

**Atheism in American Rock and Metal Music (1989-2001):  
Satanic, Subversive, and un-American?**

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## *Introduction*

Throughout American history and especially in the twentieth and twenty-first century the role of religion in society and politics have been heavily debated. From both religious and non-religious sides voices are heard about concerns about the impact.. As the United States religious demography shows that about 76% of U.S. citizens is Christian and only 1.6% is agnostic or atheist (in 2008), the latter group has been a minority in both society and political representation since the founding of the nation. It is not surprising that the debate about the presence of religion in the public and political sphere in America is also held in music. Especially in rock and metal music this discussion gets much attention and many musicians use their music as a means of giving social criticism. However, statements and opinions of this subject by atheist rock and metal musicians can sometimes be interpreted by the criticized side as subversive and satanic and are not always taken seriously. Although prejudiced ideas about atheists have become less, many people in America still consider atheism immoral. Since also rock and, especially, metal music has been perceived as “evil” and “devilish”, rock and metal musicians and fans face the same kinds of prejudice. In this line of thought, atheist rock and metal music is double the “evil”. This is also why atheism and rock and metal music are often linked; they are both interpreted by many Americans as inherently immoral.

However, this thesis argues from the standpoint that most assumptions on both atheism and rock and metal music are grounded in stereotypes, and therefore might be in many cases invalid. To do this, this study will look at the actual presence of Satanism and subversion in atheist rock and metal music and see whether this kind of music can be seen as un-American. Satanism is usually interpreted as the worshipping of the devil as god, even though Satanism, as coined by Anton Szandor Lavey, is an atheist religion that uses the devil as a metaphor for indulgence. When speaking of subversion, expressing ideas that clash with the general norms and values of a society, and acting upon these ideas, are meant. Atheist rock and metal music, musicians, and fans are often interpreted as satanic and subversive, because they go against general American norms and values.

This is also what makes them appear as un-American; atheism is not seen as part of the American identity.

This thesis will use three American rock and metal bands as case studies for analysis: Marilyn Manson (shockrock), Nine Inch Nails (industrial rock), and Slipknot (metalcore). For the analysis I will use for every case study not the entire discography but only a few albums. For Nine Inch Nails this will be “Pretty Hate Machine” (1989), “Broken (EP)” (1992), and “The Downward Spiral” (1994). For Marilyn Manson this will be “Antichrist Superstar” (1996), “Mechanical Animals” (1998), and “Holy Wood (In the Shadow of the Valley of Death)” (2000). For Slipknot this will be “Slipknot” (1999) and “Iowa” (2001). These albums are picked because of their controversial nature and release dates. Additionally, these three bands are commonly perceived as atheist as well as that they sometimes express atheist ideas in their music and videos, at times in an extreme manner. Also, they make for interesting case studies because they have great fan bases. All three bands are very popular amongst rock and metal fans. This thesis will analyze song lyrics, music, music videos, photos, album covers, interviews, biographies, and the overall image of the band surrounding these albums. Note that not all songs of the albums will be dealt with, however, a selection will be made according to importance for this thesis.

On both the subject of atheism many books have been written. It started with the publication of *On the Origins of Species* by Charles Darwin in 1859 which in itself does not necessarily promote atheism, but does give the atheist a constructed argument to back up his or her ideas. Many other works have been published in the last decades of the nineteenth century that supported the idea of atheism, for example by Freud and Nietzsche. This led to a rise of atheism in the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, with many a debate between extremely religious scholars, extremely atheist scholars, and everything in between. However, in the 1960s a return to religion could be seen, especially in the United States (McGrath, 2006). Yet, this did not stop atheists from trying to convince other people of their opinion. For example, Julian Baggini wrote a book about atheism for the “A Very Short Introduction” series published by the Oxford University Press. The book gives much information as to what atheism entails, yet, it also makes a case for atheism; Baggini tries to persuade his readers with arguments

for atheism. On the other hand, Alister McGrath, whose book *The Twilight of Atheism* was published in 2006, deals with the history of atheism from the ancient Greeks until the twentieth century, but also aims to show why atheism is inherently flawed and will never have as much followers as a religion such as Christianity does. These books show that there are many different academic works on atheism that have different conclusions concerning belief which are mainly inspired by the authors opinion on the subject.

When it comes to academic work considering rock and metal music there is less of a dialogue. This is mainly because music is not dependent on belief, yet, it is dependent on taste. Taste is generally accepted as being a subjective sensibility, whereas belief is generally seen as implying a certain truth; having different tastes in music is not a reason for conflict, yet, having different sets of beliefs does create conflict, even wars. In academia, most works written about rock and metal music are concerned with the development of the genre since the 1950s. For example, the book *American Popular Music: The Rock Years* by Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman traces the development of rock music in the United States from the 1950s until the 1990s. Also, the book *Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal* by Ian Christe is a detailed work on the development of heavy metal since the release of Black Sabbath's debut album; which is seen by most musicologists as the start of the genre.

On the other hand, in the American media the influence of, mostly atheist, rock and metal music on adolescents is a heated debate. There are journalists who criticize rock and metal musicians of trying to make their fans commit crimes. In news magazines such as *Time Magazine* and *U.S. News & World Report* articles have been published that deal with the writer's concern that rock and metal music will turn their audience into criminals. However, there are just as many articles published that go against these accusations. For example, Gary Burns claims in his article "Marilyn Manson and the Apt Pupils of Littleton" that Marilyn Manson's music cannot be seen as a reason for the Columbine Massacre. These articles show that the influence of rock and metal on the lives of adolescents is heavily debated, and that opinions on the matter range from believing that rock and metal music is satanic and immoral, to the idea that rock and metal is only a source for entertainment and nothing more.

However, there is also subculture theory concerning rock and metal fans. Theories concerning the significance of style, identification, belonging, empowerment, and subversion show workings of subcultures and fandom (Lawrence Grossberg, 1992; Simon Frith, 1996; Dick Hebdige, 2005). For example, Dick Hebdige argues that within every subculture there are certain signifiers that express their ideas. These signifiers can range from items of clothing and hand-gestures to phrases and more active interactions such as moshing (Hebdige, 2005). The terms identification, belonging, and empowerment are three closely linked notions. Within subcultures, by using similar signifiers—dressing the same, listening to the same music, etc—individuals tend to identify with others on an individual and group level. This identification can lead to belonging; the idea that you are part of the group. As a result of belonging, people can feel empowered again on both an individual and group level within their subculture. Lawrence Grossberg defines empowerment as “the reciprocal nature of affective investment: that is, because something matters (as it does when one invests energy in it), other investments are made possible” (64). These notions in subculture theory are interesting to apply when analyzing the work by Marilyn Manson, Nine Inch Nails, and Slipknot to further understand not just their music, but also the subcultures around them. However, especially the notion of subversion is interesting in light of this thesis because atheist rock and metal music is seen as the epitome of subversion.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter will look at the dialogues concerning atheism in the United States, theories surrounding rock and metal music in the United States, and where they intersect. Also, this chapter will introduce the notion of Satanism and subversion. Satanism and subversion are interesting notions to look at when studying atheism in the United States. Because most Americans are religious, and not well-informed on atheism, many look to atheists as being subversive, and in some cases satanic. Therefore, both atheists and rock and metal fans have been perceived as satanic and subversive by “outsiders.”

The second chapter will give a close reading of rock and metal music by Marilyn Manson, Nine Inch Nails, and Slipknot to see how they express themselves through their music and image. The analysis will be focused on song lyrics, music, music videos, photos, album covers, interviews, biographies, and the overall image of the band. In the analysis a few questions will be asked: “How

are atheist ideas expressed in their work?”, “What are they subversive against, are they against anything?”, and “How do their ideas fit in or deviate from America’s popular thought on themes such as religion, politics, sexuality, family, etc.”

The third chapter will look at how these bands and their fans are perceived by the media and people outside of the rock and metal scene. This is to look at where there is overlap between the ideas these bands express and how they are interpreted by “outsiders”, if there is any. This chapter will mostly look at reviews of albums and concerts from a variety of both religious and non-religious media sources. This chapter will also look at the fan bases and how the bands’ ideas are expressed through them. Additionally, the notions of identification, belonging, and empowerment will be linked to these fan bases.

The conclusion will deal with how on the surface atheist rock and metal music can be seen as subversive and un-American, but when analyzed more closely, atheist rock and metal music might not be as satanic, subversive, or un-American as it may seem. Also, a conclusion might be made on general American morals and values and how atheist rock and metal music comply or deviate from this.

This thesis will aim to answer the question in what ways are American atheist rock and metal musicians negotiating the role of religion in American society. In what ways are they perceived as being satanic, subversive, and un-American because of the way they express their opinions in their work? In this thesis both the intentions of the musicians will be discussed as well as the reception of reviewers and critics, and the reception of the fans. To fully understand the public debate on the role of religion in the United States as it is held in the music scene it is vital to look at all three components - musicians, reviewers/critics, and fans.

## 1. “I’m Not A Slave to A God That Doesn’t Exist”: Atheism and Rock and Metal music in the United States.

On April 20, 1999, the students and teachers of Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado witnessed a horrible and tragic event. Teenagers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold came to school carrying several firearms and started shooting. After murdering twelve students, one teacher, and wounding dozens of others they turned the guns to themselves. This terrible Tuesday would forever be known as the Columbine High School Massacre, and it shocked the country throughout. The massacre inspired debate about the availability of firearms to adolescents and the influence of violence in popular culture on American youth. From the circles of the conservative right came the scapegoating of American rock singer Marilyn Manson as a direct influence on Harris and Klebold’s actions. Soon many, if not most, media channels were pointing in the same direction as the conservative Christians and blamed Manson for the massacre (Moore, 2002).

The stigmatizing of Marilyn Manson as the reason why Harris and Klebold decided to take their peers’ and their own lives in the way they did is very telling about US society. Not only did the religious right see Manson’s music as inherently evil, immoral, and atheist, they also believed it was able to turn adolescents into murderers. This thesis is concerned with researching what message atheist rock and metal musicians, such as Manson, actually carry out to their fans, and how their music is received by both fans and critics. However, before analyzing the music and musicians studies, it is important to introduce and explore the complexity of both atheism and rock and metal music to get a better grasp of how both phenomenon have developed in post-war America and how the two are interlinked and attacked by the religious right. This chapter will therefore aim to answer the question how atheism and rock and metal music have developed in post-war America. What ideas do atheists and rock and metal musicians generally express, and how have both phenomenon been received by non-atheists and non-rock and metal listeners in the US?

The first half of this chapter, which deals with atheism, will aim to answer the question how atheism can be defined. Which processes and ideas have led to secularization and atheism in



the United States, and what is the place of atheists in American society? The second half of the chapter, which is about rock and metal music, will deal with the question how rock and metal music has developed in postwar America. What is rock and metal's style and message, what cultural messages can be found in rock music, and how have non-rock and metal listeners reacted to rock and metal in the US?

