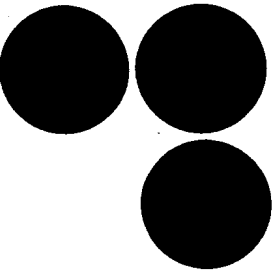
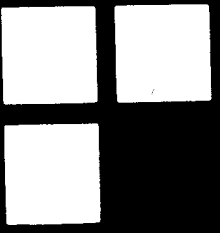


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ADOLESCENTS AND HEAVY METAL MUSIC

From the Mouths of Metalheads

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University of Chicago

Heavy metal music, once only a fringe branch of rock music, grew enormously in popularity in the 1980s. By the end of the decade, groups such as Guns-N-Roses and Metallica were selling millions of records and performing to sell-out audiences in large arenas all over the country. Other groups, such as Megadeth, Anthrax, and Slayer, developed an avid following of "metalheads" (as heavy metal fans call themselves; a.k.a. "headbangers") who could be counted on to buy tens of thousands of any record they released. Characterized by a highly distorted guitar sound, pounding rhythms, and lyrics more screamed than sung, heavy metal songs were generally avoided by mainstream radio stations seeking a wide audience. However, through occasional radio airplay, through exposure on MTV, and—most of all—through word of mouth among fans of heavy metal, the popularity of these groups skyrocketed. In 1989, the group Guns-N-Roses reported a 2-year income of over \$20 million (Associated Press, 1989).

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This rise in renown was not received universally as good news. To the contrary, as heavy metal music increased the size of its adolescent audience, criticism of it increased proportionately. Most prominently, the Parents' Music Resource Center (PMRC) asserted that certain heavy metal songs contribute substantially to problems among adolescents, including sexual promiscuity, drugs, Satan worship, and suicide (Martin & Segrave, 1988). Other rock music songs were also criticized, but heavy metal songs were especially targeted. Congressional hearings were conducted (*Record Labeling*, 1985), in which members of the PMRC and of Congress expressed their alarm at the lyrical content of the songs, and members of the music industry scoffed that critics of the music were overpuritanical at best, neofascist censors at worst. Commentators and pundits weighed in with their appraisals (Editors, 1988; Wills, 1989).

What has been conspicuously missing from the debate so far is any word from the adolescents themselves about why they listen to the music, how it affects them, and what they are like in their personalities and attitudes. In fact, partly because it has only recently become widely popular, studies pertaining to heavy metal music at all are rare. Wass et al. (1988) studied middle school and high school students and compared those who preferred songs with lyrical themes of homicide, suicide, and satanism (usually heavy metal songs) to students who preferred other types of rock music. Using open-ended and unstructured questions, it was determined that students who like music with these themes listened to music for more hours per week, were more likely to pay attention to the lyrics of their favorite songs, and were less likely to agree that songs with destructive or self-destructive themes would lead to corresponding behavior. But this study focused on only a small subset of heavy metal songs and themes and a limited range of questions. King (1988) examined adolescents in a hospital psychiatric unit and found that 59% of those hospitalized for substance abuse named heavy metal music as their favorite type of music, compared to 17% of adolescents hospitalized for other types of psychiatric disorders. But this sample cannot be taken as representative of adolescents generally.

The study reported here was intended to explore the attitudes and characteristics of adolescents who like heavy metal music. Because so little research has been conducted on the topic, the interviews were wide-ranging and the questions asked were based partly on the public debate over whether or not heavy metal music is a destructive influence on adolescents who listen to it.

The following research questions were addressed:

1. What do male adolescents like about heavy metal music? In particular, what reasons do they give for liking their favorite groups and songs?
2. To what extent are boys who like heavy metal devoted to the music? In particular, do they own more recordings, go to more concerts, and spend more money on music than boys who prefer other types of music?
3. What kind of effect does the music have on boys who listen to it? In particular, do they listen to it especially when they are in a certain mood, and does it tend to influence their mood in any characteristic way?
4. Does their enthusiasm for heavy metal music influence their sense of who they are and what kind of person they would like to be? In particular, is their enthusiasm for the music related to their expectations for the future or to their reports of whom they admire?
5. What are the attitudes of boys who like heavy metal music toward their parents, friends, school, politics, and religion? In particular, does their involvement in heavy metal music color these associations in any way?

