

# “I’m just as Rock ‘n’ Roll fan”

Popular music as a meaning resource for aging\*

## “Sou como fã de Rock ‘n’ Roll”

*Música popular como recurso de significado para o envelhecimento*

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**Abstract:** Critics and fans alike have traditionally viewed popular music, especially in terms of its rock ‘n’ roll iterations, as a meaning resource for youth navigating through adolescence. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the relevance of popular music for self-identity through middle age and beyond. The theoretical basis for this exploration is a composite of ideas from existential social thought and symbolic interactionist views on aging. Existential social thought tells us that the process of self-development is constant throughout life. What changes are life circumstances, the biological and affective aging process, reassessment of the past, and strategic relationships with others. The “baby boomer” generation was the first western generation to grow up entirely in the world of rock ‘n’ roll music and culture, and many baby boomers experienced rock ‘n’ roll as a master script for life. Therefore, this highly self-integrated cultural resource, enhanced by the power of the mass media, remains central to the self-identity of many baby boomers as they approach old age. The author investigates the variety of ways aging baby boomers keep rock ‘n’ roll in their lives, with a pervasive interest in the authenticity of their music. Examples include the purchase and display of satellite radio and other status-enhancing technology; the use of rock ‘n’ roll music to nurture romance and intimacy; appreciation for pop music at religious services and during spiritual experiences; the use of rock ‘n’ roll to make sense of political issues, and grandparenting-through-Hannah Montana.

**Keywords:** Popular music; Aging; Self-identity; “Baby boomers”; Adult socialization

**Resumo:** Tanto críticos quanto fãs têm tradicionalmente encarado a música popular, especialmente em termos de suas interações de rock ‘n’ roll, como um recurso de significado da juventude navegando ao longo da adolescência. O objetivo deste artigo é discutir a relevância da música popular para a auto-identidade ao longo da meia-idade e adiante. A base teórica para esta discussão é uma síntese de idéias sobre envelhecimento

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\* This paper was presented at the session on “Communication technologies: identities” at the International Sociological Association Forum, September 6, 2008, Barcelona, Spain. The complete study from which this paper is drawn will appear in Joseph A. Kotarba, *Growing old with rock ‘n’ roll*, Left Coast Press, 2009.

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<i>Civitas</i>	Porto Alegre	v. 9	n. 1	p. 118-132	jan.-abr. 2009
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a partir do existencialismo e do interacionismo simbólico. O pensamento social existencial nos diz que o processo de auto-desenvolvimento é uma constante ao longo da vida. O que muda são circunstâncias da vida, o processo de idade biológica e afetiva, reavaliação do passado e relações estratégicas com os outros. A geração “baby boomer” foi a primeira geração ocidental a crescer inteiramente no mundo da música e da cultura do rock ‘n’ roll, e muitos baby boomers vivenciaram o rock ‘n’ roll como roteiro padrão para a vida. Por isso, esta fonte cultural altamente auto-integrativa, reforçada pelo poder dos meios de comunicação de massa, continua a ser central para a auto-identidade de muitos baby-boomers na medida em que se aproximam da velhice. O autor investiga a variedade de maneiras que baby boomers idosos mantêm o rock ‘n’ roll em suas vidas, com um interesse profundo pela autenticidade da sua música. Exemplos incluem a compra e execução de rádio por satélite e outras tecnologias que reforçam o status; o uso de música rock para cultivar romantismo e intimidade; apreço pela música pop em atividades religiosas e durante experiências espirituais; o uso do rock para expressar temas políticos e ser avôs por intermédio de Hannah Montana.

**Palavras-chave:** Música popular; Idosos; Auto-identidade; “Baby boomers”; Socialização de adultos

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## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the relevance of popular music for self-identity through middle age and beyond. Critics and fans alike have traditionally viewed popular music, especially in terms of its rock ‘n’ roll iterations, as a meaning resource for youth navigating through adolescence. The baby boomer generation was the first western generation to grow up entirely in the world of rock ‘n’ roll music and culture, and many baby boomers experienced rock ‘n’ roll as a master script for life. Therefore, this highly self-integrated cultural resource, enhanced by the power of the mass media, remains central to the self-identity of many baby boomers as they approach old age.

