

---

## Media Column

---

### Rebellious Rhapsody

#### *Metal, Rap, Community, and Individuation*

Brad H. Reddick, M.D.

Eugene V. Beresin, M.D.

*Music can be a powerful force and tool in the life of an adolescent. It forms a social context and informs the adolescent about the adult world through the lens of artists' lives, language, and presence as models. Allegiance to a form of music is allegiance to those who make it, a way to friendship and kinship, and a road to personal identity through belonging. In their relationships formed through music, teens can create a sense of community that may be lacking in the life of family. The rebellious music of earlier generations has given rise to complex musical genres, rap and heavy metal, that are strong in defiance and controversial in their violent and sexual content. What do these musical affiliations tell us about certain segments of adolescent development and culture? The authors consider this question by exploring the form and content of the music while using it to illuminate psychodynamic and psychosocial aspects of adolescent development. (Acad Psychiatry 2002; 26:51-59)*

Nothing makes a community more than music.  
—Bobby McFerrin, *VH1 Behind the Music*

From very early in our lives, music is an important, ubiquitous form of human expression and experience. As infants we smile at the shakers, laugh at the bells and whistles, and coo at the sound of our parents' lullabies. As the infant transforms into an adolescent, this form of human expression takes on new meaning and fragments into a variety of genres that metaphorically clothe the modern teen's style and purpose. As the teen enters adolescence, much of the fact-finding and knowledge-building that involved television and books during the school-age period of development is replaced by the choices, morals, and loyalties of adolescence as teens ask the questions, Who am I? What do I stand for? and Where do I belong?

From the early moments of Elvis's hip thrust, Jerry Lee Lewis's fireballs, and Chuck Berry's chicken walk, and the later ages of psychedelia, acid-tests, Woodstock, and loathing and fear in Las Vegas, rock music has since differentiated into deeper, often more

intense genres such as rap and heavy metal that carry the same messages of rebellion, anti-establishment attitude, and individuation through nonconformity. In their relationships through music, teens can create the sense of community that has partially disintegrated as a result of technological advances that promote isolation (such as the Internet), fragmentation of family structure, homogenization and sprawl of the suburbs, and lack of community resources in the inner city. What are these particular musical communities of teens, what identifications and reflections exist within them, and more important, what do these musical affiliations tell us about certain segments of adolescent development and culture?

---

#### THE MUSIC: WORDS AND SOUND

---

Common to the heavy metal and rap genres is the idea of musical prowess. Technical proficiency and

---

Dr. Reddick is a Clinical Fellow at Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA. Address correspondence to Dr. Beresin, Massachusetts General Hospital, Bulfinch 449, Boston, MA 02114.

Copyright © 2002 Academic Psychiatry.

mastery of one's instrument are honored and encouraged. Live performers go to great lengths to demonstrate virtuosity in rhyme (rap) or screaming guitar solos (metal). Exaggeration of volume, bass, and rhythm, also common to both genres, maximize the sensory experience for the listener. This sensory experience is echoed in the graphic content of the lyrics of both rap and heavy metal artists. In one study attempting to quantify the percentage of antisocial themes in the music of college students, direct references were found to killing (50%), satanism (35.2%), and suicide (7.4%) (1). On average, those who listen to heavy metal and rap listen to music longer and register or even memorize the lyrics more often than nonlisteners. But while many argue the deleterious effects of an imposed message, adolescents most often co-create the listening experience by drawing their own meaning from what they hear. The growth and success of rap and heavy metal performers, most of them under age 25, begin with the audience that sustains them. Central to their co-creation is the adolescent's struggle for identity versus identity diffusion (2,3). The search to find a unique identity and to form an association with a group are in tenuous balance. Teens struggle to set themselves apart through an identification with the dramatized and overidealized aspects of the performer, yet maintain connection with their peers through the musical affiliation. The performers, most adolescents themselves, welcome the opportunity to play out the narcissistic fantasy of omnipotence and dominance with overstated volume, exaggerated lyrics, and exhibitionism.