Atheism is a very complex concept—every atheist can give it his or her own meaning, because there is no set of criteria that defines atheism and no scripture that serves as a guideline for what makes an atheist. Rock and metal is just as hard to define because there are many different subgenres, which in themselves are not even necessarily homogenous in style or attitude. Rock and metal musicians are not by definition atheists, as will be discussed in this chapter. Yet, many rock and metal musicians are stereotypically assumed to be atheists because of their appearance and lyrics. They have been subjected to discrimination and protests by voices from the conservative right, to which atheists fighting for their cause have been subjected to as well. Atheism and rock and metal music are often perceived as subversive because both tend to clash with generally accepted norms of US society as well as that both atheists and rock and metal musicians and fans can be considered minorities. Atheism and rock and metal music are not necessarily linked—an atheist is not by definition a rock and metal listener, and a rock and metal listener is by no means always an atheist. Yet, the two are often seen as a part of an anti-establishment discourse.

### *Atheism*

As mentioned earlier, atheism is a rather problematic concept—throughout history atheism has always existed in some form or another. As Michael Martin explains in the introduction of *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* (2007) atheism is usually interpreted as the belief that God does not exist. Julian Baggini would add to this definition that atheists also reject any supernatural or transcendental entity (Baggini, 1). Furthermore, Alister McGrath claims in his book *The Twilight of Atheism* that “[w]hile some interpret the term very loosely—‘there are no spiritual beings’—the term is correctly, and more generally, understood to entail a denial of a specific conception of God”

(99). Yet the origin of the word, the Greek word *atheos*, means “without God”; in this sense of the word an atheist is someone who is without a belief in God, which slightly differs from the popular interpretation. Martin deems both definitions of atheism important and therefore addresses the former as positive atheism and the latter as negative atheism, as well as he divides these divisions further (Martin, 1-2):

Negative atheism in the broad sense is then the absence of belief in any god or Gods, not just the absence of belief in a personal theistic God, and negative atheism in the narrow sense is the absence of belief in a theistic God. Positive atheism in the broad sense is, in turn, disbelief in all gods, with positive atheism in the narrow sense being the disbelief in a theistic God. (Martin, 2)

As Martin lays out the complexity of atheism he also indicates that that atheists usually do not fall into just one category because “a given individual can take different atheistic positions with respect to different concepts of God” (Martin, 2). The word atheism refers to the many different points of view on the non-existence of a supernatural or theistic being.

Also, it is important to understand the difference between atheism and agnosticism as these concepts are closely linked yet not similar. Agnostics hold the belief that there are good arguments for the existence of god as well as there are equally good arguments for the non-existence of god. Even though negative atheism as described by Martin is can be part of agnosticism, negative atheism, in turn, is not the same as agnosticism. Furthermore, unlike any religion, atheists do not have any form of scripture indicating rules that show how atheists should live their lives. Every atheist can decide for themselves what their atheism implies; this makes atheism rather complex and fragmented and therefore hard to define. Even though there are certain civil right groups such as American Atheists, these groups do not serve as the replacement of the source of authority in religion such as a church or bible in Christianity (Smith, 232).

Social scientist Jesse M. Smith describes the general path most Americans take into becoming a self-avowed atheist. Smith defines four stages in this process: the ubiquity of theism, questioning theism, rejecting theism, and “coming out” atheist. Here he argues that “an atheist

identity is an achieved identity, and one that is constructed in social interactions” (215). Most of the participants of Smith’s research were born into a religious environment and because of this ubiquity of religion started to question religions’ contradictions and illogical arguments, especially when they were put in a different environment such as college. The interaction with believers, as opposed to influence from atheists, made most participants doubt their own beliefs (222-223).

One important aspect for the participants to reject theism was morality. As one participant, forty-nine-year-old Matt, thought after reading the Old Testament: “the God I was worshipping and reading about all this time was really just a sinner himself. Here he is being jealous and vengeful and human” (224). Another central aspect to the defining of one’s atheism, according to Smith, is the idea of putting the theists as the “other”. Just as most religious groups see people who have different religious affiliations or non-religious affiliations as the “other”—and this “other” usually has a negative image—atheists also perceive theists as a negative “other” (229). The “coming out” of atheists is often compared to the coming out of homosexuals. Smith also sees similarities in the way people profess their atheism with the coming out of homosexuals, as he describes both as an “important step toward a new self-concept and a feeling of independence and empowerment” (229). In this process of coming out atheism becomes an important aspect of one’s identity (231). Smith concludes that “[i]n the United States, theism is not only the starting point for any religious identity; its pervasiveness is also what drives atheism” (232). Among participants of Smith’s study it is striking that the atheists who come from more strongly religious backgrounds tend to be more outspoken atheists than those from a more loosely religious upbringing (233). In the United States, coming to terms with atheist ideas and coming out of the atheist closet is a process that takes time and much self-reflection, which can ultimately lead to empowerment.

Even though atheism has always existed, in the United States it was always a very small, unaccepted group. Although it would never grow into a group similar in acceptance and political representation as Christians, amongst the elite something changed for atheists in the nineteenth century. In *The Twilight of Atheism* Alister McGrath explains how atheism has grown since the publication of *On the Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin in 1859. McGrath argues that in the first decades of the twentieth century voices were heard claiming Darwinism and the Bible were

incompatible, resulting in court cases such as the Scopes Trial in 1925 which was presented as a “duel to the death between Christianity and atheism by prosecutor William Jennings Bryan” (106). John Scopes had been teaching evolution in his biology class at a Tennessee public school, by which he broke a local law that prohibited teaching evolution. Even though atheism rapidly grew amongst intellectuals, Christianity hardly declined in US society (106).

In the 1960s, however, western Christianity suffered several blows and had to adapt itself to the contemporary society to survive (McGrath, 159). For example, in 1963, the court case *Murray vs. Curlett* caused mandatory school prayer to be abolished in public schools. As McGrath argues, “[f]rom 1955 to 1995 ... the mainline denominations suffered a massive loss of members, while churches that retained traditional teachings grew, not least from refugees aiming to escape from the rampant modernism of their denominations” (163). Even though from the 1960s onwards atheists have sought to secularize school systems through court cases and succeeded on numerous occasions, evangelical Protestantism grew in the United States because of the attack on their way of life.

Eventually, Madalyn Murray O’Hair, who sued the Baltimore school board in 1963, founded American Atheist. This group lobbies for “the civil rights of atheists, promoting separation of state and church, and providing information about atheism” (American Atheist, About). Even though the court case of 1963 ended in her favor, her atheism was not accepted by American society. Madalyn Murray O’Hair was called “the most hated woman in America” by the media in the 1960s. Not only the media gave Murray O’Hair a negative image, people in her direct environment harassed her endlessly. According to Bruce J. Dierenfield, Murray O’Hair endured heavy abuse for years:

Taunters spat in her face so much that spittle dripped on her dress. She was called a “dirty atheist,” an “anti-Christ,” a “slut,” and a “masculine lesbian bitch.” Letters smeared with feces accused her of bestiality and threatened to “kill you, kill you, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill.” Postal workers tampered with her mail, forwarded the contents to the Communist party, or delivered empty envelopes. Prank telephone calls came incessantly, day and night. Some callers tried to convert the Murrays; others

cursed them, breathed heavily or shrieked into the telephone, slammed receivers in their ears, or jammed their telephone line so that no one else could call. False telephone orders ruined their credit. The Murray flower garden was trampled upon, their car's tires were slashed, their electricity was short-circuited, and their home was pelted with gunshot and stones. Murray was arrested and prosecuted for having barking dogs, and the family cat's neck was wrung. (72)

Murray O'Hair endured much discrimination and abuse for about two years after the trial. However, the Murrays were not the only family facing harassment in the 1960s, as more court cases took place before and after the Murray case. The Schempp family, who sued the School District of Abington Township in 1963 was also tormented by their community (66-67). One could say that even though there was a rise in atheism, and more support for secularization, atheists were still an unaccepted minority.

Moreover, according to McGrath, "God's death is always followed by his resurrection" (189). From the 1970s religion has increased again globally. In the United States the rise of atheism "was undoubtedly a protest against a corrupted and complacent church; yet paradoxically, it has energized Christianity to reform itself, in ways that seriously erode the credibility of those earlier criticisms. Where atheism criticizes, wise Christians move to reform their ways" (277). The rise of conservative political groups such as the Moral Majority who were part of the Religious Right at the end of the 1970s also gave a boost the popularity of Christianity (McLeod, 140-141).

This also caused atheists to remain a minority that faces discrimination. In their article "On the Receiving End: Discrimination toward the Non-Religious in the United States," Ryan T. Cragun, Barry Kosmin, Ariela Keysar, Joseph H. Hammer, and Michael Nielsen claim that "Americans, in general, report more antipathy towards atheists than toward religious groups, such as Muslims, conservative Christians, and Jews; toward racial and ethnic groups, such as recent immigrants, Hispanics, Asian Americans or African Americans; or towards homosexuals" (105). Stigmatizing Madalyn Murray O'Hair as "the most hated woman in America" is just one example of the discrimination that atheists face in the United States. Cragun, Kosmin, Keysar, Hammer, and Nielsen state that this is due to the fact that "atheists run counter to what American generally

think of as culturally acceptable, because they do not, as a group, endorse religion. As a result, they are one of the most despised people in the US today” (105). According to Julian Baggini “the very word ‘atheist’ would conjure up dark images of something sinister, evil, and threatening”. However, when getting more familiar with atheism he claims that “atheism is, properly understood, a positive world view” (Baggini, 1-2). Occurrences of discrimination towards atheists tend to vary according to context. Most reported instances of discrimination were in a family setting, and less in the workplace, school, voluntary organization, or the military. However, especially self-avowed atheists faced discrimination when they were in contact with self-avowed religious people (118-119). The harassing of atheists has therefore not changed much since the 1960s, where the Murrays and the Schempps faced heavy abuse in their own communities. Even though the Schempps were not atheists, they were considered immoral and subversive by trying to make mandatory bible readings at school illegal.

Atheists throughout America face judgments and assumptions of immorality and subversion like the Schempps and the Murrays have. In US society atheists can be seen as a minority that is unaccepted and underrepresented in politics as well as that they are often misinterpreted in terms of what they believe.

### *Rock and Metal Music*

Just like atheism, Rock and Metal music is a highly complex and fragmented phenomenon. Roots of both rock and metal music can be traced back as far as the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, for the purpose of this thesis only the development of post-war rock and metal music will be discussed. Rock music, according to Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman, “refers to a half century of musical history that begins in the mid-1950s with the emergence of rock ‘n’ roll as a group of musical styles and as a marketing category” (2). In their book *American Popular Music. The Rock Years*, Starr and Waterman discuss the development of rock music through the decades since the 1950s. Their book deals with the development of genres, the marketing side of the music industry, and it gives close analyses of songs that grew to be highly influential. They start their

journey in 1945, where in the immediate post-war years the music market in the United States changed. Not only did most American families experience an increase in income, the target of music businesses shifted towards the teenager who now had more money to spend on music than ever before. Also, the emergence of television as a popular medium increased the teenager's exposure to popular music and trends (18-52).

