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Letter to the Editor

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Editor's Note: This Letter to the Editor is in response to the Noisy Notes column by Alberto Behar from volume 6, issue 4 Why do we like noise? Arline Bronzaft, PhD, is a well-known Environmental Psychologist, researcher, and educator in the realm of non-auditory effects of noise, especially its effects on learning. Dr. Bronzaft is Professor Emerita of the City University of New York. In addition to her academic and advocacy hats, Dr. Bronzaft is also the author of the children's book "Listen to the Raindrops" which is part of New York City's Department of Environmental Protection's efforts to educate children to the good and the bad sounds in their environment.

I know that Professor Alberto Behar has spent many years in urging people to protect their ears and in highlighting the dangers of noise. However, he and I differ in that I do not believe people love noise. I, too, have conducted research and written on the hazards of noise on our mental and physical health, including landmark research on the effects of noise on school learning. In New York City, I serve on the Board of GrowNYC (non-paid, Mayoral appointment, named by 5 Mayors). In this position, I have listened to noise complaints from New Yorkers for 30 years. While New York City is known for its loud and intrusive sounds, it is still a city with a Noise Code that attempts to rein in the harmful sounds, so that residents and visitors can enjoy the wonderful urban sounds (e.g., shouts for the winning World Soccer team, crowd roars at the falling of the ball on Times Square on New Year's Eve, loud calls of support at sporting events).

While New York City has often been identified as a noisy city, I would still affirmatively state that our residents do not "love noise." That some people may love "louder" music than others is indeed true but to the people who favour louder music, the sounds of their music is not noise to their ears. It is also true that these louder sounds may damage their hearing and that is why they should be warned to "lower the decibel level." Younger people may find it difficult to understand that their hearing is at risk because they connect a loss of hearing with aging. Thus, young people need to be educated to the fact that loud sounds harm hearing as well as being hazardous to overall health and well-being. Pete Townshend loved his music but the loud sounds still affected his hearing. I have faith in education and support New York City's Department of Environmental Protection's noise curriculum that teaches children about the beauty of the good sounds and the dangers of noise.

More recently, there have been efforts to lessen the loudness in our restaurants and I would direct readers to the Soundprint app. Younger people have taken an active role in identifying the quieter restaurants in their cities because they want to converse with others at their tables. Furthermore, it was a 13-year-old Canadian girl's findings that hand dryers in washrooms are too loud that has caught the "ear" of Dyson who wants to discuss her research.

I do agree with Dr. Behar that we need more than education to lessen noise impacts. The studies

linking noise to adverse health effects are plentiful but require wider coverage so that they reach the “ears” of legislators who can enact laws to reduce noise. We also need academics and researchers knowledgeable about noise effects to join with communities asking for legislation to reduce traffic, aircraft, or neighborhood noise. Recently, the media appear to be more interested in noise pollution and they certainly can play an important role in lessening the din. If these suggestions are followed, I believe there will be a reduction in noise pollution.

I have also noted that compared to 40 years ago when I first started my research on noise, many more individuals are asking for less noise, especially in urban environments, and urging cities to invest in enhancing and protecting quiet areas such as parks (Quiet Parks International). I would say that people generally love the beautiful sounds in their environment, not the “noise.”