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Response to Dr. Arline Bronzaft, Letter to the Editor

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Re: Why Do We Like Noise?

The title of my article was designed to attract attention and to elicit reaction(s). I am glad that it did work and I am thankful to Dr. Arline Bronzaft for her comments in her Letter to the Editor. The title is manifestly wrong, since I, as many others, have dedicated my life to noise control and hearing conservation. So, I (we) do not like noise!

Now, let's get a little bit deeper into the word "like." It is not love. It is closer to "tolerate" or closer to the phrase "I don't care" or "it doesn't bother me." Many people are not aware of the subtle effects of noise, both physiological and psychological. They navigate happily through life, accepting noisy environments and, very often enjoying them too. Isn't that what we observe at sports events, where the sound levels easily exceed 110 dBA. The same happens at music festivals and, even worse when practicing noisy sports such as shooting, snowmobiling or water motorcycling to quote just a few.

So, we are witnessing a great chunk of humanity involved in (very) noisy activities both as participants and as spectators. They spend large sums of money; not to mention the time involved in getting there, often in noisy cars or motorcycles.

Many are unaware of the damage they are causing to their hearing. But they do derive pleasure from those activities. Is the noise part of it? I tend to say "yes." Moreover, many people who complain of environmental noise have no problem with it; following the well known saying "music is what I make, noise is what my neighbor does."

There is no simple answer on how to solve this problem. Potentially damaging noise and music is simply not that loud. On one hand, I see efforts by authorities to keep a limit for symphonic orchestras. On the other, there are no (or very few) attempts to reduce the noise level at stadiums, rock concerts or even at (noisy) parties. Very often the comment is "… let them enjoy themselves; they do not mean any harm…".

Education – definitely is a way to go, especially if it is provided at an early age. But is it the solution or is there something inherent in our psyche that loves noisy activities?