When during the mid-1950s rock 'n' roll music came to the fore, the American popular music scene changed significantly. The term rock 'n' roll itself was fabricated as a marketing strategy to appeal to the massive baby-boom generation teenagers. Surprisingly, rock 'n' roll was neither a new style of music, nor a clear single style. However, the massive appeal to young people made it so successful. Rock 'n' roll music can therefore be seen as a youth oriented music genre. Starr and Waterman claim that "[t]he purchase of rock 'n' roll records by kids in the 1950s proved a relatively safe and affordable way for kids to assert generational identity through rebellion against previous adult standards and restriction of musical style and taste" (56-57). These teenagers sought in rock 'n' roll a way to express themselves versus their parents and authority; a trend that has changed in form overtime but has stayed essentially the same in nature (53-57).

In the 1960s the cultural climate shifted into one where many counter-cultures that already existed came to the fore. This decade was host to many controversial and violent events such as the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and President John F. Kennedy. With the baby-boom generation growing up, rock 'n' roll matured into "rock" music. The first half of the decade saw the birth of controversial dance trends such as the twist, and the appearance of massively successful music labels such as Motown. At the same time, there was a British invasion in America with the Beatles as the forerunners. In this decade rock music in the United States became more varied and racially mixed than a decade earlier (92-137).

Because of the politically restless situation of the 1960s, countercultures grew amongst rock musicians and fans. As Starr and Waterman argue, "[a]ntiwar groups and organizations began to multiply, attracting large numbers of young—especially college-ages—men and women. In addition, a significant number of young people were involved in various ways with the many organizations, demonstrations, and legal initiatives that formed the civil rights movement" (151).

Many of those active in the Civil Rights Movement also opposed the Vietnam War. During this time the Beatles had just released *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, which was an experimental, psychedelic album that influenced many bands and fans during the latter half of the 1960s since it was released in 1967. In that same year, San Francisco was experiencing the Summer of Love, from which many bands sprung that were influenced by this new psychedelic rock style, such as Jefferson Airplane (154-157). At the same time, the 1960s were a decade that saw many new great guitarists step to the fore. Virtuoso guitarists such as Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton were pioneers in experimenting with technique, volume and improvisation. They made the guitar the focus point of their music, which is echoed by many rock musicians in the decades after them (162). Starr and Waterman claim that, in the 1960s, “the popular music favored by many young Americans took on a harder-edged, more emphatic tone” (166).

It was during the next decade, the 1970s that the countercultures of the 1960s shifted away from political idealism towards a more conservative attitude. Starr and Waterman state that

[a]round the same time, popular attention was focused on domestic problems, including the oil crisis (1973) and economic inflation, which threatened the financial security of millions of Americans. If the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963 had robbed many Americans of a certain political idealism, the Watergate hearings—viewed by millions on television—and the subsequent resignation of President Nixon (1974) occasioned a growing cynicism about politics. (167)

Besides the loss of faith in politics, rock music kept being a target for commentary by right-winged politicians as it was in the 1920s and 1950s. However, at the same time hippie culture and psychedelic rock music entered the mainstream. According to Starr and Waterman the music market had two target groups; the teenagers of the 1970s, and “adults aged twenty-five to forty, who had grown up with rock ‘n’ roll and were looking for more mature (i.e., more conservative) material” (167-168). One such more conservative styles the latter group was interested in was popular country music with musicians such as John Denver at the wheel (171).



Starr and Waterman claim that in the 1970s more and more musicians started to view their work as art works, especially progressive rock artists. Author, music journalist, and culture critic Greil Marcus writes in his introduction to the book *The Aesthetics of Rock* by Richard Meltzer that “[t]he death of art is what rock ‘n’ roll, as the brute actualization, had aimed for from the beginning; from the beginning, rock ‘n’ roll had meant to change “art” into every day speech” (xxiv). Here Marcus twists around the interpretation and shows how by calling rock music art changed art itself into an everyday product of consumption. As the 1970s saw the coming of age of rock music, music companies started to promote a diverse range of rock musicians for commercial distribution. In the top 40 on radio and television, bands and musicians such as Led Zeppelin; Stevie Wonder; Elton John; Carole King; Pink Floyd; Paul Simon; Neil Diamond; the Rolling Stones; Frank Zappa; and Santana were all present. These artists were all called rock artists by the record companies to appeal to the vast and complex rock audience (183).

At the same time, the 1970s saw the birth of heavy metal when Black Sabbath released their debut album. In his book *Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal*, Ian Christe shows heavy metal’s development from this moment into the twenty-first century. Heavy metal is a music genre that can be divided into many different subgenres. This makes heavy metal difficult to define. Yet, practically every heavy metal genre’s origin can be traced back to Black Sabbath, which was the very first heavy metal band. Black Sabbath had a sound that was heavier, darker, and slower than that of popular rock. In their lyrics they confronted issues such as war and insanity that most popular rock musicians would not touch upon at all, or in the critical way Black Sabbath did. They had “a creepy image—one swathed in the popular witchcraft and mysticism of the day” (4). Therefore, Christe’s journey starts on Friday, February 13, 1970 with the release of Sabbath’s highly influential debut album by “the wise innocents, the originators of heavy metal” (1). Even though this genre originated and developed in the United Kingdom, heavy metal would soon cross over to the United States and grow into a popular style. Whereas in the first half of the 1970s, hard rock bands were still far from having a homogenous style,

By the mid-1970s, heavy metal aesthetics could be spotted, in the moody bass and complex dual guitars of Thin Lizzy, in the stagecraft of Alice Cooper, in the sizzling guitar and showy vocals of Queen, and in the thundering medieval questions of Rainbow. Then, following Sabbath out of Birmingham in 1974, Judas Priest arrived to unify and amplify these diverse highlights from hard rock's sonic palette. For the first time, heavy metal became a true genre unto itself. (19-20)

Heavy metal would develop into a genre with many devoted fans. Their music was loud and heavy, and their lyrics dealt with the darker side of life and explored themes such as sex/sexuality, substance abuse, violence, and the occult—a fascination that is reflected in their choice of band-names.

In the United States, heavy metal was mostly spread through the spread of 8-track tapes by fans. The only way for the fans to experience the music apart from these tapes was at concerts. Yet, there were parts of the United States, primarily the Bible Belt, where people were afraid of the occult elements of heavy metal (15-18). Ironically, it were these mystic elements that intrigued heavy metal listeners. They wanted to “confront the big picture—to create a connection between life and the cosmos. If there were to be love songs, they would be epics, not odes to teenage puppy love at the soda shop” (21). At the end of the 1970s, after the Punk craze that inspired American hardcore was over in England, the infamous New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM) came into existence. Bands such as Judas Priest and Iron Maiden were at the front of this movement and made heavy metal faster and more complicated than it was when Black Sabbath released their debut (33-34). With the emergence of many different musical styles in rock and metal music, the audience also became more fragmented which made it even more difficult for record producers to anticipate and cater for new musical trends. However, the 1970s did see a new and larger way of marketing music that satisfied the need of this new audience (Starr and Waterman, 230).

In heavy metal history, the 1980s are the most interesting and eventful. In this decade the threats of the Cold War and the economic crisis had a major impact in the daily lives of Americans, and made for a rather bleak outlook for many Americans. It is not surprising that the music genre that deals with the difficult and darker side of life increased in popularity the way it did. Also,

During the 1980s Republican President Ronald Reagan drew the country towards religious conservatism, and political parties such as the Moral Majority grew in membership.

Yet, by 1980, the only American heavy metal band in existence was Van Halen, and even this band had their origin in Europe; Eddie Van Halen and his brother Alex were born in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, but moved to the United States in 1962. In the early 1980s, only Los Angeles saw some bands that were trying to put hard rock on the map but were struggling in the process. Bands such as Mötley Crüe, Van Halen, and Ozzy Osbourne—who relocated after quitting Black Sabbath—had a hard time bringing their scene to the next level, but eventually they succeeded (Christe, 50-53). The 1980s saw the spread of heavy metal through America.

Highly influential bands such as Mötley Crüe, Metallica, Quiet Riot, Anhrtrax, and Slayer were founded in this decade. Also many new genres developed within heavy metal such as power metal, black metal, thrash metal, glam metal, hardcore punk, metalcore, and grindcore (Christe, 95, 109, 137, 159, 176, 181, 188). These styles in their turn influenced the European scene and were forefathers of German speed metal and Scandinavian black metal (Christe, 141, 274). Interestingly, Christe states that “[a]t the souring level of heavy metal’s success in 1987, the fan base was essentially the average American consumer: the same people that drank Pepsi, shopped at Kmart, ate at Burger King, visisted Disneyland, and otherwise kept the American economy afloat” (171). Heavy metal fans did not differ much from the general American in their consumer behavior.

Nevertheless, as heavy metal was a genre that dealt with the more unpleasant side of life, such as alcohol and drug abuse, (perverted) sex, and violence, many people in American society were concerned about heavy metal fans. Especially black metal fans who focused on the occult were sources of fear for the integrity of American society with many non-metal fans. However, as Christe argues,

black metal’s dress code and arcane semantics [were] an addictive power fantasy for rejects, but it required a special rarefied sensibility for fans to don shirts depicting giant blazing pentagrams and memorize long lyrical lines of barely audible blasphemy. Constant shout-outs to Satan were distracting and distressing to the unassimilated ear, but, like most youth ideologies, mock devil

worship merely expressed the desire to smash societal restraints and carve a space for unfettered fun. Or, in the words of Possessed's Larry Lalonde, "If you believe in all of this Satan stuff, you have to be stupid!" (116)

Most heavy metal fans did not subscribe to Satanism or devil worship, even though this is what most non-metal listeners thought of them exactly because of heavy metal's focus on the darker side of life, and in specific the focus on the occult. Not surprisingly, moral crusaders felt the need to make heavy metal bands into scapegoats and stigmatize them as trying to turn American youth evil because of this assumption. In 1984 Susan Baker and Tipper Gore, both wives of members of the US Congress, founded the Parents' Music Resource Center (PMRC). This political group held conservative ideas about the influence of rock and metal music on the presumably deviant behavior of teenagers (116 - 118). In 1985, Gore and Baker released a list of songs called the "Filthy Fifteen," which included songs that were, according to Gore and Baker, immoral and should not be listened to by impressionable youth. They focused on songs that referred to sex/sexuality, drugs/alcohol abuse, violence, and the occult. The artists listed amongst the fifteen were Black Sabbath, Madonna, and Prince. This list led to the labeling of albums that could be seen as offensive from 1985 onwards. This turned into the Parental Advisory Warning stickers that started to appear on albums containing explicit lyrics as of 1990. The PMRC targeted rock and metal music because they thought musicians were trying to corrupt listeners through their music and push them onto the wrong path, away from their ideas of morality which usually involved Christianity (123-124).

