Strap On Robby	Vanity	1984	37	0	0
Baby Possessed	Venom	1984	0	1	0
In My House	Mary Jane Girl	1985	18	0	0
N			272 (64)	103 (25)	47 (11)

Note: The percentage (%) represents the frequency compared to the total N units of analysis.

Table 6. Chart Comparison

Song Title	Artist	Violence	Sex	Drugs	Profanity	Occult
Filthy Fifteen Songs						
Let Me Put My Love into You	ACDC	0	0	0	0	0
High N Dry	Def Leppard	0	4	28	0	0
Bastard	Motley Crue	15	3	0	27	0
Dress You Up	Madonna	0	57	0	0	0
Trashed	Black Sabbath	3	0	20	3	0
She Bop	Cindy Lauper	0	82	0	0	0
Into the Coven	Merciful Fate	1	1	0	0	16
We're Not Gonna Take It	Twisted Sister	31	0	0	0	0
Fuck Like A Beast	Wasp	1	54	0	3	0
Darling Nikki	Prince	0	28	0	0	0

Sugar Walls	Sheana Easton	0	32	0	0	0
Eat Me Alive	Judas Priest	1	44	0	0	0
Strap on Robby Baby	Vanity	0	37	0	0	0
Possessed	Venom	3	1	0	0	17
In My House	Mary Jane Girls	18	0	0	0	0
Billboard Top 100 Songs						

Call Me	Blondie	0	127	1	0	0
Bett Davis Eyes	Kim Carnes	0	15	0	0	0
Every Breathe You Take	The Police	0	0	0	0	0
Billie Jean	Michael Jackson	0	24	0	0	0
Flash Dance	Irene Cara	0	0	0	.0	0
Down Under	Men at Work	0	0	5	0	0
Beat It	Michael Jackson	24	0	0	0	0
When the Doves Cry	Prince	0	8	0	0	0
What's Love Got to Do with It	Tina Turner	0	32	0	0	0
Say Say Say	Paul McCartney and	0	0	0	0	0
Michael Jackson						
Footloose	Kenny Loggins	0	0	0	0	0

Against All Odds	Phil Collins	0	.0	0	0	0
Jump	Van Halen	0	0	0	0	0
Careless Whisper	George Michael	0	18	0	0	0
Like a Virgin	Madonna	0	0	0	0	0

Total Filthy Fifteen		55 (9)	422	48 (9)	33 (6)	0 (0)
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N (76)

Total Billboard Top 100		253 (98)	0	6 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)
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N (0)

Note: The percentage (%) represents the frequency compared to the total N units of analysis.