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ROCK MUSIC AND TEENAGE SUICIDE

Long ago a poet boasted, "I care not who writes my country's laws so long as I can write its songs." A look at our nation's songs can tell pretty well what is in the hearts of those who sing them. When I was a teenager in the Big Band era of the 1940s, the popular songs had lyrics expressing the joy of living, optimism in the future, and sex only in terms of romance and enduring love.

If you listen to today's rock music, the big question really is, why do we have so few teenage suicides? The rock music lyrics are filled with talk of suicide, death, depression, loneliness, sex between unmarried persons (sometimes violent and disgusting), and drugs. It's pretty clear that anyone who cares about preventing teenage suicide must, first of all, address the problem of rock music.

This generation's music tells young people there's no future, no hope. The music expresses paranoia, depression, anxiety, despair, escape through drugs, and a negative attitude toward life. They frequently espouse lyrics that say, What's the use?, Have fun now, for tomorrow we die. Rock themes are persistently and perniciously nihilistic. Let's look at some examples of today's popular rock:

Pink Floyd, a successful punk rock group, sold 12 million copies of its LP "The Wall," featuring the theme of suicide, despair and death. One title, "Goodbye Cruel World," was on the top-selling lists for 17 weeks in 1980.

Two 15-year-old Leominster, Mass., girls left suicide notes that quoted lyrics from Pink Floyd's 1979 album, "The Wall." They wrote, "Goodby cruel world, I'm leaving you now..."

Melissa was another tragic case. The album on the family stereo when Melissa committed suicide was Aerosmith's album titled "Rocks." One of the songs in the album was entitled "Sick as a Dog."

Blue Oyster Cult has a record called: "Don't Fear the Reaper." It convincingly entices teenagers to join in a romantic suicide pact.

The Cars, a new wave group, has a song called "Since You're Gone." The lyric goes, "Since you're gone, I'm throwing it all away, I can't help it, Ev'rything's a mess." The recurring theme is that life is not worth living after a loved one has gone.

Black Sabbath song titles include: "Electric Funeral," "Hand of Doom," and "Nativity in Black." A White Cross lyric reads: "How much more can I take, Before I make my last mistake?"

Prince has a record called "1999." He sings: "War is all around us, My mind says prepare to fight, So if I gotta die I'm gonna listen to, My body tonight." Other songs in this album feature oral sex, masturbation, and incest.

A successful college student and avid guitarist who lived for his music, Arnold Caputa, age 19, killed himself by hanging. He was deeply involved in his rock music; that was all he cared about.

Ozzy Osbourne's lyrics are all graphically pornographic and suicidal. His song called "Suicide Solution" ends "Where to hide? Suicide is the only way out."

Led Zepplin is obsessed with the occult. Judas Priest has graphic sado-masochistic themes. The Rolling Stones are openly satanic and encourage perversion.

Unfortunately, some schools even glorify these rock stars in textbooks. The State of Florida has a textbook approved for remedial reading grades 7-12, called "Superstars of Rock." It glorifies rock stars and takes the child through exercises to make him learn in detail about the rock stars and their songs.

In some areas, schools have played rock video in the cafeteria during lunch or rock music on the school bus. Parents had to wage a campaign for months before they could get it stopped.

*The Maryland state department of education approved for use in the public schools the singing of the lyrics from the theme song of the movie "M*A*S*H." Here are some of the lines: "The game of life is hard to play, I'm going to lose it anyway. The losing card I'll some day lay, So this is all I have to say, that Suicide is painless."*

It's no wonder that more than 5,000 teenagers are committing suicide each year, double the rate of 25 years ago. The songwriters have filled their minds and ears with lies about life, about love, about America, and about the future.