However, in the rock and metal cultures, especially in hardcore, emphasis was made on agency. As Dave Smalley, former member of DYS and Dag Nasty, says, "Punk Rock was always about non-conformity and independence. So if someone from Hardcore wanted to be an atheist, a Krishna, or a Christian, if they're following their heart, ultimately that's what Hardcore was encouraging us to do all along" (Blush, 51). The agency of rock and metal fans is overlooked by the PMRC when they argue that rock and metal music makes the fans behave immorally.

The 1980s also saw improvements in technology; digital sound recording and music distribution were revolutionized with the invention of sampling, compact discs, and personal computers. This digitalization also had influence on the music itself. With songs such as “Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This) by the Eurhythmics from 1983—which was later covered by Marilyn Manson in 1995—an electronic sound was introduced in this post-disco era. Also, the 1980s saw the advent of the music video, a medium through which the artists could express themselves even more than before (Starr and Waterman, 232, 238, 267).

The 1980s saw many developments in technology and fragmentation in terms of genres, and criticism from the conservative right, and these developments crossed over into the 1990s. Starr and Waterman claim that “[t]aken as a whole, ... the popular mainstream of the 1990s includes a jumble of old and new styles, slick pop and R&B, rock-influenced country music, and rough-edged, in-your-face alternative rock and rap music” (269). Even though Hip-Hop has its roots in the 1970s and 1980s with acts such as Run DMC and Public Enemy, the 1990s sees the rise and commercialization of Gangster Rap with rappers such as 2Pac Shakur, the Notorious B.I.G., and Snoop Doggy Dogg at the forefront. As many more rock genres became popular in the 1990s, one in particular stands out. One of the greatest bands of the 1990s was Nirvana and they made Grunge rock, a commercial version of punk rock, very successful (270-291). Moreover, in the 1990s, heavy metal also became a more commercial commodity, blurring the boundaries between rock and heavy metal. Even though it never became popular, mainstream music, heavy metal was a musical style that was listened to throughout several generations, while not more than twenty years ago it was only listened to by youth in their teens and twenties (Christe, 222-232). This decade also saw the development of several new crossover styles in heavy metal such as hardcore rap, funk metal, alternative metal, death metal, and avant-garde metal (Christe, 207, 210, 225, 253).

Even after the commercialization of metal did “heavy metal remain the devil’s music—a convenient and reliable scapegoat for social and spiritual ills” (Christe, 290). Even though amongst rock and metal musicians were frequent churchgoers, rock, and especially metal fans were targeted with accusations of devil worship and active purpose to corrupt innocent minds. The fact that rock and metal music was being attacked for having lyrics that dealt with the darker side of life was “a

case of blaming the messenger” (Christe, 292) according to Christe. Even so, the 1990s saw much harassment of rock and metal fans which according to Christe occurred on three levels: “individual discrimination, lawsuits or criminal charges of a local level, and wide-ranging legislative moves that aimed to stifle heavy metal nationwide”(Christe, 293). For example, in 1988, Ozzy Osbourne was accused in court of inspiring people to commit suicide through his music (Christe, 296). Yet, rock and metal fans were most often not Satanists. Even in hardcore, the genre within rock and metal that focused on non-conformity the most of all heavy metal sub-genres, “a variety of religious ideas, most prominently from the Hare Krishna movement and Christianity, began to have a very visible presence in the scene” (Peterson, 109). Even though most hardcore fans could be seen as agnostics or atheists, there was an acceptance of people’s various individual ideas about faith (Peterson, 109). Trying to tell its fans what to think or believe would go against the emphasis on agency that is so very present in Hardcore, and rock and metal in general.

From 1945 onwards, rock and metal music has developed itself in many ways. By constantly reinventing styles and genres, developments in the technical field, and development in marketing strategies, rock music has become the vastly popular phenomenon that we know today. Just like atheism, rock and metal music is hard to define, because it implies many different styles, attitudes, and ideas. It also has been attacked, like atheism, on its assumed immoral message by, mostly, conservative Christians. Only, whereas atheists only face discrimination in their direct surroundings, not to mention being underrepresented in the political sphere, rock and metal musicians have been sued for having an assumed negative influence on listeners’ behavior.

### *Double subversive?*

Even though atheism has grown since the release of *On The Origin Of Species* by Charles Darwin, it has never become an accepted way of thinking in the United States. Attempts to secularize the American public sphere have succeeded at times, yet, atheists are still a minority. Many atheists, especially those self-avowed, have experienced harassment because of their beliefs, which is generally seen as immoral because of the lack of belief in a god. However, atheism is a complex

concept, and atheism is a word that can refer to many different ideas about the existence, or non-existence, of a supernatural, intelligent being. Still, in the United States, when atheists voice their opinions and critique Christianity's ubiquity in US society, they are usually seen as subversive because they have other ideas concerning religion than US society in general.

Similarly, rock and metal music with its violent façade and lyrics that could be interpreted as immoral according to general American ideas when not analyzed properly or put out of context made for the idea that rock and metal is also inherently subversive. Interestingly, most rock and metal musicians are assumed to be atheists, or Satanists, because their lyrics are about the darker and more troubling side of life. Yet, only a very small percentage of rock and metal musicians are actually Satanists, and even though atheism is more accepted amongst rock and metal musicians and fans than in US society in general, there are many religious rock and metal musicians and fans, as the popularity of Christian rock and metal shows. Yet, rock and metal musicians are stereotyped as subversive because atheists, just like rock and metal music, are generally seen as subversive.

Does this mean that actual atheist rock and metal musicians are twice as subversive? Better yet, to get a clearer understanding of how and where atheist rock and metal musicians place themselves within American society through their music, it is important to take a closer look at their art and image and see what their messages and ideas actually are. The next chapter of this thesis will give a close reading of the work of three bands—Nine Inch Nails, Marilyn Manson, and Slipknot—to gain a more complete understanding of what kinds of messages atheists rock and metal bands give to their audience.

2. “If You’re 555, Then I’m 666”: Atheist ideas in Nine Inch Nails, Marilyn Manson, and Slipknot’s art.

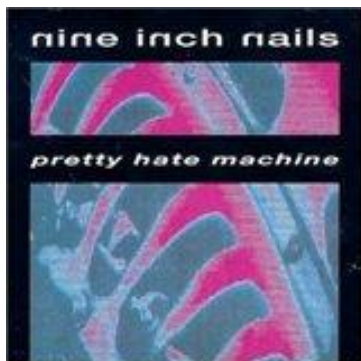
This chapter will look at Nine Inch Nails, Marilyn Manson, and Slipknot closely to find out what their music criticizes. All three bands criticize religion and have ideas and messages that differ from Christian ideas. However, all three bands take on different viewpoints concerning religion, and also express their anti-religious ideas differently. Where Nine Inch Nails’ Trent Reznor keeps his ideas on religion on a very personal level, Marilyn Manson criticizes the use of religion by government officials and the media, and the impact this has on US society. Furthermore, Slipknot is not openly critical of religion in their lyrics, however, their anti-religious ideas can be found in their image and artwork. Moreover, what social issues does their music critique? This chapter will focus on the lyrics of songs, music videos, and the bands’ image in the aim to answer the question of what ideas and messages the musicians put in their art. To what extent do they express their atheism in their music?

### *Nine Inch Nails*

Nine Inch Nails is an industrial rock band from Mercer, Pennsylvania. The band has developed itself throughout the nineties as one of the most influential acts in the genre. Nine Inch Nails has received much attention because of their shocking lyrics and videos that deal with religion, sex, and violence. Even though the band name suggest differently, Nine Inch Nails is a one-man band. The creator and only permanent member is Michael Trent Reznor who was born on 17 May, 1965 in Mercer, Pennsylvania. Mercer County, Pennsylvania is 91.6 percent white, and is situated in the Rust Belt. Reznor grew up in a state where Catholics have the majority of followers (Reznor’s paternal grandfather himself was a devout Catholic). Reznor was raised by his maternal grandparents in Mercer, which he left as soon as he graduated from high school in 1983 (Carr, 43). After working as a studio technician for several years, Reznor released his first NIN album in 1989 called *Pretty Hate Machine*.



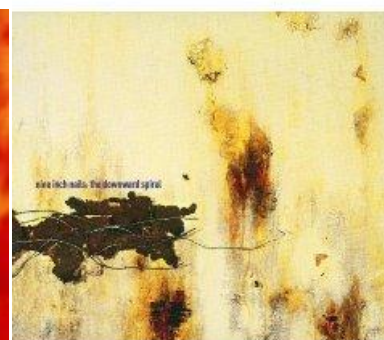
In an interview in 1992 with Gia DeSantis on Request Video, Trent Reznor comments on the origin of the band name. He claims that “people have been asking me that for, we’ve been around for what, three years now, so no. No great significance. Just thought of it, liked it two weeks later. That’s the test for a band name. Write it down if you like it that day. When you wake up the next day and it’s okay, then it’s a good name” (Request Video, 1992). Even though Reznor claims that there was no real idea behind the name, *Nine Inch Nails* does conjure up images of sharp metal objects, which fits into the industrial nature of NIN’s music. Moreover, coffins are traditionally nailed shut with nine-inch-long nails, which makes the band name also conjure up a theme of death. The albums which will be analyzed in this chapter are *Pretty Hate Machine* (1989), *Broken* (EP) (1992), and *The Downward Spiral* (1994). Even though the album artwork does not contain much imagery besides the references to machinery on *Pretty Hate Machine* and impressionist art on *The Downward Spiral*, the album titles are intriguing. *Pretty Hate Machine* might seem at first glance to refer to a mechanical entity, however, all three titles describe a mental state, as will be discussed in the in-depth analyses of the albums in this chapter.



*Pretty Hate Machine* (1989)



*Broken* (EP) (1992)



*The Downward Spiral* (1994)

Reznor’s image, as has been captured by photographers in both promotional shoots and live performances relate to the mental issues that are expressed in his music. According to Daphne Carr, “Reznor was not only a musical icon for his fans, but a stylistic one. His ghostly pallor, lank black hair, combat boots, fishnet stockings, and rail-thin body prone to aggressive drastic gestures were

admired and idealized as an alternative form of bodily grace” (7). Reznor’s style of clothing fit in with his music—dark and aggressive.