METHOD

SUBJECTS AND PROCEDURE

Adolescents who liked heavy metal music were recruited through a music store in suburban Atlanta, Georgia. A sign was posted in the store asking for participants in a study of people who like heavy metal music and offering a free cassette tape of their choice in return for their participation. Applicants for the study were

TABLE 1
Age Distribution of Sample

Age	Like Heavy Metal (N = 52)	Do Not Like Heavy Metal (N = 123)
14	5	2
15	7	26
16	10	24
17	9	36
18	9	13
19	7	11
20	5	11

$X = 16.9$, $SD = 1.6$ $X = 17.0$, $SD = 1.8$

largely (75%) White male adolescents. The area from which the subjects were recruited was predominantly middle to upper-middle class, and the occupations they reported for their parents also reflected this socioeconomic class. All subjects in the results reported here were male adolescents aged 14 to 20 (an interview study of girls who like heavy metal music is in progress). Table 1 shows the distribution of ages. All subjects were interviewed individually by the author. There were 28 open-ended questions in the structured interview, which ranged from 20 min to 2 hours in duration depending on how much the subject wished to say.

The interviews were structured according to the research questions described above. Subjects were also given a series of self-report measures (reported in Arnett, in press a). A comparison group of male adolescents was obtained (Table 1), some from a nearby high school and some from the university where the interviews took place. They filled out the same self-report measures as the adolescents who had been interviewed and also a questionnaire pertaining to musical tastes and several of the other topics that had been covered in the interviews with boys who liked heavy metal music. Corresponding questions on this questionnaire were phrased as they had been in the interview and were also open-ended, except the question concerning religion, for which there was a structured

response on the questionnaire. Those who indicated on the questionnaire that they liked heavy metal music best (Metallica, Megadeth, Anthrax, and Ozzy Ozbourne were given as examples of heavy metal performers) were combined with the interview participants for questions comparing subjects who liked heavy metal music to subjects who did not. Some questions in the interview pertained mainly to subjects' involvement in heavy metal music and were not asked of the comparison group. For these questions, all results concern only the subjects who were interviewed. In total, there were 179 subjects, including 52 who liked heavy metal music and 123 who did not. Of the 52 subjects who liked heavy metal music, 35 were interviewed and 17 were obtained in the process of gathering data for the comparison group.

RESULTS

NUMBER AND TYPE OF RECORDINGS OWNED

Boys who liked heavy metal music reported owning anywhere from 10 to 400 musical recordings, with a mean of 107. As many as this might seem, it was not significantly different from the comparison group (Table 2). Those who liked heavy metal music owned mainly heavy metal recordings—on average, 69% of the recordings they owned were by heavy metal bands—but most also expressed a liking for other types of music, from classical and jazz to reggae and country.

HEAVY METAL BANDS LIKED BEST AND REASONS FOR LIKING THEM

When asked to name some heavy metal performers they especially liked, they most often named Metallica (22 of 35 interviewed), although most named several groups. Second most popular among them was Iron Maiden (named by 9 of 35). Many other bands were cited as bands they liked, for example Slayer, Guns-N-Roses, Anthrax, Megadeth, Ozzy Ozbourne, and Rigor Mortis, and by one subject, a so-called Christian heavy band named Stryper.

TABLE 2
Consumption of Musical Entertainment and
Liking or Not Liking Heavy Metal Music

	Like Heavy Metal (N = 52)		Do Not Like Heavy Metal (N = 123)		F(1, 162) = 2.49, <i>ns</i>
	X	SD	X	SD	
Number of recordings owned	107.0	98.0	81.0	96.0	$F(1, 162) = 2.49, ns$
Number of concerts attend in past year	8.0	9.0	2.8	3.8	$F(1, 172) = 28.91, p < .001$
Money spent per month on purchases related to music	38.7	41.0	17.6	19.1	$F(1, 162) = 20.04, p < .001$

Asked why they liked particular bands, subjects most often cited the musical talent and skill of the performers, especially guitar players. Dokken's guitarist was said to be "unbelievably original"; the guitar player for Razor was described as "really amazing"; another boy said that "each member [of Metallica] is a virtuoso of his instrument." Also often cited as a reason for liking a band was the lyrical content of their songs, especially songs that exhibited social consciousness. One subject said he liked Dr. Know because their songs often concern ecology and the danger of destruction of the environment; Exodus was admired for their songs concerning child abuse and the threat of nuclear war; one subject liked Motley Crue because of "the things they stand for," in particular opposition to drug use. Some subjects liked bands because of the especially raw and intense quality of their music: Slayer has a "heavy sound . . . brutal lyrics," one subject commented approvingly; Metallica plays "the hardest metal there is"; Megadeth and Iron Maiden were liked for being "fast-paced."

