

**Dr Wayne Warburton – Summary of presentation to *Growing Up Fast and Furious* 19 March 2010**

**I know that what I eat matters, but how can listening to Eminem do me any harm?**

I will begin by summarising what the research says about (1) exposure to violent music, (2) Violent music videos, and (3) violent lyrics specifically. In essence my points are (1) there is less data on music effects than other media effects (2) a few studies find no effect of violent music exposure on aggressive behaviour, but (3) there are enough well designed and more recent studies that consistently find an effect to suggest an effect exists.

There is some debate as to whether this effect is due to the effect of violent lyrics, or to the violent tone of the music stirring people up.

I will then describe two studies comparing violent visual media with violent music. The first shows (1) that violent tone and violent lyrics both have an effect on aggression, (2) that the size of the effect of violent music exposure on aggression is similar to the size of the effect of violent visual media on aggression, and (3) that exposure to violent visual media tends to be linked with violent physical aggression but that violent music exposure was more linked to forms of indirect aggression such as sabotaging other people's relationships or hurting them in a way that doesn't allow retaliation.

In the second experiment on violent music video effects, we manipulated (1) whether the participants saw the lyrics or not and (2) whether participants heard the lyrics or not. A fifth group heard no music. Then aggression was measured. The two groups who heard the lyrics were much more aggressive than the other groups, even though two other groups heard the same music with a violent tone. Thus suggests that violent lyric exposure leads to increased aggression in the short term over and above the effect of the musical tone, and regardless of whether people see the video or not.

Together these studies underline the importance of song lyrics in terms of effects on aggressive behaviour.

I conclude by speculating on internal mechanisms. In essence, I will argue that the brain rewires constantly through the lifespan (with a lot of wiring from 0-25), and that what we experience has a clear effect. Exposure to a lot of aggression-related material increases the amount of brain space dedicated to aggression-related concepts, and creates stronger links between those concepts. This rewiring predisposes the person to be more aggressive than they may have been without those experiences.