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Sound, text and identity in Korn's 'Hey Daddy'

JONATHAN PIESLAK

Shephard Hall 78C, The City College of New York, CUNY, West 138th Street at Convent Avenue, New York, NY 10031, USA
E-mail: jpieslak@ccny.cuny.edu

Abstract

Most of the existing literature on metal approaches the subject from a sociological, anthropological or historical perspective, dedicating more attention to the surrounding musical (sub)cultures and their transformations than to the songs and music itself. This essay addresses this gap in recent metal scholarship by examining issues of sound, text and identity in one of the most influential and popular metal bands of the post-grunge era, Korn. I interpret possible meanings within 'Hey Daddy', a track from Issues (1999), based on the relationships among the music, both as pitch and sound/timbre, and the text. In addition, I explore different processes of identification, offering an assessment of identification in the genre of metal and challenges in respect to listener identity in 'Hey Daddy'.

Introduction

When we consider that trends in heavy metal music have received little attention in the scholarly literature since Robert Walser's pioneering book *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (1993), the need for further critical studies within this genre seems well overdue.[1] Changes in the metal 'scene' throughout the mid-1990s and into the twenty-first century, like most popular music forms, include the emergence of new bands and subgenres, and while a certain amount has been written about these developments, mostly intended for the commercial consuming audience or historical documentation, there are few resources that attempt a more scholarly engagement with textual readings of the songs. Most of the existing material on heavy metal approaches the subject from a sociological, anthropological or historical perspective, dedicating more attention to the surrounding musical (sub)culture and its transformations than to the songs and music itself (Weinstein 1991; Straw 1993; Wright 2000). Jeffery Jensen Arnettt's *Metalheads: Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Alienation* (1995) and Martin Popoff's *A Collector's Guide to Heavy Metal* (1997), for example, are a few of the many valuable works on heavy metal, but Arnett's study appears concerned with relating metal to facets of adolescent psychology, including depression and hyper-individualism of American teenagers, and Popoff's book is more referential than textually analytical.[2] Even such noted collections of essays as *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music* (Middleton 2000), *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays* (Everett 2000), and *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis* (Covach 1997) contain few,

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if any, pieces analysing what might be considered recent heavy metal music from a musico-poetic perspective. In the following essay, I attempt to begin addressing this gap in scholarship by examining issues of sound, text and identity in one of the most influential and popular metal bands of the post-grunge era, Korn. Before starting my analysis, however, I will briefly provide a context for the band and its music from which my investigation will then depart.

Along with a few notable contemporaries such as Limp Bizkit, Korn is largely credited with being one of the founding members of nü metal.[3] In typical metal fashion, lead singer Jonathan Davis detests this label or any possible categorisation of Korn's music, 'No one has come up with a really good fuckin' name to call this . . . there's been emo-core, heavy-hop, post metal, and nü metal. None of those really ring a bell' (Uhelszki 2000). While Davis prefers to call their music 'fusion', Korn is often cited as the quintessential nü metal band.

A logical question to address at this beginning phase might be: what is nü metal and how does it differ from 'heavy metal'? This may be a challenging if not impossible question to answer as research suggests that, presently, there could be well over forty different active categories of metal (trash, speed, death, progressive, porno, grind, power, dance, ambient, black, punk, symphonic, aluminum, nü, and so forth), each with overlapping features, but at the same time, many standing ideologically opposed to, or in direct conflict with, one another. Just as Allan Moore expresses difficulty in presenting an accurate definition of rock, 'we are always in the process of defining rock, and no formulation I shall offer can be considered definitive' (Moore 2001, p. 4), so too do we encounter similar challenges in describing metal. As mentioned above, the band members themselves appear to reject any attempts to classify their music according to resemblances with other bands (probably stemming from the fear that classification implies corporate-isation and a cookie-cutter formula that can be applied to the creation of their music – individuality and originality are highly prized in metal), and thus, they tend to position themselves in opposition to one another. Rob Zombie, for example, former lead singer of White Zombie – a nü metal band with a fantasy-horror movie inspired style – expressed his displeasure about the popularity of grunge in the early 1990s, 'All those bands were so bent on convincing the world they were sincere and unhappy; I think they sucked the life out of the music' (Kot 1999), or Christopher Thorn (Blind Melon's guitarist) once said of Dream Theatre guitarist John Petrucci's virtuosic performance on the 'Pull Me Under' single, 'that sort of guitar playing is just stupid' (Brown 1994, p. 97). In *Running with the Devil*, Walser points out that the animosities existing between bands and fans of different metal subgenres is quite strong, and Friesen and Epstein summarise the sorts of aesthetic tensions between subgenres:

> Thrash adherents, for example, tend to be quite antagonistic toward pop metal per se, and even more so to those who listen only to pop metal. Thrash adherents condescendingly refer to pop metal adherents as 'poseurs' – individuals who are associating with heavy metal primarily because of the deviance associated with the music. Thrash adherents feel that poseurs have not developed an appreciation for the true aesthetic of metal, and must therefore be accorded less prestige with the subculture. (Friesen and Epstein 1994, p. 13)[4]

Even though these seem to be obstacles in a search for a definition of nü metal, the subgenre does have some distinguishing features. Nü metal was a metal subgenre that emerged in the late 1990s, appropriately titled 'nü' since many fans and critics felt this music revived the larger categories of hard rock and metal during a time when grunge had overstayed its mainstream welcome. Just as grunge had replaced 'heavy

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metal' in the early-to-mid 1990s, nü metal overtook grunge's position of popularity towards the end of the millennium.[5] Nü metal, in short, can be characterised by aggressive, rap-influenced, angst-ridden and pitched yelling vocals, hip-hop style beats or drum samples, and heavily distorted, detuned guitars playing largely syncopated, riff-based music with a distinct absence of solos and overt displays of instrumental virtuosity.[6] If the guitar solo is 'virtually required by the conventions of the genre' in 'heavy metal' as Walser (1993, p. 5) suggests, then Korn and most nü metal bands are clearly not 'heavy metal' as very few guitar solos actually appear in their songs. Furthermore, nü metal incorporates elements of hip-hop and rap, perhaps the 'fusion' description Davis prefers, as a consistent and essential feature in the music; this integration becomes a distinguishing and defining aspect to the music and stands apart from many of the 'cameo' appearances on single songs or remakes that began in the 'heavy metal' era.[7] Korn's *Follow the Leader* (August 1998), for example, features separate collaborations with Ice Cube, Fred Durst, and Tre Hardson of Pharcyde, on three of the thirteen songs. While nü metal today may have come to include bands like Godsmack, Staind, and Taproot, who do not incorporate the rap/hip-hop elements as strongly, the majority of bands (Linkin Park, Incubus) and many of the earlier, founding bands (Korn, Limp Bizkit) have overtly embraced a synthesis of these styles.