Heavy metal grew out of the experimental music of the late 1960s and early 1970s, out of the ashes of the disillusioned and dissipating peace and protest movements. Groups such as Black Sabbath, Deep Purple, and Led Zeppelin borrowed from the blues and from the distortion of Jimi Hendrix to wield music dominated by loud guitar and heavy rhythms. The themes of this early heavy metal were dark, disappointed, and pessimistic, but kept the antiestablishment stance of late '60s rock. Over the subsequent three decades, heavy metal music has differentiated into many subgenres that differ in the character of the distorted sound, tempo, audience culture, and themes expressed in their lyrics. These include:

- Classic heavy metal
- Death metal

- Black metal
- Grindcore/hardcore
- Thrash (relative of punk)
- Speed metal
- Industrial metal
- Grunge

Themes within each subgenre range in their level of nihilism. The more mainstream popular heavy metal such as Def Leppard, Ratt, Whitesnake, Motley Crue, and Van Halen are similar in their sprayed "big hair" look and gaudy, somewhat flamboyant clothing emphasizing spandex and leather. Themes tend to focus on overconsumption, "partying till you puke," and promoting anonymous sex and drug experimentation. Thrash or speed metal performers, on the other hand, avoid hairspray and tend to wear jeans and plain clothes. These bands, such as Motorhead and Iron Maiden in the '70s and '80s, and later Slayer, quickened the tempo and refined the distortion in the guitar to create a more menacing and chaotic sound that created the background for lyrics focusing on the occult, Satan, and pagan ritual. Death metal completes the spectrum in its unique emphasis on manifestations of death such as rotten flesh, infection, dismemberment, and disease. Thrash and death metal groups such as Metallica, Iron Maiden, Megadeth, Slayer, and Nuclear Assault are similar in their adherence to turning inward and isolating or alienating the self from a world rife with corruption and destined for destruction.

He's walking like a dead man. If he had lived he would have crucified us all. Now he's standing on the last step. He thought oblivion, well, it beckons us all. Children of the Damned. Now it burns his hand, he's turning to laugh. Smiles as the flame sears his flesh, melting his face, screaming in pain, peeling the skin from his eyes. Watch him die according to plan. He's dust on the ground, what did we learn?

—Iron Maiden, "Children of the Damned"

The view dominating lyrics of these groups predicts the destruction of the world, total annihilation as a result of ever-increasing chaos and evil. Interestingly, seeing government and power as corrupt is a theme that has remained constant in the development of metal. Visual themes as seen in concert backdrops and album covers are consistent with these ideas and generally include images of skulls, violent alien crea-

tures, and studded leather. The themes expressed in the lyrics are best demonstrated by the names of the bands that make the music:

- *Speed/Thrash and Hardcore*: Abomination, Ancient Rites, Atheist, Atrocity, Autopsy, Cartilage, Dead Horse, Death, Deathstrike, Deceased, Deeds of Flesh, Deteriorate, Dismember, Fleshcrawl, Gorguts, Grotesque, Guted, Hate Eternal, Hypocrisy, Intestine, Luciferion, Metallica, Massacre, Megadeath, Molested, Morbid Angel, Mortem, Necromass, Nuclear Death, Obituary, Oppressor, Pestilence, Poison, Possessed, Pyrexia, Rigor Mortis, Sadistic Intent, Sepultra, Sinister, Slayer, Suicidal Tendencies, Suffocation, Torture, Unleashed.
- *Death Metal and Black Metal*: Abruptum, The Abyss, Angelcorpse, Behemoth, Black Goat, Black Witchery, Blasphemy, Blood, Dark Funeral, Dark Throne, Dark Tranquility, Demonic, Dissection, Enslaved, Graveland, Grotesque, Hades, Hellhammer, Impaled Nazarene, Katatonia, Merciless, Mutilation, Necromantia, Pentagram, Pervertum, Resuscitator, Rotting Christ, Septic Flesh, Sodom, Swordmaster, Usurper.

The bystander trying to understand the meaning of such nihilism and emphasis on the macabre may easily be shocked and miss the underlying message. Why the fascination with the grotesque? We can only make generalizations. The majority of metal listeners belong to the Caucasian middle class, the largest socioeconomic group in American culture. Certainly many adolescents prefer not to listen to heavy metal and instead find interest in music by Dave Mathews, Sting, Madonna, and many others. Similarly, not all adolescents who listen to heavy metal are angry and demoralized. However, there are associations among heavy metal music preference, dysfunctional families, parental divorce, and psychopathology.