The attraction of the social consciousness of the bands they liked was also evident in the songs they named when asked to provide examples of songs they especially liked. "Indians," by Anthrax, was said to be about the injustices done to the Native Americans when the American West was being settled; "Revelation Mother Earth," by Ozzy Ozbourne, was said to be about the destruction of the environment; "18 and Life," by Skid Row, was said to describe an

accidental death as a result of handling guns carelessly. The themes they described were relentlessly bleak, whether about the dismal state of the world or about personal emotional crises: "In My Darkest Hour" by Megadeth was said to be about a person whose girlfriend has just "dumped him," as one subject put it; "Trapped Under Ice" by Metallica was seen as a metaphor for emotional distress; the song named most often as a favorite, "Fade to Black" by Metallica, was said to describe a person at such a nadir of depression that he is contemplating suicide. There were some exceptions to this rule, in songs that were liked because of the stories they tell: Iron Maiden, especially, was liked for the stories in their songs, sometimes taken from famous works or myths. One entire album told in song the story in Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner"; after listening to it, said one subject, he went and read the original poem. Some subjects did not even know what the songs were about that they especially liked; they simply liked the music. And in fact, when asked in a separate question which they paid attention to most, the lyrics or the music, most said either the music (48%) or the combination of music and lyrics (41%); only 11% of subjects interviewed put lyrics first.

MOOD BEFORE AND AFTER LISTENING

Subjects were asked, "Do you listen to heavy metal music more when you are in a particular mood?" Most often, they said they listened to it especially when they were angry (15 of 35, or 43%). Many others (23%) said they listened to it "always," meaning every chance they get. The particular heavy metal songs they would listen to on a given occasion was gauged to their mood, for some of them: One said that he listened to the "harder" heavy metal when he was "ticked off"; another said he liked "full-blown thrashing metal" when he was "mad at the world"; when he was angry, said one, he "plays it very loud," although he also listened to it at other times. Only 3 said they listened to it especially when they were in a positive mood ("happy," "partyng," and "out with the guys").

As noted above, the songs they listened to were characteristically bleak and despairing. If many of them listened to these songs

especially when they were angry or otherwise in a negative mood, what kind of effect did this have on their mood? Paradoxically, it had a purgative effect, relieving their anger and making them feel better. Of the 15 who said they listened to it especially when they were angry, 10 said it had the effect of relaxing them and dissipating their anger (in response to the question "Does it put you in any particular mood?"). "It's a vicarious release of aggression," said one, and he said he needed it as a release: "Otherwise I'd lose control." "It calms me down," said several of them; "it helps me get things out," said another, explaining that he was referring to the stress accumulated from school, disagreements with parents, and so on. One described it as "like taking a tranquilizer." Some even said they listened to particular songs or groups precisely for their usefulness in purging negative emotion: One reported that he listened to the group Testament "to relieve anger," as if he were describing his use of a prescription drug; another described the song "Trapped Under Ice" as being "good for frustrated depression"; another said that listening to the song "In My Darkest Hour" made him and his friends feel better about "girls stomping on our egos." Three said that when they listened to it in a depressed or angry mood, their energy and negative emotion would increase while listening to it, but afterwards they would be relaxed and the negative mood would be alleviated. Four others, who did not say they listened to it especially when in a negative mood, nevertheless said that it had the effect of relaxing them and relieving stress or anxiety. In total, then, the music served a purgative function for 54% of subjects interviewed.

Next most common, as a response to the music, was a heightened level of energy (cited by 7 subjects): "It gets me going"; "it gets me revved up"; "it makes me hyper [if I listen to it when I'm with friends]." Four said it induced a definitely positive mood: "more cheerful" or "happy." Two said it induced greater aggression, rather than less: one of these said that it would put him and his friends in an especially good mood, during which they would "go vandalizing," for example knocking down mailboxes with bricks as they passed them in a car; the other said that listening to "hard-core"

heavy metal made him "want to go and beat the crap out of someone"—and that sometimes he would.