Nü metal does, however, present certain aspects that strongly connect it to the 'heavy metal' tradition. It still relies heavily on the distorted guitar power chord as the basic structural unit of pitch and most of the songs are in common (4/4) time. In addition, the note structure largely revolves around Dorian, Aeolian or Phrygian modalities, and the vocal articulation, even though it contains an immense vocal strain and yelling at times, still reveals aspects of pitch – an important differentiation from many contemporary death/trash bands (I like to call this pitched yelling 'scream-stimme'). This brief introduction is certainly not comprehensive, and there are many sources that trace the development of 'heavy metal' through grunge and up to nü metal, providing a more detailed historical and sociological examination than the one presented here (see Furman 2000; Small 2000; McIver 2002). It does, however, touch upon many of nü metal's salient, defining features, and is intended to provide a brief historical context for my forthcoming textual analysis.

Korn and 'Hey Daddy'

If Nirvana's *Nevermind* (1991) was the timeless grunge album that 'started it all', then one of the seminal releases to define the 'nü' style was Korn's third album, *Follow the Leader* (1998). This album seemed to usher in a new era of metal music popularity as it debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard charts, remained on the Top 100 for over twenty-eight weeks, and eventually reached triple platinum. We might call the two enormously popular singles from this album a pair of nü metal 'classics': 'Got the Life' which has received almost continuous radio airplay to this day, and 'Freak on a Leash', which won two MTV Video Music Awards in 1999. The group's next album, *Issues*, released in November of 1999, proved to be even more successful than its predecessor; it debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard charts, selling over 575,000 copies in its first week, and was accompanied by an MTV release party special and the band's appearance on an episode of the animated series *South Park*. Their mainstream popularity has endured well into the twenty-first century with the band's most recent album, a Greatest Hits compilation of tracks written over the last ten years.

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While Korn's songs have received some degree of attention, mostly through historical and sociological analysis or guitar and bass tab transcription, one aspect of this music that remains largely unexamined is the relationship between sound, text and meaning. Certainly, there is a significant amount of Internet speculation by fans on the meaning of songs, but nothing that moves towards a more critical understanding of how meaning might be reflected by the music. I will interpret possible meanings within 'Hey Daddy', a track from *Issues* (1999), based on relationships between the music, both as pitch and sound, and the text. This analysis will also draw on lyrics and images from previous Korn albums and songs that seem to provide a valuable context through which meaning might be read in 'Hey Daddy'. My analytical perspective adopts aspects of the theoretical frameworks and practical application of methods developed in works by Walser (1993), Susan Fast (2000, 2001), David Brackett (2000), Allan Moore (2001) and others. This is not to say, however, that I am prioritising this point of view – one that has been developed and employed widely in the field of popular music scholarship – over others. The historical relationship, for example, between nü-metal and 'heavy metal', and particularly the relationship to the stylistic features of 'heavy metal' presented in Walser's *Running with the Devil*, is certainly worth exploring in far greater detail than I have presented. In addition, the musical integration of rap and hip-hop elements within Korn and nü-metal in general could be examined from a socio-cultural point of view as both heavy metal and rap were targets of censorship groups like the PMRC for over a decade. Many authors share my concern that a singular, myopic approach to popular music may privilege certain aspects of the music at the expense of others, 'this is not to say that I cast my vote for ''notes'' over timbre in pop and rock music, but rather that, claiming both (as well as ''states of mind'', and more), I reject the entire either/or proposition' (Hubbs 2000, p. 22). I tend to agree with Bruno Nettl 'that each culture is thus likely – perhaps certain – to have its own musicology' (Nettl 1999, p. 289) and, for me, many of the different subgenres of metal constitute their own different 'culture'. The attempt to prioritise a singular methodological perspective ('musicological', social, or otherwise) in respect to metal analysis seems to ignore the idiosyncratic details that different subgenres demand. Instead, I would like to situate my analysis as one of many worthwhile perspectives that I believe might be taken of this music.

Korn formed in Bakersfield, California in the early 1990s and singer Jonathan Davis's disturbing personal history has been an important factor within his lyrics, which have reflected many of his own experiences or his witnessing of horrific events (Yates 2000). Prior to joining the band, Davis worked as an assistant coroner in the Coroner's department of Kern County, California, having received a degree from San Francisco's School of Mortuary Science. His lyrics often seem to have focused on tragedies that fell upon children, which he either witnessed during his work in the Coroner's Department or experienced in his childhood. The name Korn, in fact, is derived from a combination of Kern county and coroner – replace the 'e' in Kern with the 'o' from coroner, and the band consistently spells Korn with a backward 'r' to depict a child's reversed character.

From the first self-titled album, horrific events involving children appear to be a central focus. Notice the album cover presented in Figure 1, which shows a young girl on a swing looking up at an imposing, presumably male figure with its shadow revealing the outline of hooks or clamps in place of hands. On the back cover, the girl is missing from the swing and the lower right-hand corner is covered with large, boot-like imprints in the sand. The liner notes contain no song lyrics except for a few

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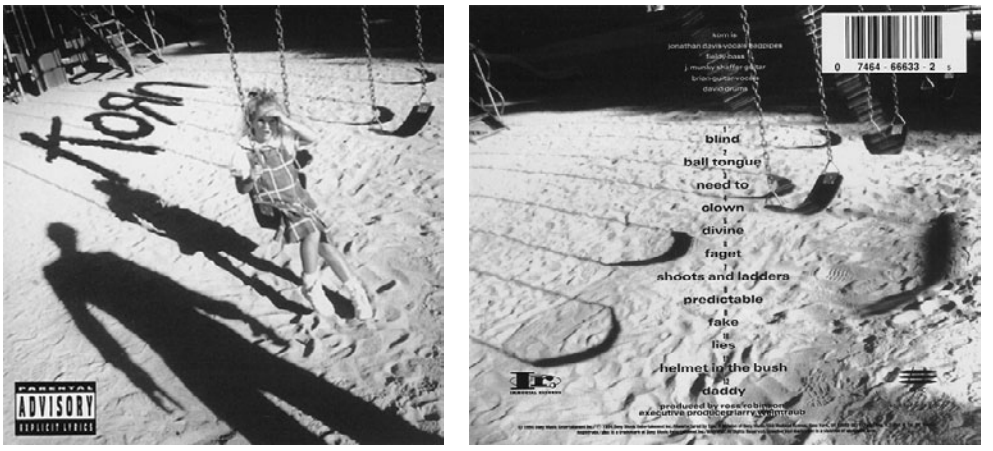


Figure 1. Korn, Korn *(1994), album cover and back cover.*

phrases written in a child-like style over the images of porn magazines, 'nursery rhymes are said, verses in my head, into my childhood they're spoon fed, hidden violence revealed, darkness that seems real, look at the pages that cause all this evil'.