One hypothesis is that the particular quality of the music and its themes may be self-selected by adolescents who need to express rage against a society that has left them selfless and without a vehicle for defining themselves. It seems, in our rapid-paced society, there is no longer a psychosocial moratorium on advancement to full adulthood for adolescents. Perhaps the rebellious rage that finds a place in extreme metal music is a rage against a society that does

not give them room to find themselves. Without a clear target to rage against, the violence implicit in heavy metal music is without social meaning and often anonymous (satanism, animal torture, suicide). Unlike rap listeners, whose music is composed largely by minorities with a common historical oppressor and focus for their rage, heavy metal listeners may use the rancid and the grotesque as metaphors for what is rotten in society. In a world without consistent support and validation by parents, or in the presence of cognitive or emotional disability, existential angst finds outlet in heavy metal and may allow the formation of a negative identity when it seems a positive one is unattainable—as if to say, if I am no one, at least the rancid, alienated, and nihilistic is something.

Social history saw a similar “drop out, tune out” quality of adolescent middle-class culture in the late 1960s along with (for the time) bizarre hair growth, dress, and escalating substance abuse. Yet the ‘60s adolescents were moved to “turn on” and “get ready” for the “peace train” while espousing anti-war (Vietnam) and anti-oppression (Civil Rights) ideals. Absent the focused broader message of rap and the late-‘60s youth culture, more and more adolescents may find themselves rebels without a cause. Certainly the rebels of the late ‘60s were perceived by adults as disrespectful in many ways other than merely ideology. Colorful painted vehicles, lack of hair grooming, and disregard for the religious and authoritarian notion of keeping behavior within socially acceptable bounds were all “freak flags” of the hippie generation. These same “freak flags” served as personal markers that enabled hippies to recognize one another in an instant. The common bond shared among a generation was strengthened by the fashion and habits of the ‘60s counterculture (the same generation that would give rise to the pioneers of heavy metal).

This largely suburban middle-class adolescent generation has transformed in recent decades as it has become increasingly harder to get the attention of overworked, overcommitted adults. As American culture becomes more tolerant of social and racial differences and, through media, more and more accepting of bizarre sexual and violent behavior, the threshold for shock increases. Without the fight for a common ideal as a focus for their rage, some adolescents may find a vehicle for their anger in the social shock value of grotesque and satanic themes while

using piercing, the macabre, and the occult as markers for securing recognition and a sense of belonging as a group.

Although hip-hop has become an ever-growing youth cultural phenomenon, the idea of rhyming spoken words over music dates back to the chants of Muhammad Ali and the "talking blues," in spoken portions of gospel, Bo Diddley, Jerry Reed, and others. The funk of James Brown and George Clinton (Parliament/Funkadelic) fused with the soul music of the 1970s to form the background music of poetic spoken word called rap. Groups primarily from inner-city New York and Brooklyn, such as Sugar Hill Gang and Grandmaster Flash, are credited with fashioning the first rap music singles. Throughout the 1990s rap, too, has matured into subgenres that differ greatly in their degree of lyrical sexual and violent content, such as "old school" rap, pop rap, gangsta rap, and rap metal. Hip-hop music is largely borrowed samples of musical phrases from almost any source played back on a phonograph used as an instrument, a technique picked up from the DJ's of reggae clubs in the 1980s. Often layered underneath the samples is a repetitive riff strong in booming bass and a simple rhythm structure that is slow and deliberate. Of most importance is the spoken word delivered in a monotonous tone that often overshadows the music.

Gangsta rap groups share an aggressive lyrical message and representation of inner-city life, although the music can resemble hip-hop or can incorporate live instruments and a backup band straying from the sampled phonograph. The slow, deliberate, booming bass of hip-hop and certain gangsta rap artists contrasts sharply with the distorted, loud guitar, syncopated rhythms of rap metal. This genre marries the spoken word of rap, often yelled or screamed, to the syncopation and broken chaotic sound of later heavy metal genres.

- *Rap*: Dr. Dre, Snoop Doggy Dog, Eminem (Slim Shady), Lil' Kim, Ice-T, Tupac Shakur, Public Enemy, N.W.A., Easy E, Ice Cube, Beastie Boys, 2 Live Crew, DMX, ODB, P. Diddy (Sean "Puffy" Combs).
- *Rap Metal*: Rage Against the Machine, Limp Bizkit, Body Count, Kid Rock, Korn.