The social science literature has traditionally focused on popular music experiences among young audiences. Specifically, the focus has been on the rock ‘n’ roll idiom as a feature of adolescent culture and, therefore, of teenagers’ everyday life experience. As Simon Frith (1981) noted in his famous sociological text, *Sound effects*, rock and roll music has been fundamental to the experience of growing up ever since the end of World War II. Similarly, sociologists have demonstrated increasing interest over the years in rock ‘n’ roll music as an indicator of dramatic changes occurring in the social and cultural worlds of teenagers. We can trace this interest at least as far back as David Riesman’s (1950) classic examination of the emergence of the *other-directed* personality in post-WWII American society. The new middle class was marked

by a weakening of parental control, a preoccupation with consumption, and a shift in the meaning of leisure resulting in the masses – the lonely crowd – desperately trying to have fun. The time was ripe for the emergence of a youth culture defined by what has come to be known as rock 'n' roll music.

The teenagers described by David Riesman and other keen observers of the post-World War II scene, are now baby boomers approaching old age. The music and musical culture they grew up with has stayed with them, becoming the soundtrack of American culture.

I define rock 'n' roll music very broadly as popular music that: (1) is created for and marketed towards young people or people who consume music according to youthful tastes and values; (2) is primarily guitar driven and amplified; (3) has its musicological origins in African-American musical styles; (4) is usually danceable; and (5) sounds best when played or performed loudly (Kotarba, 1994). I define rock 'n' roll broadly in order to include all varieties of pop music that have evolved from it (e.g., heavy metal, pop, New Age, Christian pop). All told, rock 'n' roll music is arguably the preeminent form of popular music in our society.

The purpose of this essay is to survey the many ways rock 'n' roll pervades the everyday lives of aging adults in American society. The theoretical basis for this exploration is a composite of ideas from existential social thought and symbolic interactionist views on aging. Existential social thought tells us that the process of self-development is constant throughout life. What changes are life circumstances, the biological and affective aging process, reassessment of the past, and strategic relationships with others. As these contingencies change, so does the experience of self. As Andrea Fontana notes, the activities used during adulthood to make sense of the self are likely to be the same types of activities used to make sense of getting old. In commonsense terms, I examine what happened to the first, complete generation of rock 'n' roll fans. I argue that rock 'n' roll music continues to serve as a critical meaning resource for its adult fans as they continuously experience the becoming of self throughout life.

## **The becoming of self**

The question remains: Why, then, have so many adults across western societies not outgrown rock 'n' roll? Why haven't more adults gravitated towards "adult" styles of music, such as classical and jazz? The existential sociological concept of *the becoming of self*, borrowed from earlier scholars such as Jean Paul Sartre (1945) is a useful guide in seeking the sociological

answer to this question. Existential social thought views the self: “as a unique experience of being within the context of contemporary social conditions, an experience most notably marked by an incessant sense of becoming and an active participation in social change” (Kotarba, 1984, p. 223). The incessant sense of becoming is a reflection of the contemporary need for the individual to be prepared to reshape meanings of self in response to the dictates of a rapidly changing social world. The well-integrated self accepts the reality of change and welcomes new ideas, new experiences, and reformulations of old ideas and experiences that help one adapt to change (Kotarba, 1987).

The idea of *becoming* is one of the most important ideas in existentialist thought across disciplines because it places responsibility for fashioning a self on the individual. Whereas Jean-Paul Sartre (1945) argued dramatically that we are condemned to be free and to choose who we are to become, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) insisted more moderately and sociologically that we must ground our becoming-of-self in the real world in order to cope effectively with it. Thus, an effective strategy for becoming begins with a foundation of personal experience and the constraints of social structure, while evolving in terms of the resources presented by culture. I argue that middle-aged Americans work with a self built to some degree on the meanings provided by the rock ‘n’ roll idiom, and they continue to nurture the self within the ever-present cultural context of rock ‘n’ roll.