Trent Reznor in a promotional photo



Trent Reznor live on stage

Nine Inch Nails’ first album, *Pretty Hate Machine*, was released on October 20, 1989. As Daphne Carr, author of the book *Pretty Hate Machine*, which deals with Nine Inch Nails’ debut album and its influence on its fans, argues, “*Pretty Hate Machine* arrived in the final year in office for Ronald Reagan, a fiercely antilabor president whose tax incentives made it easy to close American factories and whose trickle-down economics curbed 1970s inflation while crushing the country’s working people” (Carr, 19). The policies of Reagan caused America to head towards a postindustrial era that made for much loss for many American. Industrial music was one of the creative responses towards this shift (Carr, 20). Reznor shows a dissatisfaction with general American values that Reagan’s conservatism put upon America while creating the economic crisis that struck the US in the 1980s. Interestingly, even though *Pretty Hate Machine* can be seen as a reaction to the political climate of the 1980s, the lyrics are kept very close to home; to Reznor’s own psyche. His music emphasizes his individualism. According to Daphne Carr, “Nine Inch Nails borrow the sound and style of electro-industrial but rejects the overt politics and parody of the subgenre to focus almost exclusively on the personal tragedy of the people and institutions that fail one individual: Trent Reznor. NIN’s lyrics explore the repression of religion, family, and society, but only as they pertain to one life, sung in almost too-human melodies and without perceivable irony” (21). NIN is a product of Reagan’s decade.

The two songs of *Pretty Hate Machine* this chapter will take a look at are “Head Like A Hole” and “Sin”. Firstly, “Head Like A Hole” was Nine Inch Nails’ second single of the *PHM* album. As this thesis is not concerned with the musicological side of the music discussed here, let us take a look at the lyrics:

God money I’ll do anything for you. God money just tell me what you want me to.  
God money nail me up against the wall. God money don’t want everything he wants it all.  
No you can’t take it. No no you can’t take it (you can’t take that away from me).  
Head like a hole. Black as your soul. I’d rather die than give you control.  
Head like a hole. Black as your soul. I’d rather die than give you control.  
Bow down before the one you serve. You’re going to get what you deserve.  
God money’s not looking for the cure. God money’s not concerned about the sick among the pure.  
God money let’s go dancing on the backs of the bruised. God money’s not the one to choose.  
No you can’t take it. No no you can’t take it. No you can’t take that away from me.  
Head like a hole. Black as your soul. I’d rather die than give you control.  
Head like a hole. Black as your soul. I’d rather die than give you control.  
Bow down before the one you serve. You’re going to get what you deserve. You know who you are.  
(Reznor, 1989)

The lyrics of “Head Like A Hole” may suggest that Reznor is angry with religion, especially Christianity and its ubiquity in US society. In the song he makes the connection between religion and marketing by constantly pairing the words “god” and “money.” These two words can refer to money as god, religious money, and money as religion; the interpretation depends on the listener. The link, however, is viewed negatively in this song as there is an idea of selfishness when Reznor suggests that “god money’s not concerned about the sick among the pure”. In the chorus Reznor makes the statement that he does not want any part in religion. Even though the lyrics show his anger, they are still rather vague and can be interpreted in various ways depended on the interpreter.

Yet, the video can give the viewer more insight as to what ideas and feelings Reznor is actually trying to convey. The video presents three different settings. One is a short clip of two people twirling sticks before a crowd with another layer edited over it that shows different kinds of machinery that resemble human heads; this part is shown when Reznor is singing the verses. The head-like machinery that is shown during this part in combination of the lyrics “god money I’d do anything for you/god money just tell me what you want me to” can be a criticism on people doing what they deem a source of authority telling them without thinking for themselves, as if they are robots. The second setting is a “live” performance by Nine Inch Nails which can be seen mostly during the choruses. During this part Reznor’s anger is most apparent in the lyrics as well as that his vocals are more shout-like, which in turn can be seen on screen. In these parts the band members and equipment is covered in cables. At the end of the song Reznor is dangling from the ceiling wrapped in these cables and ropes, referring to restraint and bondage, and maybe even crucifixion. The third setting contains a long-haired man who gets covered with some water by someone who is standing behind him. The man is repeatedly bowing. This is seen while Reznor sings “bow down before the one you serve”. This layer can be interpreted as baptism. When Reznor sings these lines for the third time the man is seen kneeling in front of the bowl of water, then he bows and puts his head in the bowl. In this song Reznor is suggesting that religious people are mindless machines with heads like holes. He also criticizes the link between marketing and religion, which in the US is an integral part of the survival of churches and religious establishments because the federal government cannot provide them with financial support because of the first amendment.





Stills from "Head Like A Hole" (1989).

Shortly after the release of "Head Like A Hole," the third single of the album *Pretty Hate Machine* called "Sin" was released. The lyrics are:

You give me the reason. You give me control. I gave you my purity. My purity you stole.  
Did you think I wouldn't recognize this compromise. Am I just too stupid to realize.  
Stale incense old sweat and lies lies lies  
It comes down to this. Your kiss. Your fist. And your strain. It gets under my skin. Within.  
Take in the extent of my sin  
You give me the anger. You give me the nerve. Carry out my sentence. Well I get what I deserve.  
I'm just an effigy to be disgraced. To be defaced. Your need for me has been replaced.  
And if I can't have everything well then just give me a taste.  
It comes down to this. Your kiss. Your fist. And your strain. It gets under my skin. Within.  
Take in the extent of my sin. (Reznor, 1989)

Even though the song is about sex, the title gives it a link to religion because the word "sin" is not only mostly used in religious rhetoric, but also because the kind of sexual acts and preferences that are depicted in the video would be seen as sinful by religious standards. The video shows several heterosexual and homosexual couples seeking intimacy in various ways. The focus of this depiction lies on their fetishisms, drug use, and masochism and the overall theme of the video is the appeal of bondage. As Daphne Carr explains, the video and lyrics are an "examination of the role of power as imagined through or by the rejection of taboo and the pursuit of pleasure or the exploration of taboo desire" (29). One of the main settings shows Trent in a submission role during bondage. Even though the video was never aired on television, the video was put on the DVD *Closure*.

According to Carr, “‘Sin’ was solved with the word *purity*, or with Trent strapped half-naked in a gyroscope spun by a dominatrix in the video: a song wrestling with Christian guilt over desire” (12-13). The themes of bondage, physical pleasure, and guilt because of supposedly “perverted” desire because of its taboo status in the Christian environment of the US are themes that often reoccur on later albums.

Three years after the release of *Pretty Hate Machine*, on September 22, 1992, Nine Inch Nails released the EP *Broken*. The themes discussed on *PHM* also appear on this EP, and are even magnified. The title of the EP can refer to an object, mainly a piece of machinery, that stopped functioning. However, the overall lyrics and song titles such as “Help Me I Am In Hell,” “Happiness In Slavery,” and “Gave Up” imply that “broken” refers to a damaged mental state. Nevertheless, the only song and video that will be discussed in this chapter is “Wish,” the song that NIN received their only Grammy for. However, it should be noted that there is a short unreleased movie that was made as support for the EP which features videos accompanying five out of the eight songs from the EP, as well as an intro and conclusion video. These videos push the boundary of artistic freedom very far. Again, bondage, sex, and violence are important themes in the songs and their videos, but the video for “Happiness In Slavery,” and “Gave Up” take things even further than the already shocking videos for “Sin.” In “Happiness In Slavery” a man is seen strapped to a torture device, he is pleased by the brutal torturing, but in the end he is also killed by the machine. During “Gave Up,” the last song on the film, a kidnapped person is seen being tortured, raped, and dismembered (a different version which is included on the Closure DVD for “Gave Up” shows the band recording the song in the Sharon Tate House). Everything is depicted very graphically in the movie (Reznor, 1993).

Because of the graphic content of these videos and other parts of the *Broken Movie*, the DVD was never officially released. However, a high-quality version was leaked on the internet, which was rumored to have come from Reznor himself. Reznor claims he made the DVD out of artistic freedom, not because of its shock value. Even though these videos go to the extreme of this artistic freedom, the DVD is one of the forefathers of a genre in horror movies that can be called “torture porn”. This genre gained in popularity in post-9/11 America with movies such as *Saw*, where

humans are graphically tortured and mutilated by the hands of other humans, and is a somewhat accepted genre within horror nowadays (Edelstein, 2006). However, this thesis will not go into this because it focuses on messages of criticism on religion in Nine Inch Nails' music. However, its shock value is relevant for an understanding of this anti-religious aspect as well.



Still from "Happiness In Slavery" (1993).

Nevertheless, one of the songs from the *Broken* EP that does deal with religion is "Wish."

The lyrics are:

This is the first day of my last days. I built it up now I take it apart climbed up real high now fall down real far. No need for me to stay the last thing left I just threw it away.

I put my faith in god and my trust in you. Now there's nothing more fucked up I could do.

Wish there was something real wish there was something true.

Wish there was something real in this world full of you.

I'm the one without a soul I'm the one with this big fucking hole. No new tale to tell twenty-six years on my way to hell. Gotta listen to your big time hard line bad luck fist fuck.

Don't think you're having all the fun. You know me I hate everyone.

Wish there was something real wish there was something true.

Wish there was something real in this world full of you.

I want to but I can't turn back. But I want to. (Reznor, 1992)

The song deals with the desire for truth in religious matters. Even though Trent describes having faith in God in this song as “fucked up,” he also expresses his wish to be able to know whether a theistic god exists or not, and not be dependent on belief only. As Reznor implies he does not have faith in God anymore, he also criticizes the way he is perceived by people who do believe in God by stating “I’m the one without a soul. I’m the one with this big fucking hole. No new tale to tell twenty-six years on my way to hell” (Reznor, 1992). Knowing that Reznor is an atheist, the “you” in the line “wish there was something real in this world full of you” could be interpreted as the Christian God. This refers the ubiquity of Christianity in America, or “this world.” Reznor expresses his anger through his vocals about coming to terms with his atheist ideas in a country where being Christian is seen as the norm.

The video for “Wish” shows Nine Inch Nails playing within a large cage that is in some kind of dark industrial setting. Surrounding the cage are many people, who are watching and listening the band play. These people react very aggressively towards the band, the music, and each other. Also, various people are locked in small cages, trapped in nets, and tied to metal bars. The band and audience express the anger that can be heard in Reznor’s vocals. During the video the audience constantly tries to get to the band members inside the cage, but they do not succeed. In the end of the video, however, they open the cage and are seen coming towards the band armed with baseball bats and other weapons. The video implies that the band members will be murdered, yet it is not shown. The video has several elements that reoccur throughout Nine Inch Nails’ songs and videos from the nineties, which include taboos about bondage and constraint, violence, anger, and sex (Carr, 4).



Stills from “Wish” (1992).



Two years later, in 1994, Reznor released his second album called *The Downward Spiral* on March 8, 1994. The album title is often interpreted as the metaphor of a person slipping deeper into a depression by NIN fans. Reznor claimed in an interview that “[t]he idea behind the album is of someone who sheds everything around them to a potential nothingness, but through career, religion, relationship, belief and so on. It's less muscle-flexing, though when I started it I didn't know what I wanted it to sound like. I knew I didn't want to be a full metal album, so I tried to address the issue of restraint” (Morris, 1994). The two songs that will be dealt with in this chapter are “Closer” and its video, and “Heresy.”