Unlike the hopelessness and internal retreat espoused in heavy metal, rap music speaks to mobilizing anger to incite action and protest. Given its roots

in inner-city gang life, the most common mode of action is gang war, killing for pride, retribution, and to resist the oppressor (police and government). While heavy metal uses medieval fantasy and science fiction to tell its stories, rap themes are rooted in reality and stem from the experience of its musicians. As the spokesmen for inner-city culture stuck in poverty, poorly supported education, and drugs, rappers catalog street-life experience and memorialize the gangs, the people, and themselves. Implicit in these autobiographies are statements of power, prowess, and grandiosity that are in sharp contrast to the poverty and socioeconomic helplessness of the street.

Examples of narcissism among rap musicians' song or album titles include:

- DMX: "And then there was X."
- Tupac final album: *All Eyez on Me*.
- Puffy Combs: "Can't Nobody Hold Me Down."
- Eminem: "The Real Slim Shady."
- Kid Rock: "I Am the Bulldog."

As with the dominance and power of the heavy metal performer, rap listeners can identify with the power and narcissism of the flamboyant rap performer eager to let the world know he and his listeners have been oppressed too long. Where heavy metal listeners lack a common target to rage against, rap is tied closely to minority cultures, particularly African-American inner-city culture whose members share a history of civil disobedience, slave rebellion, and perseverance as a people in spite of focused adversity. This shared focal point may explain why the macabre and grotesque is forfeited in rap, replaced by clear targets of violence through guns and gangs. In contrast, without the identified focus or target existing in rap music themes, the rage intrinsic to heavy metal music manifests as images of ruthless nonspecific violence devoid of social meaning, such as satanic sacrifice, animal torture, and suicide.

Many rappers argue they are merely reporting the reality of inner city street life. Their opponents argue that the lyrics glorify gangs, gun violence, and the sex industry while perpetuating the sexual victimization of women. The lyrics of the white rapper Eminem (Marshal Bruce Mathers III) are the most controversial because his albums have won Grammys and have sold millions of copies. Violence toward women and homosexuals as well as sex with underage girls is a substantial part of his subject matter:

Hey, look at this bush, does it got hair? F—— this bitch right on the spot bare, till she passes out and she forgot how she got there.

—"Guilty Conscience," from *The Slim Shady LP*

Although the same depiction of women is found within heavy metal lyrics, it is often couched in satanic ritual imagery and medieval scenes. The common theme of misogyny in both rap and heavy metal is peculiar to these forms of popular music. The anger and violence described toward women are enacted in lyrical content and also in the lives of the performers, who are not uncommonly cited for alleged spousal abuse, adultery, and rape.

Why does such misogyny exist in this context? One possibility arises from the extreme narcissism of the performer, who is especially vulnerable to his dependence on females, especially with regard to the mother-child dyadic relationship. It is possible that rap and heavy metal performers cannot tolerate their longing for and need of women, whom they feel compelled to renounce. Illustrating this point is rapper Eminem's disowning of his mother, who led a legal battle against her son to curb the language in his lyrics and to sue him over derogatory statements he made against her in his lyrics (*MTV News*, June 27, 2001).

Although female heavy metal and rap performers exist, they are scarce in genres dominated by male performers. There are a surprisingly large number of female listeners who hear the misogynistic messages and continue to choose the music. It may be that these female listeners represent an especially vulnerable group to psychopathology and self-injury.

The music of both rap and heavy metal may be just as jolting to the senses as it is in lyrical content. One Rage Against the Machine fan writes: "Listening to a bombastic, politically charged Rage album is akin to having an icy bucket of water dumped over your unprepared body" (4). The adolescent "unprepared body" is assaulted by the powerful auditory experience that projects the image of the performer as dominating and omnipotent. The grandiosity and narcissism of the performer contribute to the listener's idealization of the music and identification with those who create it. The intense sensory experience of both forms of music could be especially attractive to adolescents with severe psychopathology, a history of self-injury, or a tendency toward dissociation. The

music as described by the listener above could serve as a kind of auditory self-injury to break a dissociative trance or punish the self for intolerable emotions or thoughts.