The concept of the *existential self* tells us that the experience of individuality is never complete; the answer to the question “who am I?” is always tentative. In the postmodern world, the popular media – including popular music – serve as increasingly important audiences to the self. The *self* is situational and mutable (Zurcher, 1977). One can be various selves as the fast-paced, ever-changing, uncertain postmodern society requires. The rock ‘n’ roll idiom serves as an important source of self-stabilizing meaning for many baby boomer fans. I will now explore the place of rock ‘n’ roll music and culture in various experiences of the aging self.

## **The e-self**

As the rock ‘n’ roll fan ages, many of the attractive aspects of the earlier self are more difficult to maintain. There is a tendency for youthfulness, energy, risk-taking, appearance, sensuality, and other aspects of the adolescent or young-adult self to become either less available or less desirable. Our culture does, however, provide a self-identity that resonates with the affluence of middle age, as well as with the continuing need to establish status/self-esteem.

The *e-self* refers to an experience of individuality in which the affective and philosophical self-resources of rock'n'roll media are displaced or at least supplemented by the increasingly technological and commodified aspects of the media. For the middle-aged fan, what you play your music on can be at least as, if not more, important than what you play.

Middle age results in less concert attendance and more music experience in the comfort of home, automobile and, for the energetic, on the jogging trail. A content analysis of *Wired* magazine (October 2004), which is geared toward the affluent and technologically-interested middle-aged person, discloses the strategy of marketing rock 'n' roll to its audience. There are ads for sophisticated cell phones that allow the consumer to "keep rockin' with your favorite MP3s." The promotion for "Thewireduction", on eBay which benefits a children's foundation, includes a "limited edition series precision bas guitar signed by Sting" among other high-end music items. The ad for the Bose Music intelligent playback system highlights "its unique ability to listen to the music you play and learn our preferences based on your likes, dislikes, or even your mood at the moment." There are numerous ads for satellite radio systems and the luxury SUVs that include them as standard equipment.

Such marketing sometimes resonates with the adults it targets. George is a fifty-one year old, Anglo electrical engineer who just installed a satellite radio system in his Lexus sedan. He sees two benefits of his musical purchase: "I don't have to mess with CDs or radio anymore. I get to play only the music I like to hear... There are stations dedicated just to '80s heavy metal. Cool." George has effectively eliminated the hassles of concert crowds and debates over musical tastes with peers. High technology puts his e-self in control of his musical environment. George can experience his music with the aura of cultural independence affluent adults seek.

## **The self as lover**

A significant aspect of the continuous popularity of rock 'n' roll music is its use in helping make sense of others, especially in intimate relationships. Numerous observers have correctly identified the sexist messages present in rock 'n' roll (*e.g.*, McRobbie, 1978). A postmodern existentialist view, however, highlights the fact that rock 'n' roll music displays an open-ended horizon of meaning for its audiences. What a rock'n'roll music performance means is largely a function of the situation in which it is experienced and the particular self-needs of the audience member (Kotarba, 1994a). As time passes, the rock 'n' roll audience matures, biographies evolve, men's and

women's relationships change, popular music commodities come and go, cultural themes available through the media advance, and we would expect the actual lived experience of popular music to change.

A particular self-need of the mature rock 'n' roll fan is to interpret *romantic* phenomena. This can happen two ways. First, fans can (re)interpret music to fit romantic needs. In my autobiographical writing as a rock 'n' roll fan (Kotarba, 1997), I describe the way I used Dion's "Runaround Sue" to account for the way a girl back in eighth grade rejected my very timid show of affection in favor of those of an older boy. Like the Sue in the song, my Sue was a *bad* girl and I was merely a victim of her wiles. Twenty-five years later, at a class reunion, I used the same song as the basis for a conversation with the same Sue. We laughed about the silliness of those grammar school days, but my heartbeat jumped a bit when she admitted that she really did like me back then but was too shy to tell me!