The lyrics for “Closer” are:

You let me violate you. You let me desecrate you. You let me penetrate you. You let me complicate you.

(Help me) I broke apart my insides. (Help me) I've got no soul to sell. (Help me) The only thing that works for me. Help me get away from myself.

I wanna fuck you like an animal. I wanna feel you from the inside. I wanna fuck you like an animal. My whole existence is flawed. You get me closer to God.

You can have my isolation. You can have the hate that it brings. You can have my absence of faith. you can have my everything.

(Help me) Tear down my reason. (Help me) It's your sex I can smell. (Help me) You make me perfect. Help me become somebody else.

I wanna fuck you like an animal. I wanna feel you from the inside. I wanna fuck you like an animal. My whole existence is flawed. You get me closer to God.

Through every forest, above the trees. Within my stomach, scraped off my knees. I drink the honey inside your hive. You are the reason I stay alive. (Reznor,1994)

Even though the song is about the gaining of control and identity through sex of Reznor, or the character from which the song narrates, and not necessarily about religion, this song's video contains imagery that is critical of religion. The lyrics of the song, according to James Salvatore and Brian Cancellieri are about Reznor and “[t]he complete submission of his partner to all his

abuses [which] empowers him in the most complete way. And through this empowerment he is able to escape his life as a helpless victim and feel what he perceives to be the control of God” (Salvatore and Cancellieri, 1998). Reznor describes a person whose mental health is failing, and can only escape his “flawed existence” through engaging in brutal sex with someone else.

In the “The Making of ‘Closer,’” the director of the video, Mark Romanek, claims that “Closer” was to look “like a found object, some old film found in a closet somewhere in a science institute in Prague or something”. Later he also claims that “it was meant to look dreamlike and in that sense an eclectic aesthetically” (Romanek, 2009). One of the similarities with Reznor’s earlier videos is that “Closer” has many references to bondage and S&M, religion, and contains raw and shocking imagery. Yet, what is different is that whereas many of the earlier videos contain relatively few different settings, this video is a collection of many sets, images, and references to other artworks.

When analyzing the religious imagery used in the video, the two most striking images are the one of the monkey tied to a cross right after hearing Trent sing “I wanna fuck you like an animal,” and the one where a naked, bald woman is wearing a mask that has a small Jesus statue on it in the middle of the mask. Both images make a play at the animalistic way the character wants to have sex with his partner, which obviously involves nudity. When this is combined with religious imagery such as a cross and Jesus figure, the images give a more shocking effect and play just like the video for “Sin” on the idea of the immorality of “non-traditional” sex and guilt through atypical desire as is preached in Christianity. Also, the use of the Jesus statue on the mask might indicate that Reznor is trying to convey the idea that religion blinds, or visually handicaps, its followers.





Stills from “Closer” (1994).



Left: one of the many references to other art work in “Closer.” Right: Frances Bacon’s “Figure With Meat” (1954).

Even though “Closer” deals with religious imagery and subtly criticizes religion in a few frames, “Heresy” deals more explicitly with religion. The lyrics are:

He sewed his eyes shut because he is afraid to see. He tries to tell me what I put inside of me.

He's got the answers to ease my curiosity. He dreamed a god up and called it Christianity.

Your God is dead and no one cares. If there is a Hell I will see you there.

He flexed his muscles to keep his flock of sheep in line. He made a virus that would kill off all the swine.

His perfect kingdom of killing, suffering and pain. Demands devotion atrocities done in his name.

Your God is dead and no one cares. Drowning in his own hypocrisy. If there is a Hell I will see you there.

Burning with your god in humility. Will you die for this? (Reznor, 1994)

In an interview with *U Magazine*, Reznor explains the meaning of this song. He claims that "I was trying to explore some of the paranoia I have as a sexually active person in the age of AIDS ... I guess I feel cheated for not growing up in a more liberated era. At the same time, what gets me mad is the way the right wing has used the 'convenience' of this epidemic in helping to promote their own agenda" (Hooper, 1994). This song is a clear statement against Christianity, religious conservatives, and, as mentioned by Reznor himself, using a terrible disease to market religious and political ideas.

As Hooper argues, "NIN enables Reznor to vocalize the sense of displacement he feels in his own life" (Hooper, 1994). Reznor uses various themes to accomplish this, such as "atypical desire, religious skepticism, and depressive mental states" (Carr, 4). In his music Reznor addresses various subjects that are considered taboo in US society, such as non-traditional sex and atheist ideas, as well as that Nine Inch Nails' videos constantly push the boundary of artistic freedom with shocking imagery. From the point of view of conservative Christians in US society, NIN's art can be seen as subversive because NIN criticizes general American values, which are interlinked with Christian values. However, Nine Inch Nails gathered a great following over the years that consist of people who identify with Reznor and his ideas. More importantly, NIN is the outlet of Trent Reznor's personal issues and ideas, and in his lyrics he is not dictating anyone what to think or do, he is only expressing his own doubts, insecurities, desires, and skepticism about issues that he feels are important to deal with.

### *Marilyn Manson*

Reznor is not only a musician, but also a producer who co-owns the record-label called Nothing Records. The first band signed to this label was Marilyn Manson and the Spooky Kids, later known as simply Marilyn Manson. Even though Marilyn Manson is a band consisting of five members, the band revolves around its front man who took on the pseudonym Marilyn Manson. Manson, who was born as Brian Hugh Warner on January 5, 1969, took religious skepticism to even higher levels than his friend and colleague Trent Reznor. The three albums that will be discussed in this chapter

are *Antichrist Superstar* (1996), *Mechanical Animals* (1998), and *Holy Wood (In The Shadow Of The Valley Of Death)* (2000). These three were presented by Manson as a trilogy that should be viewed backwards, and were the works that served as the fundamentals to which Manson developed and explored his persona and performance; his descent into being an antichrist.



*Antichrist Superstar* (1996)

*Mechanical Animals* (1998)

*Holy Wood* (2000)

Manson was born in Canton, Ohio, where he lived until he was eighteen and moved to Tampa Bay, Florida. Even though he was not raised in a religious household, he did attend a strict Christian school. According to Manson, this is where his interest in the occult came from. Manson explains in his autobiography *The Long Hard Road Out Of Hell* that his Christian school teachers

would bring in Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath and Alice Cooper records and play them loudly on the P.A. system. Different teachers would take turns at the record player, spinning the albums backward with an index finger and explaining the hidden messages. Of course, the most extreme music with the most satanic messages was exactly what I wanted to listen to, chiefly because it was forbidden. They would hold up photographs of the bands to frighten us, but all that ever accomplished was to make me decide that I wanted long hair and an earring just like the rockers in the pictures. (26)

Even though Manson was raised by parents who were not really religious and did not have anything against rock music, the negative attention his school gave rock music was exactly what inspired Manson to make himself more familiar with the genre and eventually become a rock musician himself (Manson, 1998).

The name Marilyn Manson, according to Gavin Baddeley, is “a name split between the theoretical opposites of America’s most infamous killer, Charles Manson, and her most beloved

Hollywood star, Marilyn Monroe. As their rechristened namesake has observed, ‘I thought that those two – positive/negative, male/female, good/evil, beauty/ugliness – created the perfect dichotomy of everything I wanted to represent.’” (8). So unlike Nine Inch Nails, the name Marilyn Manson was chosen because of its meaning. Other band members were given similar pseudonyms by Manson, such as Twiggy Ramirez and Daisy Berkowitz. Manson’s physical appearance has changed since the band recorded their first album *Portrait of an American Family* in 1994. Even though Manson was already sporting a Goth look when the band started in 1989, when *Antichrist Superstar* came out seven years later he had added many layers of make-up, extravagant haircuts, and over-the-top outfits to his already dark image. Throughout the years Manson has had many different looks, yet all had an overall Goth theme.



The many looks of Marilyn Manson.

Before Manson released *Antichrist Superstar* the band released the album *Portrait of an American Family* and the EP *Smells Like Children*. Both records already contain the critical stance towards Christianity. Manson claims that he meant for his lyrics to be shocking. In his autobiography he talks about the song “Cake and Sodomy” that is featured on *POAAF*. He argues

that “‘Cake and Sodomy’ was more than just a good song. As an anthem for a hypocritical America slobbering on the tit of Christianity, it was a blueprint for our future message. If televangelists were going to make the world seem so wicked, I was going to give them something real to cry about” (95). Manson is very explicitly against organized religion, mainly Christianity, and the way it is used by government officials and the media, which can be heard in his music and read in his autobiography.

On October 8, 1996, Manson released his second album *Antichrist Superstar (AS)*, which was produced by Reznor. According to Daphne Carr, *AS* “was a death-rock-opera mockery of evangelical faith narratives” (Carr, 4-5). This album is loaded with criticism on religion in US society. Even though the album has also been compared to NIN’s *The Downward Spiral* by fans and critics, Manson states in his autobiography that “*Antichrist Superstar* was not the same as *The Downward Spiral*, which was about Trent’s descent into an inner, solipsistic world of self-torment and wretchedness. *Antichrist Superstar* was about using your power, not your misery, and watching that power destroy you and everyone else around you” (232). Just like Reznor, Manson sees his work as an expression of his own personal feelings and thoughts, and *Antichrist Superstar* is about his own personal apocalypse (242). The album title is a play on the popular movie *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973), and is, by using the word Antichrist, an introduction to the anti-religious content of the songs the album holds. Even though the antichrist in biblical terms is an evil character that precludes the second coming of Jesus Christ, Manson puts himself in the character of the antichrist on this album.

Booklet of *Antichrist Superstar*Back of *Antichrist Superstar*

The song that gave the album its name and the video that was made for it show Manson's views of Christianity. The lyrics are:

You built me up with your wishing hell. I didn't have to sell you.  
You threw your money in the pissing well. You do just what they tell you.  
Repent, that's what I'm talking about. I shed the skin to feed the fake.  
Repent, that's what I'm talking about. Whose mistake am I anyway?  
Cut the head off. Grows back hard. I am the hydra. Now you'll see your star.  
Prick your finger it is done. The moon has now eclipsed the sun.  
The angel has spread its wings. The time has come for bitter things.  
Repent, that's what I'm talking about. I shed the skin to feed the fake.  
Repent, that's what I'm talking about. Whose mistake am I anyway?  
The time has come it is quite clear. Our antichrist. Is almost here... It is done. (Manson, 1996)

Manson states in this song that the antichrist is rising and that he was made Christians. He puts his own personae, Marilyn Manson in the role of the antichrist. As mentioned earlier, Manson became interested in rock and metal music as a teenager exactly because his high school teachers condemned it for its immoral and supposedly evil content. He also claims that the criticism on his work by Christians only made him stronger, as he uses the metaphor of the hydra; when he is put down, he only comes back stronger. The song deals with his anger towards Christians and his descent into becoming the antichrist that Christian critics have claimed he is.