## THE PERFORMANCE

The visual presentation of a musical group can say as much as the words and sound. For both rap and heavy metal artists, the "show" is a chance to translate part of the meaning of words and music into visual demonstrations. Across the board, the music is loud and startling, but particularly in the depth of bass and reverberation the listener feels. The tendency is toward intense sensation—whether it be the physical quaking of one's ribs to the rumble of the bass, the ringing, piercing auditory experience of music played at high decibels, or the physical impact of slamming into another person. The repetitive drone of the music and screaming vocals promote the dissociative, chaotic experience espoused by heavy metal's lyrical content. Mainstream heavy metal is known for large performance venues and the pyrotechnics and laser light parade in each show. In keeping with the "party all the time" theme, many of these performances are accompanied by alcohol or marijuana use on stage during the performance.

With the move to thrash, punk, and speed metal, audience participation in the form of "slam dancing" is more common. This practice involves full-force collision of bodies stage-center in the "mosh pit." Mosh pits have been somewhat controversial in the media recently because of the participants' risk for physical injury and sporadic reported accounts of sexual assault in the frenzied moments of slamming impulsively during shows. The most widely publicized account involved the recent Woodstock concert, with about 13 reports of sexual assault and 4 reports of rape in the audience during the performances (5).

Heavy metal genres with heavy satanic lyrical content use demons, occult symbols, and alien creatures as the backdrop to album covers and performances. This setting provides a dark theater of the absurd in which some groups have pretended to engage in decapitation of animals, bloodletting, and animal sacrifice on stage. This practice dates back to the theatrics of many of heavy metal's founders, such as the leather, make-up, and blood pellets used by

Kiss and the bat decapitation by Ozzy Osbourne and Alice Cooper (now a semi-pro golfer).

The pyrotechnics are often even brighter offstage, where much of the lyrical content of the music is acted out in the performer's individual lives. Examples receiving much media attention have included the DWI charges for Vince Neil of Motley Crue in an incident that resulted in the death of a friend (*VH1 Behind the Music*). From the same band, drummer Tommy Lee has been closely watched in the legal case involving his alleged assault of wife Pamela Anderson Lee, with whom he has allegedly appeared in a widely distributed Internet pornographic movie. Within the more extreme groups of black metal, death metal, punk, and grunge, heroin addiction and death marry life experience and the music, as with Kurt Cobain of Nirvana, whose heroin addiction and depression resulted in his suicide in 1994. Similarly, the punk legend Sid Vicious murdered his girlfriend while intoxicated and then committed suicide.

Rap artists, particularly gangsta rap artists, bring to life somewhat different lyrical content. Performances on stage and in video demonstrate gang war or scenes of uprising against police or authority. The costume is often either baggy clothes with a baseball cap or a more elaborate and flamboyant set of overgarments and sunglasses recalling an inner-city pimp stereotype, unlike the bondage-style, medieval, or gothic dress of many heavy metal bands. Although avoiding animal parts and blood in the drama, rap artists are often just as shocking in the scenes enacted on stage. In testimony to Congress, one parent described the scene at an Eminem show after the performer mimicked police brutality by placing a nightstick in his anus and then throwing the stick to the audience (6). Even more controversial has been the ever-growing list of rap artists who have been arrested for firearms possession or assault, wounded by gunfire, or murdered. The gang warfare described in song has divided the rap community into a war between East Coast and West Coast resulting in the untimely deaths of a recording executive and rappers Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur. So heated is this rivalry that the 2000 Hip-Hop Academy Awards ended in a riot involving audience and performers (7). Violence involving gangsta rappers has included the following:

- *Jay-Z (Shawn Carter)*: Charged with handgun

possession and accused of alleged stabbing of a record company executive (8).

- *Biggie Smalls (the Notorious B.I.G., Christopher Wallace)*: Killed in drive-by shooting (9,10).
- *DMX*: East-West Coast gang war involvement.
- *Hip-Hop Academy Awards*: Ceremony in August 2000 ended early in riot/fight (7).
- *Dr. Dre*: Assault with a firearm, shot in the legs, and served time in prison (11).
- *Tupac Shakur*: Killed in Las Vegas in a feud between the West Coast's Death Row record company and the East Coast's Bad Boy Entertainment ("Thug Life" tattooed on stomach) (7-9).
- *Rapper ODB (Russell Jones) of Wu Tang Clan*: Gunshot wound (10).
- *Eminem*: Serving probation for concealed weapons charge (12).
- *Sean "Puffy" Combs*: Gun battle outside New York nightclub (13).