Second, fans can gravitate towards music that can be perceived as romantic. Autobiographically, "Smokey" Robinson and the Miracles' "Tracks of My Tears" was a constant play on my 45 record player in 1965 when it put comforting words to yet another heartbreak in my life. My guess is that I would not have been drawn as much to this new record if I did not have a personal need for its plaintive prose. In general, fans gravitate towards music that fits their everyday life concerns.

Baby boomers use rock 'n' roll materials for a range of romantic purposes. They use music (*e.g.*, CDs) as birthday and Christmas gifts. They use music to help them appreciate other media such as films and television. One of the more interesting romantic uses of rock 'n' roll music is the *our-song* phenomenon, where a musical performance serves to define a relationship. Our-songs are clearly not limited to baby boomers. Pre-adolescents, for example, commonly choose songs that remind them of a boy or a girl, but are often too shy to disclose this fact to the other!

For mature rock 'n' roll fans, the our-song can function at least two ways. First, it provides meaning for benchmark events in the relationship. Shirley is a fifty-two year-old, Latina sales person who is a big Los Lobos fan. She builds anniversary activities around one particular song she and her husband both enjoy:

We fell in love with "Nadie Quiere Sufrir" at a Los Lobos concert when we were still just dating. It is a very pretty waltz that actually comes from an Edith Piaf song... I make sure the CD (with the song) is in the car when we drive to (our anniversary) dinner. He bought me the CD for our anniversary a few years ago... Oh, I guess it just makes us feel young again.

Second, the our-song can help the person feel like a lover. As couples age and perhaps find themselves feeling and acting less romantic over time, the our-song can function as a quick fix. Rob is a fifty-eight year-old, Anglo executive who has maintained a serious relationship with Tommy, a forty-seven year-old artist, for about fifteen years. Their song is Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody:"

There will never be another Freddie Mercury. It was really special to have our own gay rock icon... I surprise Tommy by playing "Bohemian Rhapsody" now and again. Tommy is still thrilled that I remember it... Why? Well, it's one of those songs that make you feel good, to feel that you can be gay and a rocker at the same time... I like doing things for Tommy. We are just so busy with our careers, 'makes us feel like an old married couple!

Needless to say, the rock 'n' roll industry is aware of the market here for its goods and services. One of the more recent examples is the advent and growing popularity of rock 'n' roll cruises. Carnival Cruise Lines offers the following "Rock 'n' Roll Cruise Vacation" in an on-line ad:

What could be cooler than a seven-day Caribbean cruise with legendary big-hair 1970s/80s rockers Journey, Styx and REO Speedwagon? Well... we'll reserve comment. But, if your idea of a totally awesome vacation is a seven-day cruise with legendary big-hair 1970s/80s rockers Journey, Styx and REO Speedwagon, you're in luck.

## **The self as believer**

Baby boomers learned to love, play, dissent, and celebrate through the idiom of rock 'n' roll. They also experienced spirituality through their music (Seay; Neely, 1986). In adulthood, the spiritual dimension of rock 'n' roll continues to impact the self as believer. The lyrics and mood created by such performers as Van Morrison (*e.g. Astral Weeks*) and U2 (*e.g. The Joshua Tree*) provide baby boomers with non-sectarian, yet religion-friendly, soundtracks. New Age Music, such as that produced by Windham Hill, functions in much the same way.

Rock 'n' roll music has also had direct influence on spirituality by helping shape organized religious ceremonies and rituals to fit the tastes of the adult member. For example, Catholic baby boomers grew up at a time when the Church, largely as a result of the Vatican II Council, encouraged parishes to make use of local musical styles and talent. Hence, witness the emergence of the rock 'n' roll mass in the 1970s.

As baby boomers age, there is a tendency amongst them to return to organized religion. Some of that movement is obviously fueled by being married, having children, responding to pressure from grandparents, and so forth. This movement coincides with attempts among many church leaders to modernize liturgies, ministries, and relationships with the faithful (Roof, 1999). The Catholic Church, for example, has shifted emphasis from medieval ecclesiastic music to more popular styles of music, thus raising questions of musical authenticity for fans. In the debate over the appropriateness of popular church music theological concerns often emerge. I will now briefly discuss the issue of authenticity relating to two recent styles of music permeating Catholic worship, both based upon the rock ‘n’ roll idiom: praise and worship music and the Christian singer-songwriter.