A brief consideration of the track, 'Daddy', from this album will help situate my forthcoming analysis of 'Hey Daddy', (five years separate the two songs). The meaning behind the lyrics of 'Daddy', presented in Figure 2, has been the source of much controversy. While many fans interpret the song to be about Davis's father sexually abusing him as a child, the singer clarifies the issue:

> People think 'Daddy' was written because my dad fucked me up the ass, but that's not what the song's about. It wasn't about my dad or my mom. When I was a kid, I was being abused by someone else and I went to my parents and told them about it. They thought I was lying and joking around, so they never did shit about it. They didn't believe it was happening to their son. (Denise 2005)

Davis's lyrics powerfully recount this experience over the duration of the track, which ends with Davis sobbing and cursing uncontrollably over the music. The emotional impact of this music and lyrics has been so strong that the band has only performed 'Daddy' live on two occasions; both times the show had to be stopped due to Davis's uncontrollable weeping.

Since the release of this album in 1994, the themes of childhood tragedy and horror, particularly as related to sexual abuse and death, have consistently played an important role in the images that have accompanied Korn albums and their music. The cover to *Follow the Leader*, Figure 3, depicts a young girl taking her last step of hopscotch off of a cliff, while an almost endless crowd of children wait their turn to play 'follow the leader'. The observer is also cast in a child-like perspective through the animated portrayal of this scene. Many of the songs from *Follow the Leader* address issues of childhood sexual abuse, including the song 'Pretty', which was written about a dead infant, sexually abused by her father, who was brought to the mortuary where Davis was working.[8]

These intensely personal and disturbing topics are prevalent within Korn's imagery and words, and I would now like to address how this affective content might be viewed as being expressed in the music, using the song 'Hey Daddy' (*Issues*, 1999) as an example. To begin, the title references the previously mentioned 'Daddy', and

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Mother please forgive me, I just had to get out all my pain and suffering

Now that I am done, remember I will always love you, I'm your son

Little child, looking pretty, come out and play, I'll be your daddy

Innocent child, looking so sweet, a rape in my eyes and on your flesh I'll eat

You've raped! I feel dirty. It hurt! As a child

Tied down! That's a good boy. And fucked your own child

I scream! No one hears me. It hurt! I'm not a liar

My God! Saw you watching. Mommy why? Your own child

It's alright

I didn't touch you there, Mama said she didn't care

I didn't touch you there, that's why Moma stopped and stared

(Cursing and weeping…)

Figure 2. Korn, 'Daddy' (Korn, *1994), lyrics (Jonathan Davis).*

the lyrics, printed in Figure 4, seem to confirm a similarity in textual meaning as certain phrases from 'Daddy', like 'tied down', 'I scream! No one hears me', 'your flesh I'll eat', and 'I just had to get out all of my pain and suffering', resurface in 'Hey Daddy', in a slightly varied form: 'gagged and bound', 'all it does is scream and shout', 'my soul they're eating', and 'this thing inside me wants to get out'. A complete reading of the text of 'Hey Daddy' presents the recollection of the narrator of sexual and physical abuse by his or her father, 'let me see, all my life has been taken, this demon haunts me, they're hating, help me, you fuck me up, I'm gagged and bound . . .'.

The compositional decisions of performance, timbre and pitch in musical elements of the song – guitars, bass, drums and voice – play important roles in symbolising this affective picture and are crucial to the depiction of the meaning of the text. The gurgled wah-wah (B–C) of the guitar, for example, on the left side of the stereo field that opens the track and is sustained throughout the verses, suggests a child's muffled cries and noises during periods of 'gagged and bound' abuse – each repetition of this riff is varied somewhat in terms of the wah-wah and gurgle effect, making it

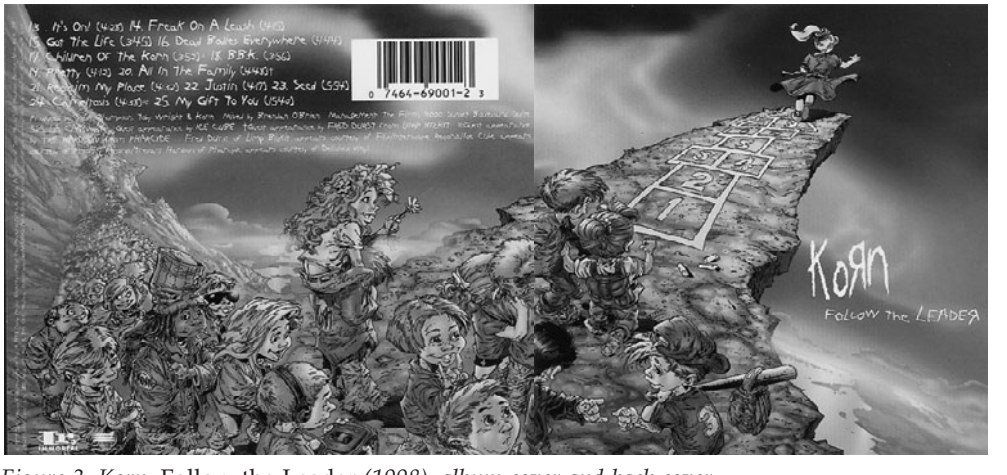


Figure 3. Korn, Follow the Leader *(1998), album cover and back cover.*

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Verse 1

Let me see (let me see), all my life has been (taken) taken

This demon (haunts me) haunts me, they're hating (help me), help me

Chorus

You fuck me up, I'm gagged and bound

You pick me up, when I am down

I cannot live without them, I do not live without them

Verse 2

Hey Daddy (Daddy), they are taking me away by biting

Facing me (what soul), my soul, they're eating (help me), please help me

(Chorus)

Bridge

They say this thing inside me wants to get out

All it does is scream and shout, I'm trying not to let them out

They tell me to hurt myself, but I'm not going to listen

(Chorus)

Hey Daddy

They are taking me, this demon (waiting)

Figure 4. Korn, 'Hey Daddy' (Issues*, 1999), lyrics (Jonathan Davis), whispers are indicated in parentheses.*

slightly more personal in its expression than if a few measures had been looped. Meanwhile, the second guitar, on the right side of the stereo field, repeats (B–D sharp–D natural–C) through a telephone-like EQ setting in counterpoint to the vocal melody. In this way, the frequency field of this guitar is itself 'gagged and bound', and the articulation of this passage includes a high degree of whammy bar or pitch bend inflection, particularly at the end of these repetitions, which gives the pitches an instability that might imply the instability or frailty of the narrator's emotional state. Furthermore, both guitars, during the verses, play higher in their register compared to the heavy distortion riff of the chorus sections (played on the low B string of guitarist James Schaffer and former guitarist Brian Welch's Ibanez Rg7 guitars), which could be interpreted to represent the release of anger as the narrator becomes overwhelmed with emotion. Notice also that the guitar on the right side of the stereo field plays a tremolo (B–D sharp–D natural–C) passage during the choruses symbolising the instability, fear, and almost crying of the narrator.