The use of heavy metal music as a purgative for anger and frustration was also evident in what they said about attending heavy metal concerts. Nearly all of them (88%) had attended at least one heavy metal concert in the past year, a far higher rate of concert attendance than the comparison group (Table 2), and for most of them (24 of 35 interviewed), going to a concert meant occasionally moshing or slamdancing. These terms refer to getting into a circle and running into other "dancers" haphazardly, bouncing off each other's bodies into other bodies or onto the floor: "It looks like one huge brawl," as one subject described it. Most spoke of it as a release of aggression, barely contained and channeled into a social ritual: "It's violent fun," said one; "any aggressions you have, you let them out," said another; and one subject said half seriously, "I don't feel fulfilled if I don't come away with a scratch or a bloody nose." One subject even reported stage diving, that is, eluding the security guards long enough to run on stage with the performers and then plunging head first into the densely packed crowd in front of the stage. On one occasion when the crowd moved apart at an unfortunate moment, he landed 10 ft below on the hard concrete and was lucky to come away with only badly swollen knees for a few days. But he clearly considered this a scar of battle, well earned.

HEAVY METAL DREAMS

The concerts are expensive (typically about \$20.00), and many subjects reported spending money on expensive T-shirts (also about \$20.00) and programs (\$10.00-\$15.00) at the concerts, in addition to their regular expenditures on recordings. On average they reported spending \$38.70 a month on music-related purchases, which was far more than the average amount spent by the comparison group (Table 2). Most of this money came from their own labor: 55% of those interviewed worked part- or full-time, and an additional 22% had worked the previous summer.

The prices paid for their music-related purchases might seem exorbitant to others, but the adolescents who liked heavy metal

TABLE 3
Cross-Tabulation of Playing a Musical
Instrument by Liking or Not Liking Heavy Metal Music

	Like Heavy Metal (N = 44)		Do Not Like Heavy Metal (N = 123)	
	yes	no	yes	no
Play an instrument	35 (80%)	9 (21%)	42 (34%)	81 (66%)
	chi-square = 25.08, $p < .001$.			
If play an instrument, what type?				
Guitar	24 (69%)		22 (18%)	
Other rock instrument (drums, bass guitar, keyboards)	10 (31%)		11 (9%)	
Non-rock-music instrument	0		9 (7%)	

NOTE: *N* for those who like heavy metal music is smaller for this question because it was added after some interviews had already been conducted. Percentages do not add to exactly 100% in some cases because of rounding.

music clearly considered it to be money well spent. Their identification with the music and the performers was remarkably strong; when attending concerts, many of them envisioned themselves on the stage, as a romantic dream or as a fervent ambition. Over half of them (55%) reported either that they currently played or had tried to play the guitar; of the remainder, 25% said that they played some other rock-music-related instrument such as drums, bass guitar, or keyboards. These percentages were far higher than in the comparison group, as Table 3 illustrates. Not surprisingly, most of the heavy metal listeners who played an instrument preferred to play heavy metal music (88%). Twelve of the 35 interviewed (34%) were currently or had been part of a heavy metal band, although only a few were successful enough or persistent enough to do it for money.

Their identification with the fantasy of being a heavy metal star was also evident from their responses to the question "What do you see yourself doing in 10 years?" Thirty-six percent said they expected to be doing something related to music (compared to only 6% in the comparison group)—in most cases, heavy metal music: "on stage, live, with a heavy metal band" as one put it simply.

Perhaps the most unique of these was a boy who said he would like to study opera and combine it with heavy metal music in a new genre, "horror-opera." Most had an alternative, in case their heavy metal dreams failed to materialize, but this also frequently involved music: If he did not end up touring as a member of a heavy metal band, said one, perhaps he would own a music store; if not being in a band, hoped another, then producing albums for heavy metal bands (he said he was planning to enroll in a school for music recording and production). Also, several of those who did not see themselves in a heavy metal band saw themselves doing something else related to heavy metal music: writing books and articles on heavy metal music and musicians, said one, who currently wrote on that topic for his high school newspaper (although he stated, "I'd be a musician in a heartbeat if I could," i.e., if he thought he had the talent). Those who did not plan to go into music had a wide variety of careers in mind, from marine biologist to CIA agent to electrical engineer.

Another indication of their identification with heavy metal music and bands was in their response to the question of whom they most admired. Asked to name three people, 61% of boys who liked heavy metal music named at least one musician, usually from a heavy metal band. One heavy metal guitarist "is my absolute hero," said one subject, quite in earnest; another described a certain guitarist as "my guitar god," only half in jest. It might be argued that they would be predisposed to name a musician because the question came toward the end of an interview on heavy metal music, but the interview had covered a broad range of other topics as well. Also, among the comparison group, only 13% named a musician when asked to list three people they admired, at the end of a questionnaire mainly concerning their musical tastes. Among the other responses of the subjects who liked heavy metal music, one or both parents were named most often (by 29%). The other responses were diverse, including Martin Luther King, Ronald Reagan, Einstein (by a subject planning to study physics), a best friend, and for several a favorite teacher.