Praise and worship music originated in the youth-oriented “Jesus Movement” of the 1960s and ‘70s (Scheer, 2007). The young people involved in this Southern California-originated movement were seeking an alternative, a timely and user-friendly way to celebrate the basic Christian beliefs with which they were raised. Over time, this festive, exciting, upbeat musical style became integrated with the larger Christian music industry, and came to be known as praise and worship music. This style has been very inter-denominational in scope, and has gained great popularity by its use of contemporary instrumentation (e.g., amplified band instruments, keyboards, and guitars) and links with the pop music industry (e.g., concern with charts, producers, recoding companies, sales, and marketing). The songs continue to be an upbeat blending of lyrics derived from both the Old and New Testaments. Major stars include Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith.

Discussions over authenticity in praise and worship music tend to focus less on the status of any particular songs than on the validity of the genre itself. *Is praise and worship music really (authentic) Christian music?* In terms of the sociological ways I am framing my argument, *the answers focus specifically on the contrasting ways popular Church music may impact the spiritual (self) of the faithful.* The proponents of praise and worship music clearly feel that any style of music that brings people closer to the Lord is authentic. The detractors, however, argue that the musical style itself is consequential and cannot be accepted arbitrarily.

Take Danielle, for example. Danielle is a fifty-seven year-old music and choir director for a Catholic Parish. She has seen the styles of music shift greatly in the Church, beginning with Latin-based psalms in the 1950s, to the first English language songs in the 1960s to rock masses in the 1970s to the open-horizon of styles resulting from the praise and worship movement.



For her, the issue of authenticity has shifted over time, just as the music has evolved. Her original position on changing musical styles matched that of the opponents of popular Church music: the style of music is the true object of evaluation and control, even more than any particular song, artist or lyric in question. As an illustration, Danielle approached praise and worship music in much the same way critics (*e.g.*, the Parents' Music Resource Center) approached heavy metal music in the 1980s (Kotarba, 1994b). For Danielle and other senior music directors in the Church, authentic praise and worship music is that which is not confounded by a "star system." By star system, Danielle is referring to the ego-centered careers of some Christian music performers "who put themselves above their music and the good message they should want to convey." Therefore, for Danielle and other baby boomer musicians, authenticity in Christian music is synonymous with, parallel to, and performed into being by the humility of the performer and performance.

John Michael Talbot's music is an exemplar of authentic, contemporary, Catholic/Christian music for people of faith like Danielle. Talbot is an American Roman Catholic singer-guitarist who is also the founder of a monastic community: the Brothers and Sisters of Charity (Talbot, 1999). He is the largest selling Catholic musical artist with over four million albums sold. He has authored or co-authored fifteen books. John Michael tours through the U.S. in support of his monastic community nestled in the beautiful Ozark Mountains in Arkansas. On the surface, John Michael appears much like the high profile artists about whom Danielle is cautious. John Michael Talbot is authentic to his followers, however, because he leads a simple lifestyle and does not personally profit from his talent and dedication. In a very postmodern way, John Michael is able to integrate his Internet site, concert tours, and many followers into a pristine, humble, and monastic lifestyle that will never make the cover of *People Magazine*. His persona is refreshing – and authentic – to those baby boomers who are a bit overtaken by mass culture, even of an ecclesiastic sort.

In summary, Danielle's experience illustrates how adult opponents of popular Church music are leery of the negative effects the overall secular and materialist architecture of popular Church music can have on the souls (read: selves) of the faithful. Danielle's ministry may be typical insofar as her choir and musical ensemble will perform praise and worship songs without even mention of the "star" Christian artist who either composed the song or made it popular. Her more recent experiences of Church music, specifically her appreciation and support for John Michael Talbot, allows for

commercial considerations that are acceptable because they (ironically) enable singer-songwriters to teach messages of humility, simplicity, and traditional spiritualism to an audience increasingly hungry for them – but prefers to hear these message on CDs.

