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Interview Paper

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1. For this paper I interviewed my stepfather Dennis Moore, who was a teenager between the years of 1983-1988. Dennis grew up in a typical middle class family that lived in the suburbs of various cities in New Jersey, such as Pemberton, Browns Mills, and Vincentown. After his parents divorced, he went to live with his mother in the town of Spring, Texas. Of all of the places he lived in, he said that the neighborhoods were good areas with no safety concerns and quality education systems. One of the rampant themes he noticed in the 80’s was the total attention diverted to individual lifestyle, especially when it came to hair and attire. Everyone was driving to certain types of brands, even more so than teenagers today. One was also considered mainstream based on the popular artists of the time, like Madonna, Michael Jackson, Elton John, and Billy Joel. Although he didn’t listen to these artists himself at the time, Dennis still perceived himself as mainstream and even popular at his high school. Everyone knew who he was, and he even played varsity football for the school. His attire, however, was very different from what was considered mainstream. He grew his hair out down to his shoulders and wore different metal shirts. This led to some of his peers looking down on him for his fashion tastes, but he hardly cared what they thought. Dennis actually wanted to stand out from the rest of the kids and give off that outsider or non-conformist status. In short, although he wanted to appear as an outsider, he was very much in touch with the mainstream of the 80s.
2. My stepfather’s parents mostly listened to hits from the fifties and sixties. His dad listened to doo wop groups and Motown artists like the Temptations, the Supremes, Smokey Robinson, and eventually the Commodores in the late seventies. His mom listened to a lot of sixties pop, with artists like the Mamas and the Papas, the Carpenters, and even counterculture artists like Janis Joplin. Joplin’s pushy and limitless vocal style and her use of multiphonics made her one of the most successful blues singer of all time. (Schloss, Starr, and Waterman 153-154). Dennis admitted that he hated this music, and states he never listened to it back then and won’t listen to it now.
3. Dennis’ parents tolerated the music that he listened to, but they personally did not approve of it. Not only did they have to put up with my stepfather listening to metal, but they had to see his tastes around the house as well. He collected all sorts of band memorabilia (band shirts, posters, etc.) of different metal artists such as Slayer and Megadeth, which often depicted flames, skulls and even torture scenes. Whenever Dennis wanted to go out to a metal concert, his parents tried to convince him from going, but in the end they knew he wouldn’t listen to them. In a sense they had personal disdain of the music they listened to, but kept their music choices to themselves.
4. Before listening to metal, Dennis listened to thirty-three speed vinyl albums. He even recalls the first album he ever owned: the 1979 album “Get the Knack” by the The Knack. The first album that he purchased was “Breakfast in America” by Supertramp, also released in 1979. As he approached his early teens my stepfather began to buy cassette tapes, and listened to FM radio throughout the rest of his teenage years. I also learned something about my stepfather that I never knew: he was an early pirate of music. He would buy blank cassette tapes and then turn on his radio to listen to his favorite songs. When he heard one that he would like he would put the cassette tape and a tape recorder next to the radio and literally record the song being played on the air. He did this so much that he no longer had to worry about going to a music store, and just listened to his homemade recordings. Although he lowered the quality of his tapes by doing this, he still found the music enjoyable and easy to listen to. As he moved on to his twenties, he began to purchase CDs. Dennis noticed that the discs enhanced the sound quality and made the song just as good, if not better, than the versions heard on vinyl, cassettes, or the radio.
5. When he was little my stepfather listened to what was mostly being played at the time, like pop, disco, rock, and light rock. As he grew older he began to listen to hard rock, metal, and progressive metal. I did not know the difference between the style of metal and progressive metal, so I asked him to explain the difference to me. He explained that metal was more about the aggressive type of sound, and focused more on the sound itself than the quality or the actual group. Progressive metal, on the other hand, was more about the musicianship of the group than the sound and themes they were trying to project. It also emphasized artist recognition as a whole rather than being known as “the band who wrote a couple of hit songs”. Their professionalism and credibility as musicians was by far more important. I could not find anything in the text about the subgenre called progressive metal, but I found another subgenre of heavy metal that seemed to share similar characteristics. Speed metal took a different approach to heavy metal. Artists of speed metal saw heavy metal as overly abundant, and the message they tried to produce could be lost over the aggressiveness in songs. Speed metal as a whole focused on different techniques and skills that gave the artists individual recognition, and made themes in their song clear for the audience (Schloss, Starr, and Waterman 284-285).I also found many points about heavy metal that my stepfather touched upon. Metal bands in the early eighties rarely received radio play, and had little to no musical abilities (Schloss, Starr, and Waterman 283). To make up for their lack of public attention, these artists performed many extreme stage antics and dressed with glamour to win the media. The metal bands may have strived to be artistically recognized, but it was due to their attire and spectacles, not their musical talent.