PARENTS, FRIENDS, SCHOOL

Subjects were asked about their social relationships, including questions concerning their parents, friends, and their involvement in and attitudes toward school. Many of them said that their parents dislike the music: 20 of 35 subjects interviewed (57%) indicated a clear dislike of the music on the part of one or both parents. However, very few parents were said to forbid or even restrict their sons' access to it, although a number of subjects said that they were not allowed to play it as loud when their parents were present. This absence of restrictiveness was founded on a permissive or *laissez-faire* approach to child rearing, in many cases. "They trust my judgment," said one, in explaining why his parents allowed him to listen to it even though they abhorred it. "They've always gone along with what I wanted to do," another said of his parents, with evident satisfaction. One said he was aware that his mother did not approve: She "had a fit" when he brought home a copy of the latest Megadeth compact disk, but she "just voiced her opinion" and did not try to forbid or restrict him in listening to it. Perhaps some parents realized the futility of forbidding it: One subject told how his mother would take his tapes and destroy them, early into his involvement in heavy metal music, but he would simply buy others, and eventually she gave up. Other parents encouraged or assisted their sons' enthusiasm for heavy metal music. One boy, whose parents were divorced and whose father lived in California, said his father obtained tickets for him to see Slayer when he was in California for a visit and even arranged for him to go backstage after the show to meet the performers.

Although heavy metal music was rarely a source of contention between these boys and their parents, a number of subjects spoke of open or smoldering conflict in their relationships with their parents. It is worth noting that in the questionnaire results of this study (Arnett, in press a), boys who liked heavy metal music reported a lower level of satisfaction than other boys on the Family Relationships subscale of the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire (Offer, Ostrov, & Howard, 1982). In some cases the conflict described by the boys in the interviews was open. One said that his

father was "my exact opposite . . . we even disagree on beer," and his mother "views me as an investment." Another said that he fought often with his stepfather, and his father was an alcoholic whom he rarely sees: "It bothers me a lot that I haven't had a real father." Another said his parents were divorced and he did not get along well with either of them: "They love me, but we just don't get along." He lived with his mother, but the hostility between them was so high that they left notes for one another on essential topics to avoid speaking directly. In other cases, an absence of conflict was the result of the parents' having retreated from the field: One said he and his mother had fought a lot when she had rules; now that she had given up the rules, they no longer fought, although he said he "tries not to walk over her." Another said his mother realized when he was 13 that she could not control him, so she sent him to live with his father (the parents were divorced); his father did not care what he did, so they got along fine. It should be noted, however, that the divorce rate among parents of the subjects who liked heavy metal music was not significantly different from that of parents of the boys in the comparison group.

Those who described in positive terms their relationships with their parents sometimes cited their parents' tolerance/permissiveness as one reason for their good relations. One said his parents were "super-intelligent and mature" and so had never disapproved of anything he did. Several subjects said they viewed their parents as friends: "my best friends," said one; "good friends you can talk to," said another. One said he called his father by his first name and often called his mother "Shorty." Friends, of course, do not expect to discipline or be disciplined by one another.

Heavy metal music was experienced for many as part of an adolescent subculture in which they shared their enthusiasm for the music. Over half (59%) of those interviewed said that all or most of their friends liked heavy metal music. The music was described as a strong bond among friends who liked it: They spoke of listening to it with friends, going to concerts together, and sharing recordings of bands they liked. Asked how they first became interested in heavy metal music, "friends" was the most common response (14 of 35; older siblings had introduced 5; 6 became interested from

hearing heavy metal music on the radio; 3 from MTV). One said that he and his best friend had shared their aspirations, growing up, and heavy metal music. But this was by no means true of all subjects. Among those whose friends generally did not like heavy metal music, one said that in fact "everyone of my friends hates it"; another said that he has friends among the "metalheads, brains, and jocks," but those among the "jocks" are his best friends. Also, among those who reported that most or all of their friends liked heavy metal, only 7 did not have at least some friends who did not like it.

Even for those who mostly had friends who liked heavy metal music, being part of the heavy metal subculture did not usually mean that they were scorned by other peer subgroups or viewed as social outcasts. Fifty-eight percent of the boys interviewed said they were or had been involved in extracurricular activities in high school. They named a wide variety of activities, from Fellowship of Christian Athletes to Spanish Club to Future Business Leaders of America. However, a significant minority of those interviewed (11 or 31%) voiced strong hostility toward school. Four of these had dropped out of high school. In the statements of those who disliked school, a common theme was that they found the structure and regimentation of school difficult to take. One said he "didn't like being told what to do"; another objected, "Why should I be there when I could be out making money?"; another said that he "didn't like sitting down all day" and that he would "rather be doing something active, outdoors"; another described school as "pointless . . . I'd rather learn from real life . . . I had better things to do."