The bass timbre and articulation also operate in much the same way as the guitars in terms of reflecting the expressive content of the lyrics. The verse sections are dominated by a smooth, legato-style finger playing with very little tone gain or high-end EQ, and depict the sleaze of the father during the episodes of abuse through an allusion to a stereotyped style of porn-movie music.[9] This articulation and timbre sharply contrasts bassist Reginald Arvizu's percussive slap technique during the choruses, which supports the rage and emotional release of the narrator. In terms of the drums, the consistent eighth-note pulse of the shaker that persists throughout the verses is a childhood reference to a rattle that is sometimes given to infants or very young children. Also, the cymbal hits occurring on the downbeats of each four-bar

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Table. Summary of sound as reflecting the affective content of the text in 'Hey Daddy'.
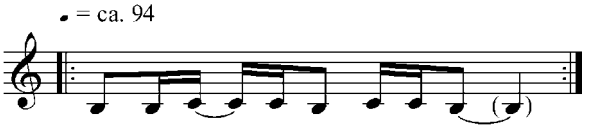
Instrument	Sound/Timbre	Interpretation
Guitar (verses, left)	Gurgled wah-wah	Child's muffled cries
Guitar (verses, right)	'Telephone' EQ, pitch bend	'Bound' EQ, emotional instability
Guitar (chorus, right)	Tremolo	Instability, fear
Guitar (chorus, center)	Heavy distortion	Release of anger
Bass	Smooth, legato articulation	Sleaze, porn-movie music allusion
	Percussive/slap technique	Release of anger
Drums	Shaker	Child reference
	Cymbals dampened	'Gagged' abuse
	Open hi-hat	Emotional release
Voice	Falsetto, vibrato	Child reference
	Whispers	Child's thoughts
	Yelling (scream-stimme) articulation	Emotional release

hypermeasure are immediately dampened or cut off through digital volume control, while the hi-hat is open during the choruses. The 'gagged' cymbal hits are transformed into the outbursts of the 'open' hi-hat as we are taken from the 'bound', abusive world into the release of emotional anger. The voice articulation supports the nature of these interpretations with the falsetto and vibrato being child-like in their expression. The narrator appears to cast him or herself in a child-like state during the verses, which situates the character of the child within the framework of the aforementioned sleaze, porn-movie music allusion of the bass. The whispers that pan within the stereo field represent the thoughts or voices circling in the child's head, and the drastic change to the pitched yelling during the chorus ('scream-stimme') sustains the reading of these sections as portraying the release of anger by the narrator. Thus, there appear to be two contrasting worlds in this song: one of recollection in the verses and bridge, possibly depicting episodes of sexual abuse by the narrator's father, and one of intense emotional release and anger in the choruses; the Table presents a summary of the relationships I have outlined between sound and meaning. Timbre and sound, however, are not the only aspects of 'Hey Daddy' that reflect the affective content of the lyrics.
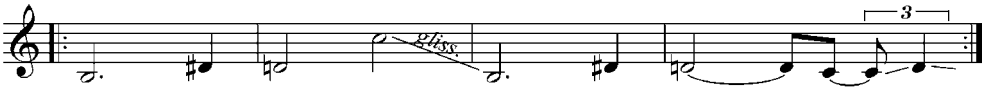
With the exception of the bridge that alternates between A and its chromatic upper neighbour B flat, the entire song is tonally centred on B with an interval configuration implying a phrygian subset (B, C, D, E, F sharp, A) or octatonic subset (B, C, D, D sharp, F sharp, A) in the guitars and voice.[10] A conflict seems to be created between the D sharp clashing with the D natural and C. This juxtaposition can be interpreted to reveal the innocence of the child (major third), appropriately emphasised by the voice, who is subjected to abuse (minor second and third) or one could conceive of this melodic/scalar conflict as the struggle between the child, represented by the B–D sharp major third, and the abusive father, represented by the B–D natural minor third. The lack of scalar or modal clarity in relation to the third is rare within nü metal, which almost always tends to gravitate towards the minor third. Another important aspect to the pitch organisation of this song is the bass line during the verses. While the voice and guitars generally repeat their (relatively-speaking) straightforward parts, the bass repeats only a few measures during the first or second verses, and even though an emphasis is placed upon a (B–C [8 va]–F sharp) contour as

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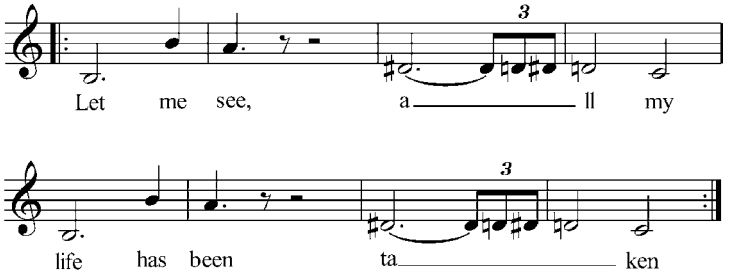
tonic (I) and dominant (V [flat 5]), within this framework, the bass articulates every pitch of the total chromatic. If we extend the nature of the sonic and timbre metaphors developed above, the guitars and voice, which have depicted the child, seem relatively 'bound' in their pitch content: the left guitar plays only B and C (Example 1), the right guitar repeats (B–D sharp–D natural–C) (Example 2), and the voice sings (B–B [8 va]–A, D sharp–D natural–C) (Example 3). At the same time though, the bass is much freer in its pitch selection and repetitions as the excerpt in Example 4 illustrates. This underscores the idea that, during the verses, the bass in terms of timbre, articulation and pitch possibly symbolises the sexually abusive father, while the guitars and voice embody the character of the child.



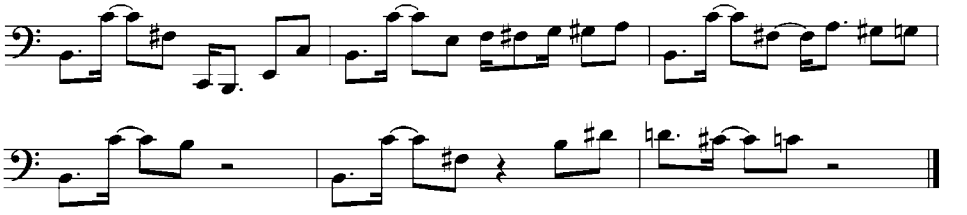
Example 1. 'Hey Daddy': guitar, verses, left side of the stereo field.