6. Dennis listened to a lot of hard rock artists, such as Rush, Ozzy Osbourne (as a soloist), Zebra, and Randy Rhoads, and Cheap Trick. When it came to heavy metal, he listened to some Van Halen and Metallica. Dennis mostly listened to progressive metal which included bands such as Queensryche, Iron Maiden, and Dream Theater. Dennis also liked country rock bands like the Allman Brothers Band and Lynyrd Skynyrd when he lived in Texas. All of these artist were considered new in his generation; most were formed while he was still a teenager. There was nothing in the book about progressive metal bands, but there is information on Van Halen and Metallica. I was kind of surprised that he didn’t particularly care for Van Halen, as the band did just as much as a progressive metal band strived for. Eddie Van Halen is known as being one of the fastest guitar players in the world. He used his musical talent to create elaborate melodies, and even developed new guitar techniques like “tapping” (Schloss, Starr, and Waterman 283). Van Halen had just as much, if not more, than the competing progressive metal bands. Metallica was more of his taste, as they focused on new frequencies and guitar techniques. The band also made sure that the message of their songs was clearly punctuated over the aggressive sound (Schloss, Starr, and Waterman 286).
7. When he was a teenager my stepfather did not want to listen to fifties or sixties pop like his parents did. He also hated country and artists like George Jones and the Oakridge Boys. He also didn’t like pop artists like Wham!, a-ha, Madonna, and Michael Jackson. In fact, he and his younger sister fought constantly over music tastes, as she herself was a Madonna fan. His younger brother was a Michael Jackson fan, and sometimes Dennis would go in his room and write rude remarks or draw phallic symbols on his posters. When asked why he didn’t like country artists, he said that he didn’t like there whiny vocal styles and reoccurring themes of sentimentality and patriotism. I think one of the reasons he disliked pop was because he was constantly surrounded by it in his household, and needed a sort of musical escape. Dennis just simply said that the songs were too “vanilla”, and simply unoriginal.
8. My stepfather has greatly increased his musical palette. He still listens to a lot of progressive metal and the same bands listed above. He has steadily listened to more of country and blues as he grew older, but only because he was forced to in a way. My stepfather has been a musician ever since he was thirteen. Since then, he has been in numerous bands that perform that sort of music, so he’s had to adapt and perform the very music he hated.
9. Overall, I not only learned about my stepfather’s musical tastes, but learned that we share very similar attitudes when it comes to mainstream music. We both listen to some sort of rock; I listen to hard rock and classic rock while he continues to listen to heavy metal and its subgenres. I always knew that my stepfather listened to that sort of music, but I never knew what genre it was classified as until I questioned him in this interview. We also shared the same negative attitudes with specific categories of music, most notably country and pop. I believe that nowadays anyone can coin up a simple song with simple lyrics, perform it, and make money off of it, even though they have no musical talent. They have are often recognized by name rather than any sort of musical ability. These artists do not even write their own songs. Songwriters make them and then hire certain artists who would make the song sound well. The musicians that I and my stepfather listen to always write their own songs and create different techniques to perfect them. I was also able to compare and contrast on the music our parents listen to, and if we enjoy any of that music now. My father has always loved artists like the Beatles, Byrds, and the Rolling Stones while my mother listens to today’s hits. I listen classic rock as much as my father, but I despise modern pop. So in a sense, I still love my parents’ music, while my stepfather has always hated his parents’ music. I am also surprised that my stepfather eventually came around to enjoying country and even pop music today. The thought of me ever liking country or pop in my life absolutely terrifies me, and I hope that my musical tastes does not expand to that of my stepfather over time.

Works Cited

Schloss, Joseph G., Larry Starr, and Christopher Waterman. *Rock: Music, Culture, and Buisness*. New York: Oxford UP, 2012. Print.