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Politically they were more likely to describe themselves as Republican than Democrat (48% to 14%), although the figures were similar for the comparison group (55% to 18%), reflecting the upper-middle-class socioeconomic status of the area from which the sample was recruited. Equal proportions described themselves as liberal (29%) and conservative (26%), although a plurality did not subscribe to either label (45%). Similar percentages of the

comparison group described themselves as liberal (19%), conservative (31%), and neither (50%). Among the heavy metal listeners this disinclination to identify themselves with a general political orientation may have been more a reflection of uncertainty or disdain for labels rather than political apathy. Although 4 were adamantly apolitical—"I don't know, and I don't care," said one, when asked how he would describe himself politically—most named at least one issue when asked if there were any issues that were especially important to them. Generally their positions on these issues are not best characterized as liberal or conservative, but rather as libertarian, in the sense of wishing to have as few restrictions or sanctions as possible on their behavior. Most often named as an issue of importance was opposition to attempts to restrict legal access to abortion, named by 10 of 35 subjects interviewed. Other libertarian positions included opposition to gun control, opposition to censorship, approval of legalizing marijuana, opposition to restrictions on pornography, and, not surprisingly, opposition to attempts by the PMRC to limit the availability of heavy metal music. One described himself as a "personal anarchist . . . You should be able to do whatever you want as long as it doesn't hurt someone else," and this was the creed to which many of the others implicitly subscribed. Altogether, 15 of the 35 interviewed (43%) mentioned an issue and a position that could be classified in this way as libertarian.

Religiously, fewer of those who liked heavy metal music described themselves as Christians (49% vs. 76% in the comparison group), whereas a higher percentage described themselves as agnostics or atheists (33% vs. 11%). Table 4 shows the distribution. One subject in each group was Jewish. Among the 9 others who liked heavy metal, 3 said they believed in God but not in organized religion; 2 said they subscribed to Judeo-Christian morality but did not believe in God; and one said he "believes in" himself; one said he favored the Eastern religious orientation; one was Unitarian; and one called himself a Satanist. Some of those who described themselves as Christians nevertheless expressed uncertainty or apathy with regard to their religious beliefs or practices. One said that he belonged to a church, but that he wondered often about the truth of

TABLE 4
Religious Orientation and Liking or Not Liking Heavy Metal Music

Religious Orientation	Like Heavy Metal (N = 52)	Do Not Like Heavy Metal (N = 123)
Christian	25 (49%)	94 (76%)
Jewish	1 (2%)	1 (1%)
Atheist	6 (12%)	1 (1%)
Agnostic	11 (22%)	12 (10%)
Other	9 (16%)	15 (12%)

it. One who said he was Catholic also said that he was "reading up" on other religions, such as Taoism. Another said that he considered himself a Christian but that he was curious about witchcraft and satanism; many of his friends said it makes more sense than Christianity. He declared that "I'm not going to give up my faith" in spite of their encouragement, but he also said that he would like to find out more about what they do and that he is "keeping an open mind."

Heavy metal music has been said to advocate Satan worship, so subjects were asked about this association. Most greeted the suggestion with derision, saying that they considered it a publicity stunt on the part of certain bands, not to be taken seriously: "It's a gimmick, to get the band signed or to make people aware it exists"; "it's just hype"; "bands do it just to sell records"; "I laugh at it . . . it's all fake." Even those who had said they like the band Slayer, which was especially known to them for its Satanic themes, did not take it seriously; "it's just a concept," said one, a theme, "like other bands singing about sex." They also argued that very few heavy metal bands were even guilty of using it to make their names known, although it has become associated with heavy metal music generally. One subject did describe himself as a Satanist and named as his favorite group King Diamond, an awowedly Satanist band. But he argued that although the performers in King Diamond were Satanist, as he was, neither for him nor them was it something evil, something intended to do harm to others. For him, he said, satanism constituted mainly necromancy, that is, trying to make contact with the dead.

DISCUSSION

It is evident from these interviews that heavy metal music plays an important part in the lives of boys who like it. It is not just a musical preference to them, but an intense avocation that shapes their view of the world, their spending habits, their moods, their friendships, their notions of who and what is admirable, and their hopes for what they might become.