Example 2. 'Hey Daddy': guitar, verses, right side of the stereo field.



Example 3. 'Hey Daddy': vocal line, verses.



Example 4. 'Hey Daddy': bass excerpt, verses (0:23–0:38).

I realise that many of the features I relate to the meaning of the song, like the guitar's wah-wah, the slinky bass, the 'gagged' cymbal hits, are themselves not signifiers of the specific meaning I am reading, but must be understood through the interpretative context of this song – a wah-wah is not the same for Funkadelic as it might be for Korn in terms of creating a sound that reflects an affective picture, and we may want to think of these features in terms of what Richard Middleton has called

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'style codes' (Middleton 1990, p. 182). In this way, sound or timbre is not ascribed a definitive meaning or expression which can be interpreted in every instance, but must be understood within a larger contextual framework and, in the case of 'Hey Daddy', its relationship to other Korn tracks, specifically 'Daddy', the images presented on previous albums, and the lyrics. To illustrate this point, we might consider that when Jonathan Davis, for example, sings 'come dance with me' on 'Got the Life', it seems to mean a very different thing than when Jennifer Lopez or Orleans sings those words. Thus, I want to emphasise that my analysis is largely specific for the context I have tried to develop for interpreting 'Hey Daddy'.

Identity and 'Hey Daddy'

There is little question that Korn's music is and has been enormously popular over the last decade.[11] Cultural critic John Fiske, in *Television Culture: Popular Pleasures and Politics*, believes that television programmes need to be 'polysemic' in order to qualify as being truly popular (Fiske 1987, p. 267). In other words, a variety of different interpretations must be open to the observer and 'those multiplicities of possible meanings must be negotiable, or appropriable' (Taylor 2000, p. 166). This suggests that Korn's consuming audience or fan base has found a variety of different ways in which they identify with aspects of their songs. In the following section, I would like to explore some of these different ways of identification, offering an introductory assessment of identification in metal, and to propose what I believe are challenges in respect to listener identity in 'Hey Daddy'.

Identity is certainly a tricky issue; one that appears to mean different things to different people. In perhaps the most comprehensive examination of the concept of 'identity', Brubaker and Cooper open their study by suggesting that '''identity'' is too ambiguous, too torn between ''hard'' and ''soft'' meanings, essentialist connotations and constructivist qualifiers, to serve well the demands of social analysis' (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, p. 2). They show how the term has been used in widely varying ways within scholarship depending on the context and purposes of individual authors whose 'usages are not simply heterogeneous; they point in sharply differing directions' (*ibid*., p. 8). While they demonstrate, among others, five contrasting ways in which scholarship has enacted the concept of identity, most studies addressing issues of identity in popular and metal music seem to deal with it in terms of 'identitarian', 'instrumentalist' and 'collective' theorising, contained in Brubaker and Cooper's first and second categories:

> For identitarian theorizing, it means position in a multidimensional space defined by *particularistic categorical attributes* (race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation). For instrumentalist theorizing, it means position in a *universalistically conceived social structure* (for example, position in the market, the occupational structure or the mode of production). Understood as a specifically collective phenomenon, 'identity' denotes a fundamental and consequential *sameness* among members of a group or category. (*ibid*., p. 7)

Much of the more sociologically and politically motivated literature operates in these ways (Weinstein 1991; Stokes 1994; Ballantine 2004), situating a listener's association with a particular musical style within an ethnic, gender, or larger socio-cultural framework. My intention, however, is to explore identity on the more immediate level of initial self interest, which makes the larger processes of socio-cultural examination possible. From this perspective, identity is how a listener relates to music on a

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personal level, and focuses on the features of the music that he or she finds appealing (Walser 1993, pp. 18–19; Harrell 1994; Baulch 2003, p. 204), apart from any 'identitarian', 'instrumentalist' and 'collective' theorising.[12]

Scholars seem to have differing opinions when it comes to determining relationships of audience identification (as I am using it) in metal music. Walser's research, for example, indicates that 'fans overwhelmingly reject the categories of the pissed off' (Walser 1993, p. 19) when asked to agree or disagree with certain statements, but at the same time, Jack Harrell thinks that 'Death metal rockers say that the appeal of their music is its anger' (Harrell 1994, p. 97). While these differences may speak to the relative complexity of the issue of listener identification in metal (and I will not claim to have definitively sorted these out by the end of this discussion), many metal scholars seem to agree that the sound and energy of the music are the most fundamental and immediate aspects with which metal listeners identify (Roccor 2000, p. 84). Even considering the raging tensions that often exist among different subgenres, the musical experience itself is of primal importance, so much so that ideological distinctions between bands can be dismissed through the affect of the music alone:

> Stryper, for example, an explicitly evangelical Christian group with lyrics that support such a belief system, opened for bands such as Anthrax on tour. To insiders, however, this is most plausible. 'What counts' said one insider (in reference to Stryper) 'is that they can thrash it out'. (Friesen and Epstein 1994, p. 7)

This may mean that the text/lyrics are of secondary significance for some fans who seem to prize certain features of the music regardless of the actual words, but one must look at this distinction a little more critically because the association with the music itself is manifested in different ways. Friesen and Epstein point out that for pop metal, which would include nü metal, 'an important musical aesthetic is commonly referred to as a ''hook''' (*ibid*., p. 10). Meanwhile, within 'progressive rock', the 'emphasis is placed on complex changes in tempo, key selection, key changes, dynamics, style, and chord progressions which require more skill to perform than pop metal' (*ibid*., p. 10). While the experience of the music seems to be prioritised over the words as the most apparent form of identification for most metal fans, they appear to navigate this process of identification in different ways. Some fans of pop metal and nü metal, for example, find the 'hook' to be the most appealing aspect of this music, suggesting that the timbre and sound or the overall essence of the music might be the most significant for them, but for fans of progressive metal or so-called 'math metal' bands, they tend to find the musical performance and pitch/rhythmic complexity to be the most engaging. A revealing source of information that supports this idea is the reviews written by fans on www.amazon.com. Consider the following two reviews of Korn's *Issues*:

> The album comes out more polished, and much more eerie and creepy. From start to finish, the album never loses its dark, eerie feeling. I don't care what you say . . . nothing sounds like this album. All those copycat nu-metal bands will never have anything on this album. ('JP' 2005)

> They have their good moments and some proficient ensemble playing, but overall I don't find them to be extremely brilliant instrumentally, musically, or in terms of songwriting. They're just proficient. I don't consider weird little sounds and effects during verses followed by 2–3 power chords to be genius. And they're definitely not 'inventing metal'. Please. ('Ockhams razor' 2000)