## The political self

Rock ‘n’ roll music serves as a soundtrack for situations in which baby boomers perceive themselves as political actors. Rock ‘n’ roll can add both atmosphere and meaning to political events. For example, New York punk poet and singer Patti Smith performed a concert in Houston on March 28, 2003, right at the beginning of the war in Iraq. The concert was originally scheduled simply to support an exhibit of her art displayed at the Museum of Contemporary Arts. The audience was overwhelmingly composed of middle-aged people, dressed up in their jeans and long (hippie) skirts. Through conversations with numerous fans after the concert, it was clear that they *enjoyed* the concert. Patti Smith’s poetry and songs (*e.g.*, *People have the power*) gave them a relevant and identifiable venue for sharing their overwhelmingly negative *feelings* about the war.

Families also use rock ‘n’ roll to relay a sense of political history to their children. For example, every year on Memorial Day in Houston, various veterans’ organizations sponsor a concert and rally at the Miller Outdoor Theater. Most of the veterans present fought in the Vietnam and Gulf Wars, two wars for which rock ‘n’ roll served as the musical soundtrack. Most of the veterans bring their children to the event. Among all the messages and information available to the kids is the type of music popular during the war. A popular band regularly invited to perform is the Guess Who, whose “American Woman” was a major anthem among soldiers. I have observed fathers explaining the song to their teenaged and preteen children, who would otherwise view it as just another of dad’s old songs. The fathers explain that the song had different meanings for different men. For some, it reminded them of girlfriends back home who broke up with them during the war. For others, the title was enough to remind them of their faithful girlfriends back home. For still others, the song reminded them of the occasions when they were sitting around camp, smoking pot and listening to any American rock ‘n’ roll songs available as a way of bridging the many miles between them and home. In Houston, Juneteenth and Cinco de Mayo activities function much the same way for African-American and Hispanic families, respectively. In summary, rock ‘n’ roll music is vital to maintaining a sense of the political self because many baby boomers learned their politics – and how to be and feel political

– from Country Joe McDonald (and the Fish), Jimi Hendrix, and the Grateful Dead. Whereas the music of the 1960s and 70s may have helped liberate baby boomers from the restrictive and conservative culture(s) of their parents, this music – which now is likely to be labeled as “classic rock” – can help fans sustain a politically aware and even critical political self.

Musical inauthenticity can also serve as a powerful interactional tool in establishing one’s political acumen as correct and one’s political self as astute. If one’s political opponent appreciates bad, inappropriate – or inauthentic–music, the very persona of that opponent can be discredited, to his or her political disadvantage. A recent example of this phenomenon was the media coverage to a survey inquiring as to the 2008 U.S. presidential candidates’ musical preferences. One could almost predict the differences between Barack Obama’s and John McCain’s music (<http://www.obama-mccain.info/compare-obama-mccain-music.php>). Since McCain is a member of the baby boomer generation, there is no surprise in learning that his favorite style of music is 1950s and ’60s rock ’n’ roll. He is also a big fan of ABBA, and recently purchased a CD album, “The Very Best of the Beach Boys.” Again, predictably, Obama’s taste in music is much more eclectic, matching the tastes of the “Generation X” of which he is a member (e.g., Miles Davis, Bob Dylan, Stevie Wonder, Bach and the Fugees). Whereas Obama’s conservative critics lambasted him for pandering to his youthful and therefore unsophisticated supporters, McCain’s liberal critics used his choices in music as evidence that he is old and out of touch with today’s styles and values. The often heated discussion among baby boomers of candidates’ musical tastes and preferences should not be surprising. This is the generation of music fans that learned to attach their very basic sense of self to musical performers and styles as adolescents and young adults. I simply ask the middle-aged reader to recall those common debates – arguments? – in the dorm or in the club on: “who is better, the (pop-oriented) Beatles or the (hard rocker) Rolling Stones?”