The intensity of their enthusiasm for the music was evident from the number of recordings they owned ($X = 107$), the percentage of their recordings that were heavy metal ($X = 69\%$), the number of concerts they attended (an average of eight just in the past year), and the money they spent on music-related purchases (an average of over \$38.00 per month).

Their identification with the romantic image of the heavy metal music performer was strong. A remarkably high percentage of them (80%) played or had tried to play the guitar or some other rock-music instrument; over half of them named at least one musician among the three people they admired most; over one third saw themselves in a career performing or otherwise related to music when they forecasted what they would be doing 10 years from now. It is not difficult to understand the lure of this fantasy for male adolescents: riches, fame, and the adulation of millions. One could argue that the fantasy does not harm at a time when they are in the process of forming an identity, when their own abilities and inclinations and how these fit with the roles available to them in their society still are not evident to them. On the other hand, it might be objected that an allegiance to the nihilism of the songs and an identification with the antisocial images of the performers do not bode well for the formation of character in adolescent fans of heavy metal music. It may be of some consolation that the adolescents of the 1950s did not after all develop adult personalities resembling Elvis Presley and James Dean.

Heavy metal listeners reported being attracted to the music for a variety of reasons, but most of all for what they perceived as the skill and talent of the performers. This might come as a surprise to any adult who has heard the music, and to whom it may seem a

noxious blur of noise, but heavy metal performers were truly admired by these adolescents for their musical talents. Members of their parents' generation may find themselves distressed at the thought that their children admire the members of bands such as Megadeth and Slayer as great musicians, but it seems unlikely that they will still be listening to heavy metal music in adulthood, when the high intensity of sensation in the music is less likely to be experienced as pleasurable (Arnett, in press a). Meanwhile many of them have been inspired by the perceived expertise of the performers to learn to play a musical instrument themselves, usually electric guitar.

They also favored heavy metal music because of the themes expressed lyrically in the songs, in particular the dismal condition of the world as they saw it. The songs they said they liked best were often songs concerned with social issues such as environmental destruction and the nuclear arms race. One can hear an echo in this of concerns with social issues from the music of the 1960s, but with an important difference: The songs of the sixties often lamented the state of the world but promised a brighter future if we would mend our ways; heavy metal songs often lament the state of the world but do not provide even a hint of hope for the future. Hopelessness and cynicism pervade the songs. It is revealing that most heavy metal bands almost never play a song in a major key; the songs are nearly all in minor keys, the keys of melancholy.

In view of this, it is not difficult to see why many adults have expressed alarm at the heavy metal songs and why heavy metal music has been accused of leading to suicide in some widely publicized cases. In fact, subjects in this study most often named as their favorite song "Fade to Black" by Metallica, which describes a state of suicidal despair. This makes it even more remarkable that not even one subject reported that the music tended to make him feel sad or hopeless. Perhaps the most striking finding of the study was that for many of these adolescents, heavy metal music served a purgative function, dissipating their accumulated anger and frustration. They listened to it especially when they were angry, and it consistently had the effect of making them less angry, of calming them down. This result certainly does not lend itself to an argument

that heavy metal music is dangerous and should be banned; ironically, it would seem more appropriate to advocate subscribing heavy metal music for adolescents who show evidence of a propensity for aggression.

Although this finding might be considered surprising in light of the public reputation of the music, Lyle and Hoffman (1972) also found that adolescents often use music as a way of dealing with anger, and Kurdek (1987) found that adolescents cite "listening to music" as their most commonly used coping strategy when frustrated or anxious. The results presented here confirm these findings and indicate that the soothing effect of music on adolescents' negative emotions applies even, and perhaps especially, to heavy metal music. In a future study it would be intriguing to see if the salutary psychological effect of music applies more to some kinds of music than to others, and more for adolescents than for people of other ages. It might also be interesting to monitor the physiological functioning of adolescents as they listen to music — heavy metal and other types — and assess this purgative effect physiologically.

Subjects' enthusiasm for heavy metal music did not appear to be motivated by rebellion or defiance toward their parents. Although most of them said that their parents did not like the music, only in one case did a boy say that his parents made any effort to stop or restrict him from listening to it. Evidently the parents considered it a matter of their children's free choice and did not actively oppose it as long as it was not played too loud while they were present. Opponents of heavy metal music such as the PMRC have lobbied for "warning labels" on heavy metal recordings, to warn parents of the lyrical content of the songs. Apparently, however, most of these parents would not forbid their children to listen even to songs that the parents found deeply offensive. At least, this is the way the boys in this study reported it and apparently saw it; perhaps their parents would express more concern and objection if questioned directly. In any case, the parents are not the ones who buy the recordings. Their sons are quite self-sufficient financially; generally they are employed, and having few expenses, they make enough money to provide their own recordings, T-shirts, and concert tickets. This

reduces the opportunity of the parents to monitor and restrict their children's musical purchases even if they desired.