The first reviewer clearly finds value in the sound and timbre of the music, 'the album never loses its dark, eerie feeling . . . nothing sounds like this album', but the second

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reviewer criticises the music for its lack of musical and instrumental brilliance, which implies that he or she prioritises these facets of the music over the sound or timbre alone. For some fans, it is not so much how it sounds, but what is played, and many times advocates of performance and notes will condescendingly look down upon pop metal adherents because pop metal does not aspire to any cultivated form of musical influence.[13] Thus, fan identification within metal appears to be shaped at its most rudimentary and 'popular' level around the music, but in two differing aspects – sound/timbre or performance/note complexity.
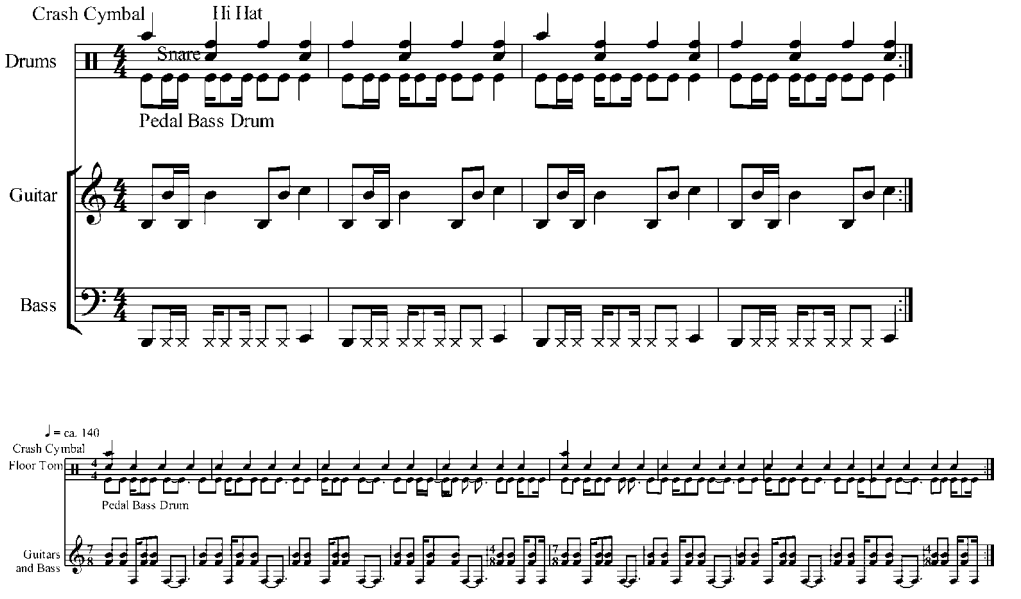
I feel that this has been a stumbling block for metal analysis that attempts to make a case for analysing and prioritising one of these aspects of the music over another. Given the idea that fans identify with this music in different ways, it may seem inappropriate to attempt to privilege one analytical perspective (sound/timbre or formal complexity) as the most suitable approach for all metal music. If we consider the present analysis, for example, the pitch structure of 'Hey Daddy' does present some intriguing features in terms of the octatonic scale subset in the vocal part and the chromatic bass line, but this is an exceptional case rather than the norm. In terms of pitch, Korn and nü metal tends to be based on a single tonal centre (Dorian, Aeolian or Phrygian modalities) with repeated vocal lines that revolve around a few notes within a relatively limited range. Meanwhile, the rhythm and metre components of the music largely comprise syncopated, power chord riffs in common time. The music itself presents a relatively straightforward structure, and this may explain why scholars do not dedicate a significant amount of time to formal analysis – Moore believes that 'heavy metal is the most formulaic of rock styles' (Moore 2001, p. 150). Likewise, Walser, in *Running with the Devil*, devotes less than two complete pages to the concept of rhythm in his analysis of the formal features of the music, and even though he is not addressing nü metal specifically, one could contend that Korn's music, with its distinct absence of guitar solos, is even less interesting from this perspective. In fact, the musical aspects of nü metal are so seemingly conventional that fans of progressive/math metal openly mock the music and its surrounding subculture by constructing 'how to' lists for success in nü metal that always emphasise a lack of musical skill.[14] When considering Korn's music then, the most interesting features may not lie in the notes, and more importantly, fans do not identify with the music based on its formal complexity, but rather, with its sound, timbre and energy.

On the other hand, this would certainly not be the case if we were to analyse music by, for example, the Swedish band, Meshuggah, which falls under the larger category of metal, but seems to be driven by issues of formal complexity. Meshuggah (Yiddish for 'crazy') is considered to be one of the leading bands of the progressive/math metal scene, and their fans' process of identification revolves significantly around the sophisticated rhythmic and metric structure of their music. One of the most popular links, for example, on Meshuggah's website is 'Polymetrics and Polyrhythms: The science of insane rhythms', in which fans discuss issues of metre and rhythm in the music. Transcriptions and tabs are often meticulously scrutinised in these postings as admirers of the music work in a notationally centric way towards an accurate score rendering of different songs – the ability to decipher musical complexities is often met with great admiration. Fan reviews of their recent album 'I' refer to it as 'a new standard for intelligent, complex metal', with an 'impeccable sense of timing – and I don't mean their rhythmic craftiness. They seem to have Bartok's sense of how a musical piece should unfold' (www.amazon.com). This is not to deny the idea that listeners are attracted to the sounds or timbres of the music; however, the pitches and

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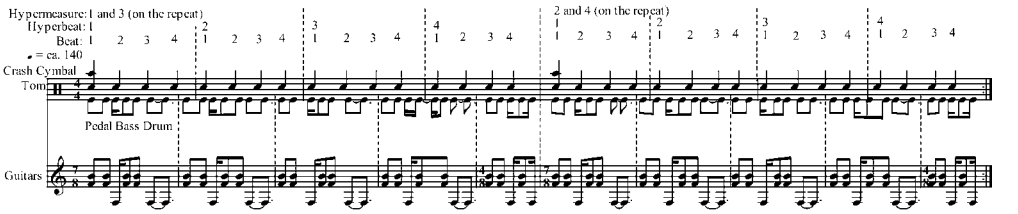
rhythms (formal aspects of the music) appear to carry significant meaning for the fans of progressive/math metal, and in many cases, this is one of the most important features through which they not only identify with the music, but distinguish themselves from other metal subgenres.