The video that was made accompanying the song was never officially released. However, it has been spread on the internet and is now, in 2012, available on YouTube. The video is a black and white, low definition video that has many images referring to Nazi Germany and censoring practices that are a result of oppression by a government, or the attempts to censorship by a religious group such as the burning of certain books. At one point the viewer also sees an American flag waving. These images are seen during the verses. A layer is edited over this that shows Manson sitting on some kind of throne singing. During the choruses we hear Manson shout



“repent” and see him preaching with a book in one of his hands; here he plays on evangelical and revivalist ways of preaching and their tradition of naming and shaming. The video links religious practices such as preaching and censorship with totalitarian regimes such as that of Nazi Germany. Manson criticizes hypocrisy of Christianity by showing its practices can be compared Nazism (Manson, 1996).



Stills from “Antichrist Superstar” (1996).

Where *Antichrist Superstar* was seen as a “death-rock opera,” its successor *Mechanical Animals* leaned musically more towards pop-rock. *Mechanical Animals* was released on 14 September, 1998 by Nothing Records. Where Manson put himself in the shoes of the antichrist in his previous album, on *Mechanical Animals* he has a dual identity. As Gavid Baddeley argues, “Marilyn’s new twin personae for this musical exploration of the hollowness of fame, was that of an impossibly decadent rock star and an androgynous extraterrestrial” (14). On the cover of the album we see the latter, whereas the rock star is shown on the backside of the booklet.



Manson’s two *Mechanical Animals* personae.

Even though this album contains less explicit criticism on Christianity, it is still very present. The overall theme of the album is drugs—both the medical and recreational kind. However, Manson links the usage of drugs to depressions that are gained by living in contemporary US society. He also links the development of this mental illness to the ubiquity of Christianity. The songs are split into two categories, as can be seen in the booklet. The first is the one of the androgynous extraterrestrial; the medical and mechanical side of drug usage and depression. The second is the one of Omega the rock star; the recreational, glamorous, and emotional side of drug usage and depression. The two songs from this album that show Manson’s ideas on Christianity and its use in US society most explicitly are “Coma White” and “I Don’t Like The Drugs (But The Drugs Like Me).”

Firstly, the lyrics for “Coma White” are:

There's something cold and blank behind her smile.

She's standing on an overpass in a miracle mile.

Cause you were from a perfect world.

A world that threw me away today, today, today. To run away.

A pill to make you numb. A pill to make you dumb. A pill to make you anybody else.

But all the drugs in this world. Won't save her from herself.

Her mouth was an empty cut. She was waiting to fall.

Just bleeding like a Polaroid. That lost all her dolls.

Cause you were from a perfect world.

A world that threw me away today, today, today. To run away.

A pill to make you numb. A pill to make you dumb. A pill to make you anybody else.

But all the drugs in this world. Won't save her from herself. (Manson, 1998)

The song is about a girl that takes medication for her depression and possibly anxiety issues. Manson criticizes the use of anti-depression drugs such as Prozac because he claims that they make you a different person. He criticizes US society by claiming that in the United States it is better to be numb, dumb, and anybody else than face the darker things in life.

The video goes a step further by recreating the murder of President John F. Kennedy. In the video Manson steps in the role of Kennedy and drives through a street on the backseat of a car. Next to him is actress Rose McGowan in the role of Jacky Kennedy and they are waving at the crowd. Then he gets shot and the cars drives off with Jacky in shock holding her dead husband. Interestingly, Manson links the worshipping of Jesus with the idolization of the President, in this case JFK. For example, in the beginning we see a woman kneeling before a star on the Walk of Fame. Also, in the street where the car with the Kennedys drives through many neon signs hang off the walls. Some of them are crosses, indicating that Jesus Christ is just as much a celebrity and commodity as the President, or even Manson himself is. Manson even compares the crucifixion of Jesus Christ with the murder of JFK. A man is seen holding a head-high cross with a picture of JFK on it, as well as that Manson in his role of Kennedy is nailed to a cross, suggesting that JFK was a martyr and died for—or maybe even because of—our sins, as well as that this is what turned him into a “holy” celebrity (Manson, 1999). Manson plays with the concept of idolization. In this video he links the worshipping of Jesus Christ to the worshipping of JFK, or the American president in general. The criticism lies in the idea that religion, the president, and even death itself are commodities to be consumed by the audience; American society. Also, the video makes the link between religion, marketing, and entertainment, because of the neon signs. Religion is put as a commodity that can be consumed and be used for entertainment.





Stills from “Coma White” (1999).

Secondly, the lyrics for “I Don’t Like The Drugs (But The Drugs Like Me)” are:

Norm life baby "we're white and oh so hetero and our sex is missionary."

Norm life baby "we're quitters and we're sober our confessions will be televised."

You and I are under dosed and we're ready to fall. Raised to be stupid, taught to be nothing at all.

I don't like the drugs but the drugs like me. I don't like the drugs, the drugs, the drugs.

Norm life baby "our god is white and unforgiving we're piss tested and we're praying."

Norm life baby "I'm just a sample of a soul made to look just like a human being."

Norm life baby "we're rehabbed and we're ready for our 15 minutes of shame."

Norm life baby "we're talkshow and we're pointing just like Christians at a suicide."

You and I are under dosed and we're ready to fall. Raised to be stupid, taught to be nothing at all.

I don't like the drugs but the drugs like me. I don't like the drugs, the drugs, the drugs.

There's a hole in our soul, that we fill with dope. And we're feeling fine. (Manson, 1999)

In this song Manson is criticizing what is considered to be the “norm life” in the United States. Manson argues that he is pushed into drugs by US society’s hypocrisy which he feels stems from the ubiquity of Christianity. Just like the video for “Coma White,” this song is criticizing the link between marketing and religion in America, especially the phenomenon of televangelism. Also, Manson draws attention to the television culture in general, especially the talk show phenomenon. Manson claims in this song that television makes people dumb and passive consumers without the ability to think critically. This is also reflected in the video for the song.

In the video we see Manson walking through a suburban street dragging along a cross made of television sets. He is chased by policemen who have no heads. At a certain point he drops the cross and flees to a plastic surgery facility and they cut off part of his left arm. Eventually the policemen catch him on top of a building from which he jumps to escape them. In the last shot Manson lies on the ground, only to be replaced by the cross made of televisions that show Manson. During parts of the video a family with strange cartoon-like heads is shown watching television. The video criticizes the link between marketing and religion by showing a cross made of television sets, and shows how the combination of religion and television makes for passive consumers. The family is shown as passive and numb because of their heads and their animated way of reacting to the television. The policemen are shown as passive and numb because they are headless, and therefore brainless. The video also criticizes the use of tragedy and death as entertainment, not unlike “Coma White”. This can be seen at the end when Manson lies dead on the ground and later his body is televised (Manson, 1999). The fact that the television sets form a cross shows that Manson criticizes not only the link between marketing and religion, but also the element of sensation and entertainment that comes with it.



Stills from “I Don’t Like The Drugs (But The Drugs Like Me)” (1999).

If Manson became more explicit against religion and its role in American society on his second album of this trilogy, then on his third he is most explicit about his ideas concerning religion. On the album *Holy Wood (In The Shadow Of The Valley Of Death)*, which was released on November 13, 2000, Manson makes very explicit anti-Christian statements. The cover shows Manson nailed to a cross just like Jesus, including the wound on the left side of the chest, a halo, and the sign above his head saying “I.N.R.I.” The title is a play on the name Hollywood, which is the biggest entertainment industry of the world, and a description of the cross to which Jesus nailed; a piece of holy wood. Also, this was the first Manson album to be released after the Columbine massacre. Manson called this album a “declaration of war” against his critics (Bryant, 2010).

This declaration of war can be heard in the song “The Fight Song.” The lyrics are:

Nothing suffocates you more than the passing of everyday human events.  
And isolation is the oxygen mask you make your children breath in to survive.  
I'm not a slave to a god that doesn't exist. I'm not a slave to a world that doesn't give a shit.  
And when we were good, you just close your eyes. So now we are bad we'll scar your mind.  
Fight. Fight. Fight. Fight. Fight. Fight. Fight. Fight.  
You'll never grow up to be a big rock star. Celebrated victim of your fame.  
We'll just cut our wrists like cheap coupons and say that death is on sale today.  
and when we were good, you just close your eyes. So now we are bad we'll scar your mind.  
I'm not a slave to a god that doesn't exist. I'm not a slave to a world that doesn't give a shit.  
The death of one is a tragedy. The death of one is a tragedy.  
The death of one is a tragedy. The death of a million is just a statistic.  
I'm not a slave to a god that doesn't exist. I'm not a slave to a world that doesn't give a shit.  
I'm not a slave to a god that doesn't exist. I'm not a slave to a world that doesn't give a shit.  
Fight. Fight. Fight. Fight. Fight. Fight. Fight. Fight.

In this song Manson explicitly states that he does not believe in God and that he wants to fight those who do. Again Manson criticizes Christians for blindly following an entity that in his views

does not even exist; he calls them slaves of God. The video emphasizes the fight Manson envisions in the song.

The video shows an American Football match. The game is between the Holy Wood High School team, which is dressed in white with the word “holy” on their shirts, and the Death Valley High School team, which is dressed in black with the word “death” on their shirts. On a podium next to the field where the game is held Manson is playing with his band before a large poster that says “We’re all HAPPY to live in America,” a phrase which, in light of this video, should be taken with sarcasm. The two teams play an aggressive game while Manson shouts “fight” towards the teams. In the end of the video the match board is set on fire as well as one of the crossbars. The video ends with the crossbar on fire falling over (Manson, 2000). Manson uses a iconic American high esteemed sport and leisure activity to embody his fight against Christianity. The burning crossbar at the end can be seen as a metaphor for a burning cross, the Christian cross than Manson wants to take down.



Stills from “The Fight Song” (2000).

Interestingly, in an episode of the MTV U show “Stand In,” Manson teaches an art class at Temple University. Here he claims that “as an artist your goal is to affect people, whether that is in

a negative way or a positive way. I think ultimately that is the role of the artist in society". When asked the question "Do you feel that the government or the establishment of power that be, that they use religion and the media in order to manipulate and dumb the people down so that they control us?" Manson answered that "I think that's the principles on which religion was created in the first place. I'm not someone who does not respect religion if that's what someone believes in, but I don't care for the way religion is used to manipulate people" (MTV U, 2008). Manson here claims that he is against the way the US government uses religion to keep their citizens in check. Yet, he shows that he is not anti-religion altogether. Even though Manson is always received as an atheist, he calls himself spiritual. In an interview uploaded to YouTube in 2011, which was recorded in his Manson's home, he claims that "I think church has very little to do with spirituality. I think it's something you have to find in yourself. It's about expressing your deepest fears and your emotions and putting it in something. It's not about living in fear and praying and hoping you're not going to hell, that's not real spiritual to me"(Marilyn Manson Interview On his Spiritual Beliefs, His Pets and His Lunchboxes, YouTube). Manson does not oppose to religious beliefs, but to organized religion and its use by the government and media to scare and control people.

