

## Offensive Lyric Sing-Along

Nate is riding in a car with some of his friends when a popular song comes on the radio. A fan of the song and its artist, Nate knows all of the words and feels the urge to belt them out. Soon after he begins to sing, however, Nate remembers that the song has some sexist lines and could plausibly be construed as endorsing an objectionable attitude toward women.

Now he doesn't know how to proceed. Nate sees himself as a nice person, sensitive to the cares of others. If his singing the lyrics could hurt someone, then maybe it would be best for him not to sing the possibly offensive lines. Additionally, Nate wonders if perhaps his singing the song amounts to a kind of approval of the sentiments the song reflects, even if none of his friends would be offended.

On the other hand, Nate knows that *he* doesn't endorse the sexism expressed in the song, and thinks it unlikely that any real harm could come from his singing it out loud. Plus, he reasons, it's the artist, and not him, who wrote the objectionable lyrics. He questions whether it really reflects badly on him to sing these catchy lines when they are already being blasted on the radio. Moreover, Nate feels slightly uncomfortable with having to censor himself. After all, alone, he would sing the song.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

- (1) Is it morally permissible for Nate to sing the song?
- (2) Does the presence of women in the car affect the moral status of Nate's singing? Why or why not?
- (3) What sorts of harms might singing along cause?
- (4) When is self-censorship morally appropriate? When not?