As a brief example, consider the opening riff to Meshuggah's 'Straws Pulled at Random' (*Nothing*, 2002) with the chorus riff to Korn's 'Hey Daddy', shown in Example 5. Unlike the syncopated riff in common time that characterises this passage from 'Hey Daddy', Meshuggah utilises an integration of odd time signatures, mixed or changing metre, and metric superimposition. The opening riff (0:00–0:28) of 'Straws Pulled at Random' demonstrates how the band tends to combine these devices. The guitars and bass riff can be grouped into four repetitions of measures in 7/8, followed by a measure in 4/8. The entire passage is then repeated four times. One of the interesting aspects of this music – a technique employed widely in Meshuggah songs – is a metric superimposition created by the cymbals, or in this case the floor tom. While the pedal bass (kick) drum reinforces the guitar and bass rhythms, the floor tom maintains a consistent quarter-note pulse, complemented by crash cymbal hits on what would be beat one of every four-bar hypermeasure. Example 6 illustrates how the floor tom and crash cymbal can be interpreted in 4/4 time and, in fact, reveal a larger, prototypical, hypermetric phrase rhythm implying four, four-bar hypermeasures. The point here is that these differences in the rhythmic and metric attributes of the music play a significant role in the way in which Meshuggah fans identify with the music. The surrounding subculture which supports this music is, from an identification perspective, largely concerned with virtuosity and the formal aspects of the music beyond just the sound and timbre, and they attempt to distinguish themselves through their ability to appreciate musical complexities. In this way, formal analysis plays a significant role not only in the composition of the Meshuggah's music, but operates as a key component in the process of fan identification.



Example 5. Korn, 'Hey Daddy', chorus riff; Meshuggah, 'Straws Pulled at Random', (0:00–0:28), Nothing *(2002).*

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Example 6. Meshuggah, 'Straws Pulled at Random', (0:00–0:28), Nothing *(2002), phrase rhythm.*

This comparison between Korn and Meshuggah is intended to illustrate that the subgenres that constitute metal may be too widely varied and, in certain cases, too overtly opposed to one another to offer the possibility that a single perspective may provide the most appropriate and insightful analysis in all instances. The attempt to prioritise a methodology (formalist, social or otherwise) with respect to the analysis of this music seems to ignore the idiosyncratic details that different styles demand. If, as Henry Louis Gates believes, 'each tradition, at least implicitly, contains within it an argument for how it can be read', then it would be difficult to understand how a study of different bands like Korn and Meshuggah would benefit from the same degree and type of 'formalist' or sociological analysis at the expense and exclusion of others (Gates 1998, pp. xix–xx). In the case of Meshuggah, the complexity of the music is far more critical in the process of fan identification and plays a significant role in shaping the surrounding subculture, but with respect to Korn, the sounds and timbres, not the 'notes', provide the foundation for listener identity.

While this discussion supports the idea that certain musical features, like sound/timbre or formal complexity, are of primary importance to metal fans, this does not mean that Korn's audience, or the metal audience as a whole, is unaware of the textual content or elements of meaning in the words to songs. Quite the contrary, Korn fans in particular readily identify with the words and phrases of a song, and this becomes immediately apparent at any Korn concert as Jonathan Davis consistently holds the microphone over the crowd, allowing them to sing the refrain to one of Korn's signature opening songs, 'Blind'. Throughout their career, Korn have emphasised that their music is for and 'about the kids' who make up their fan base and they have gone to considerable efforts to 'stay connected' to their fans (Uhelszki 2000). In one such effort, they announced an open competition in conjunction with MTV, giving any fan the opportunity to design the cover for *Issues*. Ultimately, four finalists were chosen with a limited edition of each cover going into circulation. From these covers, presented in Figure 5, the audience also seems to be acutely aware of many of the aforementioned themes of childhood sexual and physical abuse which constitute a consistent underlying theme within Davis's lyrics. Notice that all four album covers for *Issues* in some way depict or reference childhood, but in a more tragic way that allies itself with many of the topics addressed in Davis's words: the discarded, decaying doll (upper left corner); the child sleeping with stuffed animals with an imposing shadow looming in the background (upper right corner); the chalk outlines of children and the memorial candles (lower left corner); and the band represented as cartoon images in straightjackets and shackles (lower right corner). Many members of Korn's listening audience appear aware, to a significant degree, of the affective picture presented in the song's lyrics.

But knowing the intensely personal nature of the meaning behind the words, a challenging question seems to arise from this discussion: how do we engage a song

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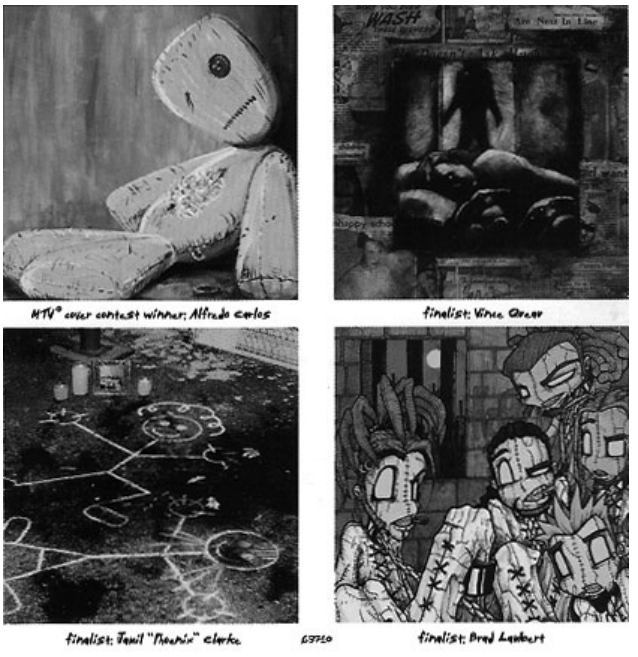


Figure 5. Korn, Issues, *album covers.*

like 'Hey Daddy' as listeners? Personally, I found myself in a conflicted position of identification because my initial interest in this song was that I liked the music; the verses have a slinky, sensual feel that I found alluring and irresistible, while the chorus had a great 'hook' and syncopated metal groove. Well before I investigated any possible meaning behind the lyrics, or examined how that meaning might be manifested in the sound and pitch content of the track, I found the song attractive in many ways – we might say that I initially identified with the song on a sound and energy level. But now, after exploring the possible meaning behind the words, I feel somewhat uneasy about enjoying it. By finding pleasure in the music of the verses, am I identifying with the molester? If one considers the music during these sections to reflect the pleasure that might be experienced by the sexually abusive father, and I, too, as a listener, experience this music in an enjoyable way, with whom am I identifying in 'Hey Daddy'? From another point of view, the idea that the bass line during the verses is an allusion to a stereotyped style of porn-movie music is discomforting because if we accept this allusion, typically associated with sexual arousal, and we find an allure to this aspect of the music, is our enjoyment an arousal associated with that of the molester?