Socially, boys who liked heavy metal music generally reported having friends who also liked it, although nearly all of them also had at least some friends who did not. Their enthusiasm for heavy metal music included them as part of a particular adolescent subculture, but it did not generally exclude them from other adolescents. In fact, over half were involved in or had been involved in school activities of one kind or another. Politically, too, they were no different from their peers.

Concerning religion, they were generally less religious than their counterparts in the comparison group. This does not indicate a sympathy for satanism or other cults, as has been feared by some opponents of heavy metal music, but rather apathy with regard to religious practices generally. Still, although they were clearly less religious than boys in the comparison group, over half stated that they did have some religious affiliation.

THE IDEOLOGY OF ALIENATION

In sum, the role of heavy metal music in the lives of adolescents who like and listen to it is complex, reflecting their concern with the condition of the world and a certain pessimism with regard to the future, but also being used by them to assuage unpleasant and unruly emotions. For many of them, the music also mirrors the emotional volatility of youth, particularly the anger that accumulates in some adolescent boys as a result of the usual crises and conflicts of adolescence, concerning parents, girls, and school.

The music's popularity may also reflect the propensity among adolescents for testing the boundaries of what society defines as socially acceptable. The social movements of the 1960s extended the boundaries of society's tolerance for personal expression and unusual forms of behavior so far that heavy metal bands (and vicariously their followers) have had to be all the more extreme in their music and lyrics for anyone to notice that they had crossed the implicit boundaries of good taste. Songs about suicide, murder, radical despair, and the destruction of the world are the result.

Rather than being the cause of recklessness and despair among adolescents, heavy metal music is a reflection of these, and of a socialization environment that, from family to school to nation to religion, provides only the broadest and least directive socialization (Arnett, in press b). Adolescents growing up in our time are encouraged to decide right and wrong for themselves, to make their own choices with regard to an occupation, to take a religious faith or leave it. This was clearly true of many of the boys in this study; they described their parents as providing the least restrictive environment possible, leaving them to their own resources for better or worse. The extent to which their generation is influenced by family and community is less than perhaps any time in human history; other influences — peers, school, TV, music — also provide ideas and ideals, models and morals. Many adolescents flourish under these conditions of broad socialization, but there are also those who do not, who in the absence of guidance in how to live become disoriented and alienated.

The popularity of heavy metal music among adolescents is, among other things, a symptom of this alienation. But even though the lyrics are despairing and the music is angry, listening to it does not cause them to despair and in fact dissolves their anger. Ultimately there is something consoling in the bond they feel to others through the music, even if the bond is based on a shared alienation. Ironically, this relation between heavy metal music, adolescents, and society seems best described in words written by Durkheim nearly 100 years ago:

The more the family and community become foreign to the individual, so much the more does he become a mystery to himself, unable to escape the exasperating and agonizing question: to what purpose? . . . For individuals share too deeply in the life of society for it to be diseased without their suffering infection. . . . Thence are formed currents of depression and disillusionment emanating from no particular individual but expressing society's state of disintegration. . . . Then metaphysical and religious systems spring up which, by reducing these obscure sentiments to formulae, attempt to prove to men the senselessness of life and that it is self-deception to believe it has purpose. Then new moralities orig-

inate which, by elevating facts to ethics, commend suicide or at least tend in that direction by suggesting a minimal existence. On their appearance they seem to have been created out of whole cloth by their makers who are sometimes blamed for the pessimism of their doctrines. In reality they are an effect rather than a cause; they merely symbolize in abstract language and systematic form the physiological distress of the body social. As these currents are collective, they have, by virtue of their origin, an authority which they impose upon the individual and they drive him more vigorously on the way to which he is already inclined by the state of moral distress directly aroused in him by the disintegration of society. Thus, at the very moment that, with excessive zeal, he frees himself from the social environment, he still submits to its influence. However individualized a man may be, there is always something collective remaining — the very depression and melancholy resulting from this same exaggerated individualism. He effects communion through sadness when he no longer has anything else with which to achieve it. (Durkheim, 1897/1951, pp. 212, 214).

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