Controversial rapper and actor Ice-T drew much media attention after the release of "Cop Killer" by his band Body Count. The song told of police brutality in the wake of the Rodney King beating and the Los Angeles riots, with some lines alluding to cop killing. Although graphic in its depiction of violence to police officers, the record gave political voice to minorities and brought to a boil the debate over free speech. True to his media struggle for free speech, Ice-T has nicknamed his son "The Pimp" and created his own recording label to avoid pressure to curb the explicit material in his music (14). Although their lyrics document life in poverty and crime on the street, successful rappers like P. Diddy display their wealth in expensive clothes and extravagant parties. In winning battles for free speech and overcoming the odds against material and social success, hip-hop artists become the heroes of their audience.

## THE AUDIENCE

Much of the rhetoric by adults about the music of adolescence has focused on a causal link between heavy metal and gangsta rap and antisocial behavior, substance abuse, and suicide. Although we are unaware of any truly rigorous studies demonstrating a causal link, there is a body of work that seems consistent in showing what associations exist with these music subcultures. Although there are important dif-

ferences between them, rap and heavy metal are similar in that the vast majority of listeners are male. Both audiences are associated with tendencies toward lower socioeconomic status, greater incidence of impulsive violence (whether directed at one's self or others), and substance abuse. Although the rap audience has not been well studied, much has been written on heavy metal listeners. Characteristics found to be associated with this group include:

- By population, higher youth suicide rate (15).
- Male gender (15,16).
- Poor relationships with parents (16,17).
- Higher rate of parental divorce (16,17).
- Working class (1,15-17).
- Poor school performance (poor attendance) (1).
- Risk-taking and minor criminal behavior (16).
- Substance abuse in psychiatric inpatients: 59% among listeners relative to 16% among nonlisteners (18).
- Sensation-seeking trait (15-17).
- Paranormal beliefs (19).

Because heavy metal themes tend toward alienation, individual mental confusion, and hopelessness, associated violence is thought to be self-directed, and some argue that it poses a risk for suicide, especially in those who report listening to music to amplify dysphoria (15). Because of the lack of relational content and the portrayal of women in metal lyrics and videos as medieval sex slaves, some feel that adolescent female listeners may be especially vulnerable to depression and suicide, given the poor self-esteem that seems likely to accompany their membership in this group (17).

Unlike heavy metal, the gangsta rap and rap-metal audience is more unified around race, inner-city life, and standing up against the oppressor (usually police). Some argue that the images and lifestyle portrayed in the music are merely a realistic account of life on the street. The rap audience is associated with external violence, such as gang and gun violence, rather than suicide. In contrast to heavy metal listeners, the inner-city minorities who make up a large part of the rap audience often find the inclusion and camaraderie of common experience in the gang-focused lyrics of gangsta rap. In recent years, however, hip-hop and rap have also claimed a growing fan base outside their socioeconomic and cultural barriers and have spawned a fashion and language

all their own for listeners of various ethnic and social backgrounds. The lyrics of rap songs often serve as a source of common street slang, and legions of fans emulate the baggy clothing and heavy jewelry of the performers who sing to them.

Much has been written about associated demographics of teenage listeners and their preferred music, often with the aim of revealing the dangers of malevolent messages in music lyrics and negative role modeling. As the listener matures from the latency stage of development into adolescence, more and more time is spent listening to music in lieu of watching television (20). The Parents Music Resource Center estimates that American teens listen to approximately 10,500 hours of rock music between the 7th and 12th grades (500 hours less than the total time they spend in school during grades 1 through 12) (21). Only 10 of the top 40 popular CDs on sale during the 1995 holiday season were free of lyrics dealing with sex, drugs, and violence (21). The illustration of such lyrics in the form of videos on the MTV and VH1 channels is available to nearly 75% of all adolescents through cable television (22). In the wake of national disasters such as Columbine and Oklahoma City, the adult world has turned a glaring eye on the music industry, creating a Senate subcommittee to review youth and the media (23). In a review by the Federal Trade Commission dated April 24, 2001, music was cited as standing out from other forms of media for its failure to self-regulate in controlling violent and pornographic content (6). Such Federal focus has followed a handful of litigations by parents who are seeking to blame particular artists for the effect their music may have had in a son or daughter's suicide (*McCullum v. Osbourne*, *Vance v. Judas Priest*, *Waller v. CBS*).

