



# Metalheads: Heavy Metal Music And Adolescent Alienation

*Jeffrey Arnett*

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Heavy metal is a violent, head-bashing music complete, in its live performances, with its own arena of rage and celebration, the mosh pit. It is a music in the red corner of society, loud, angry, and, to a well-tuned ear, practically intolerable. And yet, the art form radiates a message about American adolescents well worth examining and comprehending: Its devotees, primarily adolescent boys, are alienated from their world and angry about its future. Heavy metal speaks throbbingly the message of rage, loneliness, and cynicism. In this sensitive book, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett synthesizes the stories and experiences of seventy male and thirty-eight female “metalheads” in a successful attempt to understand the often crippling results of a society and an image of the nuclear family steeped in conformity, self-denial, and obedience. The vacuum such an atmosphere creates in the individual can be temporarily obliterated by a heavy metal concert, which Arnett sees as a substitute manhood ritual. This conclusion is just one of the many striking hypotheses the author advances in this dynamic study of a music and its followers. Of the one hundred metalheads interviewed for this volume, ten have allowed themselves to be profiled in depth—the reader becomes fully acquainted with Jack, for instance, and with the multiple crosses decorating his body, his black rose tattoo, and his tumultuous family life; or with slim and well-groomed Jean dressed entirely in black, her favorite color, and wearing the temperament of withdrawal. This is a unique study filled with compassion for a disenfranchised subculture and the respect to want to understand it.

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