This may be moving too far towards a personal, meta-identification perspective, but I think it is worth considering briefly because 'Hey Daddy' seems to challenge some of the presuppositions that scholars like Fiske would contend make this music popular. If the majority of listeners cannot relate to the experience of sexual abuse or of being a molester, then an empathetic relation to the words (one would hope) is not likely to be possible for fans. In terms of the meaning of the track, can we only feel sympathy for the narrator? Many fans have expressed their sympathy regarding Davis's abuse, but in this case, I have a difficult time describing the overall affect of the music as evoking feelings of sympathy, or our sympathy must only exist on a very

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basic level of mutual anger release. When we consider that fans of nü metal who engage the lyrics typically do so because the words express a feeling, emotion or situation that is directly applicable or relatable to their own lives, 'Hey Daddy' seems to fall outside of this possible form of identification. By way of comparison, Limp Bizkit's breakout single 'Nookie' (*Significant Other*, 1999) seems to operate in a relatively straightforward way. The song describes the plight of a young man whose girlfriend cheats on him and he takes her back because he desires physical intimacy; he knowingly does something foolish due to the urges of his libido – a subject most adolescents and maybe even adults can probably relate to on some level directly or indirectly. In terms of 'Hey Daddy' though, are we limited to enjoying the song on a purely sound and energy level without regard to the subject matter or any real identification with the words?

My intention with this short *sojourn* into a more personal analysis of identification is to invite the considerable debate that questions like these seem to raise; they are certainly valuable and challenging topics for discussion when examining 'Hey Daddy'. While I realise that my unease about enjoying the verses and the issue of with whom I am identifying may be interpreted in dramatically different, if not opposite, ways for other listeners, I have presented it with the intention of revealing another possible way of considering identity when analysing this track, and a way in which 'Hey Daddy' may challenge conventional norms of identification in metal music.

My analysis begins to fill an existing gap in recent metal scholarship by adopting a musico-poetic perspective that has been largely ignored by previous works, which tend to focus on sociological, anthropological or historical aspects of this music. I have tried to show how a relationship between sound and pitch might reflect aspects of the meaning behind the lyrics, which for Korn seem to deal with dark and disturbing subject matter. In addition, I have suggested ways in which we can understand the process of identification within nü metal and how that process relates to other metal subgenres, specifically progressive or math metal. There is much more that could and should be said about this song, band, and nü metal in general, but I hope my essay has contributed to a scholarly interest in nü metal and offered a critical framework for reading elements of sound, text and identity in this music.

Endnotes

1. I am especially grateful to Walter Everett for his insightful comments on drafts of this article.
2. Also worthy of note are: Wicke (1990), Stuessy (1999), Szatmary (2000), Fiske (2001), Frith (2001), McIver (2002), Crampton (2003) and Brackett (2005). This list is by no means comprehensive and cites only a few, but nonetheless important, sources.
3. The umlaut over the u (ü) is an historical metal reference, alluding to such bands as Motörhead and Mötley Crüe. *New metal* and *nu metal* are often used interchangeably, generally referring to the same music.
4. See Walser (1993, p. 5). All one has to do is enter a heavy metal Internet chat room to discover the passions with which fans defend their subgenre preferences and discredit others.
5. 'Heavy metal' is sometimes used to refer to popular metal bands of the 1970s and 1980s, like those mentioned in Walser (1993), *not* a broader category within which nü metal would be included.
6. Korn's detuned Ibanez Rg7 guitars (a seven string guitar with a low B string detuned to A) also provide a distinctive depth to the instrumental range of their songs.
7. It is important to view the integration of rap/hip-hop and metal in an historical context. Walser (1993) provides some examples of historical precedents, like Run-D.M.C.'s 1986 remake of Aerosmith's 'Walk This Way' and Töne Loc's 1989 'Wild Thing', for the fusion of rap and metal, but there are quite a few more throughout the 1990s that seem to be important precursors that would contribute to nü metal's synthesis of these styles as genre defining. Other examples, but certainly not all, include: Public Enemy and Anthrax's remake of 'Bring the Noise' (1991), Ice-T's Bodycount (1992), Biohazard and Onyx's remake of 'Slam' (1993), the

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entire *Judgment Night* soundtrack (1993), which featured collaborations by rap groups and metal bands on original songs (not remakes) like House of Pain and Helmet, Living Colour and Run-D.M.C., Sonic Youth and Cypress Hill, Slayer and Ice-T, Biohazard and Onyx, and Faith No More and Boo-Ya Tribe.

8. Other examples include 'Faget', 'Shoots and Ladders' (*Korn*, 1994) and 'Mr. Rogers' (*Life is Peachy*, 1996). It is important to remember, however, that the band has not always addressed these issues of childhood death and physical and sexual abuse in a way that some critics regard as 'shock rock'. The song 'Justin' from *Follow the Leader*, for example, refers to the name of a child who requested to meet the band through the Make A Wish Foundation – a foundation granting wishes to terminally ill children. Not only does the music serve as a powerful statement about the triumph of the child's strength as Davis sings 'You are alive!', but the album begins with twelve tracks of silence amounting to forty-eight seconds, representing a 'moment of silence' in remembrance and tribute to Justin.
9. A stereotyped style of porn-movie music is a reference to music, typically a funk-like bass and wah-wah guitar, that is used to imply sexual intimacy by alluding to what is thought of, in popular culture, as porn-movie music. Television shows, like the Simpsons, have, on multiple occasions, made use of the suggestive power of this musical reference when attempting to suggest physical intimacy.
10. One could hear this as a Phrygian subset by interpreting the D sharp as an appoggiatura, but given its duration and appearance as an upper chromatic neighbour in the vocal line, I am more inclined to hear as part of an octatonic subset.
11. One might say that the true test of popularity in popular music is the existence of significant backlash, and typing the phrase 'I hate Korn' into any search engine (I recommend Google) will reveal a significant level of Korn and nü metal backlash.
12. A listener, for example, can find the beats, syncopations and timbres of 'gangsta' rap appealing without associating or agreeing with many of the ethnic, gender or ideological positions inherent within the genre.
13. Other excellent examples of this are the comments posted about math metal or progressive metal bands on www.myspace.com. In the case of Sleep Terror (Sacramento, CA; www.myspace.com/sleepterror), fans are so amazed by the technical virtuosity of this music that they have questioned if the recordings actually document a performance: 'Is that even humanly possible?' (Max 2005), 'I'm impressed. No actually I'm amazed. Wait, no actually I just shit my pants . . . theres no fucking way yall are that good' (Sherman 2005), '1. Are the drums in the recording your real drum player playing a kit? 2. Is the recording sped up in *any* way? 3. Can you play this material as well/fast live?' (Meldon 2005).
14. http://www.metalstorm.ee/fun/view_fun.php?id=19.

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