All of the Senate hearings, legal cases, and politician-driven campaigns to reform the music industry demonstrate to the teen that the adults are not only watching them, they are appalled. The adolescent struggle for independence in the face of the rulemakers plays out in the politics, laws, and behavior of government, which provides proof of the teen's narcissistic power in making adults tremble, agitate, and retch in reaction to the adolescent. The drama and opposition in this struggle are illustrated in the words of 17-year-old Jeffery Yates, who authored the website for the musical group Korn:

Out of the small town of Bakersfield, California, in the early nineties, came a sound. A faint whisper at first, it grew in force and intensity with time, unhindered by the yapping mouths of politicians and parents alike. It rang in their ears. It plagued their minds. It genuinely terrified them. The voice, talking in low-tuned rhythmic tones, spoke for a generation that would have no more of modern America and its leaders. A generation fed up with lies and greed from their own society. It grew and grew as more and more people realized the veracity of its claims, and adhered to its cause. The politicians grew fearful, and attempted to end its spread by censoring and denouncing. Little did they know that, six years later, that small whisper would grow into a deafening scream, a disturbingly present reminder of its own existence, and of its legions of followers. (24)

As this excerpt suggests, music can be a powerful force and tool in the life of an adolescent. It forms the background of car rides and social gatherings, and it also informs the adolescent about the adult world through the lens of the artists' lives, language, and role modeling. Allegiance to a form of music is allegiance to the individuals who make it, a way to friendship and kinship with others, and a road to personal identity through belonging. Whether the music chooses the adolescent or the adolescent chooses the music is a debated question that lacks the complexity of the reality. It is more likely that the complex web of culture, temperament, and relational style for any adolescent group arises within the particular music it creates.

Movies and TV sitcoms have often characterized heavy metal listeners humorously, for example in the hit movie *This is Spinal Tap*, a parody of a glitzy heavy metal band that is unaware of its own folly. Similarly, Internet sites feature the "mullet" hairdo, a popular hairstyle among heavy metal listeners of the past, and MTV's Beavis and Butthead cartoon characters are two adolescent "metalheads" who search for farts, fun, and fornication while committing minor vandalism. These are characterizations of hedonistic, unmotivated, odd, indifferent, bumbling youth on society's fringe.

But in the numerous metal and hip-hop magazines, Internet sites, and compact discs there is a collective interest and pride in the music and its performers. With the introduction of heavy metal into the school-age child's awareness comes an opportu-

nity to know details and facts about musicians, lyrics, songs, and albums, increasing the child's sense of mastery over finite information. In adolescence, the heavy metal music provides a seemingly novel outlook of hopelessness and chaos that may be consonant with the teen's depressed mood, his quest for heightened sensation, and a much-needed sense of belonging in the absence of a consistent larger family.

In a society faced with the fragmentation and isolation of family, increased violence in movies and on television, and the lack of a sense of history and community, hopelessness about the future and a brutal rage at opportunity denied may arise in the most vulnerable of adolescents. The adolescent may find needed self-validation in the resonance between his own hopelessness and rage and that found in the themes of heavy metal music. In this way, teens growing up in families with divorce, family discord, and psychopathology, in dissipated suburban or working-class communities, may be more prone to self-select heavy metal. Rap, too, attracts the latency listener in the intricate rhyming of spoken word. Implicit in the rhyme is the secret revealed only to those who can understand the string of words through the boom and yelling. In the inner city, where broken families are more numerous, poverty more pervasive, jobs fewer, schooling poorer, and gang war more common, budding adolescents find performers who validate their experience and resonate with the frustration and anger of denied opportunity.