The political value of rock ’n’ roll music is an international phenomenon. Baby boomers in Poland who were instrumental in the rise of Solidarity and the fall of communism in the later 1980s are a good example. The *intelligentia* – college-educated, urban and professional-level adults – grew up with rock ’n’ roll in post-war Poland. Heavy metal was a very popular style that was a voice of dissent while, ironically, supported by the ruling regime as a cultural safety valve for the masses. Bands like *Perfect* and *Republica*, with their rebellious heavy metal tomes, served as emotional and strategic links for potential revolutionaries during the 1970s and 80s. Yet, they

remain popular among baby boomers today as reminders of the great progress made and the hard work of building a successful democracy (Kotarba 2002c).

## **The old self**

In an earlier work (Kotarba, 1994b) I wrote about the importance popular music holds for parents as a feature of family interaction, parental control, and so forth. As the baby boomers I studied age, however, their sense of self shifts from parent to that of grandparent. Interestingly, these increasingly senior citizens typically maintain their interest in popular music, although not always in the songs with which they grew up. Being a good or at least competent grandparent in our culture involves doting on grandchildren. Popular music serves as a convenient mechanism for nurturing this kind of relationship. Music is a great gift at Christmas or birthdays. Tickets to concerts are a welcomed surprise for the teenagers in the family.

The example in question is the recent Hannah Montana concert tour in 2007-2008. Robert is a 61 year-old petroleum engineer in Houston. He has two children and four grandchildren, one of whom is a pretty little eleven year-old girl who lives close by. Like all her friends and many pre-teenagers around the country, Sally is a Hannah Montana fan. When tickets went on sale for the concert stop in Houston, Sally wanted to go more than anything else in life. Her parents refused to buy her tickets for, as Robert noted, “they couldn’t see spending a hundred dollars or so on a kid concert, and waiting in line for hours to boot.” Sally made her plea to Grandfather Bob, in terms of her opinion of what a great birthday present would be. Being the softy he is, Robert obliged, went on-line, and was very fortunate to be able to buy two tickets at retail – still at a cost of over \$100. Robert, a widower himself, actually took Sally to the concert. He told me that “Sally didn’t mind. She had her cell phone with her to talk to all her friends who also went to the concert, during the concert [...] it was like they all went together! She is way too young to go to something crazy like that by herself.” Similarly, Robert is a life-long Rolling Stones, Led Zepplin, Cream, and Elvis fan. The inauthenticity of Hannah Montana and her music – as forms of rock ‘n’ roll – do not bother Robert at all: “It’s pretty crappy stuff, but you know, these are just little kids. They do not know any better, what do you expect? It’s what they like and what they get on TV. If it makes my little girl smile, then it makes me smile.” Therefore, music perceived to be inauthentic does not necessarily mean that the self will find it useless or dysfunctional. Accepting another’s inauthentic music may

allow grandparents – and other adults if you will – achieve their ideal self of understanding, caring, and willing to sacrifice one’s taste for the good of another person.

## Conclusion

I have described several contemporary experiences of self to illustrate the ways popular music, in its rock ’n’ roll idiom, has remained a major cultural force in the everyday lives of mature fans. There are obviously other experiences. Furthermore, these experiences are not limited to fans. Rock ’n’ roll music is also a preeminent aspect of the musician’s self who performed rock ’n’ roll music many years ago, and who continues to perform. These musicians redirect their careers in directions more comfortable if not more profitable. Kinky Friedman comes to mind. He was a Texas-based band leader in the 1970s (The infamous Texas Jew Boys). He now performs acoustically in small clubs, while managing a very successful line of men’s clothing and authoring popular mystery novels. As time passes (Kotarba, 2002b), rock ’n’ roll provides resources for the aging self. In my interviews, I routinely hear respondents note how the recent deaths of middle-aged rock ’n’ roll artists, such as Robert Palmer and George Harrison, are disturbing because these afflictions may be more the result of aging than the excessive lifestyles associated with the premature deaths of artists such as Janice Joplin, Jimmy Hendrix, and Jim Morrison. It will be interesting, then, to see the various ways in which baby boomers draw upon the rock ’n’ roll idiom as they move well beyond middle age.

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Received Jan. 17, 2009  
Approved Apr. 29, 2009