For most adolescents, the music of popular artists such as Dave Mathews, Madonna, Lenny Kravitz, and many others serves as a less extreme, subtler alternative to the intense and extreme rebellious themes of rap and heavy metal. The way adolescents find the particular theme, style, and sound that best speaks for them is as complex as are the many musical genres, groups, and popular fashions that surround them. Do adolescents choose the violence of heavy metal and rap for the intensity of emotion and sensation? Does the exploration and need to belong couple with depression, low self-esteem, and psychopathology to steer adolescents toward music with darker, more violent themes? Do those lost in an ever-loosening community indifferent to the presence of the adolescent, chaotic in parental discord and separation, find acceptable sublimation of their rage in the head-banging, sensory-overloading, and violent fantasy of medieval annihilation (heavy metal) or gang



war revolution (gangsta rap)? In all rebellious rhapsodies, the music provides a tool for the adolescent to re-examine and re-question assumptions of earlier stages of development in the service of separation and individuation (25). The graphic, often political focus and unique style, readily accepted by peers, provide a means to increase chances of being accepted in a group while giving the adolescent the

much-needed opportunity to practice loyalty and espouse the genuine message of his music (26). In this mutual inclusivity, the music of adolescents becomes a way to belong while pushing toward identification with those who stand for what parents, the police, opponents of free speech, and the government abhor. Rock on?

## References

1. Wass H, Raup JL, Cerullo K, et al: Adolescents' interest in and views of destructive themes in rock music. *Omega*, vol 19, 1988-1989
2. Erikson E: *Childhood and Society*. New York, WW Norton, 1950
3. Erikson E: *Identity and the Life Cycle*. New York, WW Norton, 1980
4. CNN report. Rage Against the Machine. CNN.com, December 12, 1999
5. CNN report. Police investigate alleged rapes at Woodstock 1999. CNN.com, July 29, 1999
6. Marketing Violent Entertainment to Children: A Six-Month Follow-Up Review of Industry Practices in the Motion Picture, Music Recording, and Electronic Game Industries: A Report to Congress. Washington, DC, Federal Trade Commission, April 24, 2001
7. CNN report. Violence curtails hip-hop music awards. CNN.com, August 23, 2000
8. Jay-Z out on bail. *Rolling Stone*, no. 838, April 13, 2000
9. CNN report. Snoop Doggy Dogg murder trial opens. CNN.com, October 23, 1995
10. The murder of the notorious B.I.G. *Rolling Stone*, no. 870, June 7, 2001
11. Showbiz Today, CNN. Dr. Dre's rap to riches tale. CNN.com, August, 2000
12. CNN report. Eminem pleads no contest to weapons charges. CNN.com, April 23, 2001
13. CNN report. Will Puffy's career profit or perish from his trial? CNN.com, March 1, 2001
14. CNN report. Ice-T. CNN.com, October 27, 1999
15. Stack S, Gundlach J, Reeves JL: The heavy metal subculture and suicide. *Suicide Life Threat Behav* 1994; 24:15-23
16. Arnett J: Heavy metal music and reckless behavior among adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 1991; 20:575-591
17. Martin G, Clarke M, Pearce C: Adolescent suicide: music preference as an indicator of vulnerability. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry* 1993; 32:530-535
18. King P: Heavy metal music and drug abuse in adolescents. *Postgrad Med* 1988; 83:295-301, 304
19. Trostle L: Nihilistic adolescents, heavy metal rock music, and paranormal beliefs (brief report). *Psychol Rep* 1986; 59:610
20. Larson R, Kubey R, Colletti J: Changing channels: early adolescent media choices and shifting investments in family and friends. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 1989; 18:583-589
21. Entertainment Monitor, December 1995
22. American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Communications: Impact of Music Lyrics and Music Videos on Children and Youth. *Pediatrics* 1996; 98:1219-1221
23. The Social Impact of Music Violence. Statement of Senator Joseph I. Lieberman (D-Conn.) before the Governmental Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Oversight, Violence in Music Lyrics. Senate.gov, November 6, 1997
24. The Official Korn Website: Biography. The Firm, Inc., and korn.com, 2001
25. Erikson E: *Identity, Youth, and Crisis*. New York, WW Norton, 1968
26. Noam G: The psychology of belonging: reformulating adolescent development. *Adolescent Psychiatry* 1999; 24:49-68