Manson's music and lyrics are an expression of his personal ideas and feelings, however he also reacts directly to his critics by calling his fourth album, *Holy Wood*, a declaration of war. In comparison to Nine Inch Nails, Marilyn Manson is more explicit in criticizing US society as a whole, not just the role religion plays in it and its effect on him as an individual. Manson tends to use the words "we" and "us" more often than the word "I," whereas Reznor does the opposite. Manson therefore tries to be a spokesperson for people with the same ideas as him. Many critics and conservatives would call Manson subversive; from their point of view he is because he attacks Christianity and the practices in US society that he feels are hypocrite. Yet, in a country where freedom of speech and freedom of religion is celebrated highly, Manson can hardly be seen as subversive. Yet, he does position himself against practices that are highly celebrated in US society, such as Christianity. Most interestingly, he is assumed to be an atheist—and even a Satanist—because of his the extreme anti-Christian ideas and imagery in his music and music videos, even



though he openly proclaims he is spiritual. Does this mean that that being different, or non-Christian, equals to being subversive in the US?

### *Slipknot*

While Reznor and Manson sported Goth looks, the men of Slipknot took things a step further. Jason Arnopp claims in his book *Slipknot: Inside The Sickness, Behind The Masks*, that “Nine Inch Nails frontman Trent Reznor originally signed Marilyn Manson to his own Nothing Records label, and believes his protégé opened the floodgates for a beast like Slipknot” (11). For years after the release of their debut album *Slipknot*, no one knew what the nine men of this metalcore band from the conservative town of Des Moines, Iowa even looked like. This is due to the fact that the men of Slipknot all wear masks and overalls that conceal their individual identity. Even though they all have their own unique mask, they go by numbers, not names. The reason why this band is interesting for analysis is because Slipknot’s image is often described as satanic. Even though the band does not have many explicit anti-religious lyrics, this band is usually considered atheist, satanic, and subversive.



Slipknot



#0 Sid Wilson

#1 Joey Jordison

#2 Paul Gray

#3 Chris Fehn

#4 Jim Root



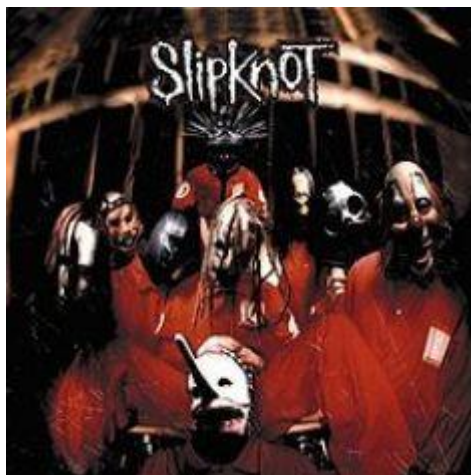
#5 Craig "133" Jones

#6 Shawn "Clown" Crahan

#7 Mick Thompson

#8 Corey Taylor

This chapter will analyze two songs. The first is "Wait and Bleed" from their self-titled debut album *Slipknot* (1999), and will be analyzed because of its two videos which establish Slipknot's image. The second song is "The Heretic Anthem" from their second album *Iowa* (2001), which deals with Slipknot's ideas of religion and the way they position themselves against Christianity.



*Slipknot* (1999)



*Iowa* (2001)

On 29 June, 1999, Slipknot released their self-titled debut album. The album quickly grew very popular on an international level. The main themes are rage, confrontation, corruption, waste, and sickness, whether the songs are written from their own points of view or from fictional characters (McIver, 92-93). As Joel McIver states, “even the songs that don’t deal directly with violence between person and person are still concerned with hurt or harm in some form or other” (93). Firstly, the lyrics for “Wait And Bleed” are:

I've felt the hate rise up in me. Kneel down and clear the stone of leaves.  
I wander out where you can't see. Inside my shell, I wait and bleed.  
Goodbye!  
I wipe it off on tile, the light is brighter this time. Everything is 3D blasphemy.  
My eyes are red and gold, the hair is standing straight up. This is not the way I pictured me.  
I can't control my shakes, how the hell did I get here? Something about this, so very wrong.  
I have to laugh out loud, I wish I didn't like this. Is it a dream or a memory?  
Get outta my head cuz I don't need this. Why didn't I see this? I'm a victim - Manchurian candidate.  
I have sinned by just by makin' my mind up and takin' your breath away!  
You haven't learned a thing. I haven't changed a thing.  
My flesh was in my bones The pain was always free.  
And it waits for you! (Slipknot, 1999)

In his book *Slipknot: All Hope Is Gone*, Joel McIver gives a short analysis of “Wait And Bleed.” McIver claims that “Taylor is singing from the perspective of someone who has cut his wrists in a suicide attempt and is waiting for death to come. Heavy? In all sense, although, the song is among the most hummable of the Slipknot cannon” (McIver, 86). The song is about a man who is trying to commit suicide. In itself, this song has little to do with religion, however, the use of the words “blasphemy” and “sinned” shows that the subject of the song views his actions through the Christian morals and standards. The line stating “I have sinned by just makin’ my mind up and takin’ your breath away!” shows the idea that even ideas and thought can be “sinful”, which is

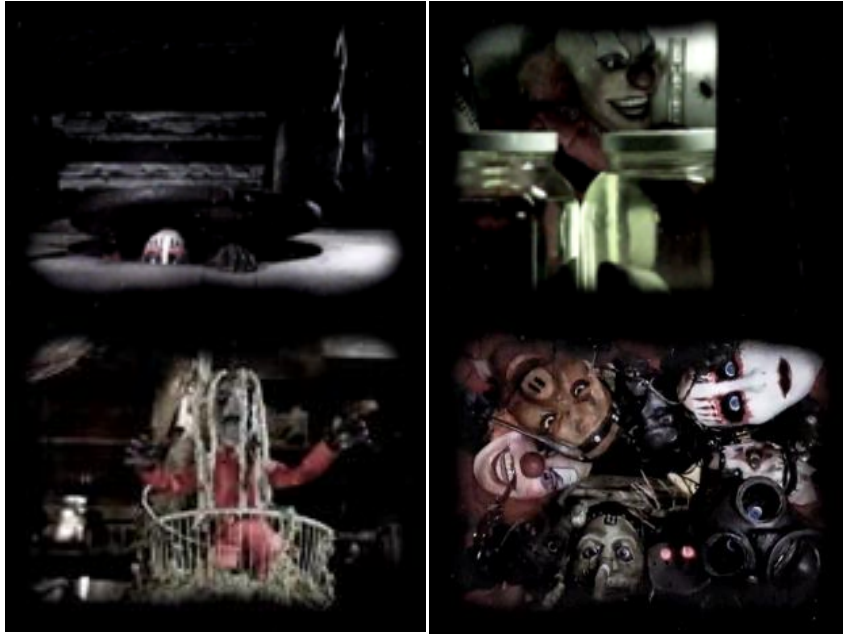
clearly a Christian approach to the subject. Even though this song does not really criticize religion or have a claim about Christianity, the use of these Christian words is interesting.

There are two videos for “Wait And Bleed.” The first one shows Slipknot performing the song on a festival. As this was Slipknot’s very first single, and therefore first video, the video establishes Slipknot’s image; the usage of overalls and masks. Also, the video shows their aggressive and energetic live performance and shows that the band puts itself first and foremost as a live band with a exiting stage performance.



Stills from “Wait and Bleed (Original Cut)” (1999).

The second version of the video is partly animated. It shows a man in a basement that contains many mechanical devices and jars full of fluids and objects such as eyes—it is probably some kind of laboratory. In the shadows animated doll-like versions of the band members are seen creeping about. Eventually they manage to tackle the man and set him on fire. This video again establishes the band’s image, rather than that the video complements the what the song is about.



Stills from “Wait And Bleed (Animated Version)” (1999).

Slipknot’s second album *Iowa* was released on August 18, 2001. On this album Slipknot takes the themes of anger and sickness even further. The DVD that accompanies the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition contains “an hour-long film capturing the insanity that was *Iowa*” (2011). In this film Joey Jordison, #1, claims that *Iowa* is “probably the darkest place that this band’s ever experienced, ever. And that’s what made such, that’s what made the record. If we weren’t in the place that we were at that time this record wouldn’t exist. And the first record was fun, this one’s complete hate, and I listen to it now, and it actually scares me” (2011). Shawn “Clown” Crahan, #6, states that “*Iowa* to me, what I represent and envision, is that it was going to be darkest I could become without being arrested, locked up, divorced, have my kids taken away from me, abandoned, and any sort of philosophies that would go with making real art” (2011). Later in the film Corey Taylor, #8, claims that

*Iowa* was an example of how we succeeded and failed on so many fucking levels. It’s the darkest fucking album I have ever heard. It’s gross. It’s thick. It’s brutal. It’s heavy as shit. It’s the fucking, like it’s the only album I ever heard where you can wear it, like a skin. You can wear it like fucking

clothes. You put ‘em on like hunting boots. It’s disgustingly fucking heavy and dark, and everything that we were feeling and everything that we were doing went into that album. (2011)

Slipknot members claim that *Iowa* was dark and brutal, it is an expression of the hate and anger that they felt during the recording of this album. The expressions of hate can be seen in the song “The Heretic Anthem”. The lyrics are:

8 7 6 6 6 5 4 3 2 1.

I'm a pop star threat and I'm not dead yet. Got a super dread bet with an angel drug head.

Like a dead beat winner, I want to be a sinner. An idolized bang for the industry killer.

A hideous man that you don't understand. Throw a suicide party and I'm guaranteed to fucking snap.

It evilsonic, it's pornoholic. Breakdowns, obscenities, it's all I wanna be.

If you're 555, then I'm 666. If you're 555, I'm 666.

Well if you're 555 then I'm 666. What's it like to be a heretic?

If you're 555 then I'm 666. What's it like to be a heretic?

Everybody's so infatuated. Everybody's so completely sure of what we are.

Everybody defamates from miles away. But face to face they haven't got a thing to say.

I bleed for this and I bleed for you. Still you look in my face like I'm somebody new.

Toy, nobody wants anything I've got. Which is fine because you're made of everything I'm not.

If you're 555, then I'm 666. If you're 555, then I'm 666.

Well if you're 555 then I'm 666. What's it like to be a heretic?

If you're 555 then I'm 666. What's it like to be a heretic?

30 seconds, 16, 8, 4, lemme tell you why. I haven't the slightest, I'm teaching your brightest.

They're listening , clamoring. All the money in the world can't buy me.

Go ahead, lie to me. Tell me again how you're tortured.

I wanna know how you followed your orders so well. You're full of shit

You want a dream, but this ain't it.

If you're 555 I'm 666. If you're 555 I'm 666.

If you're 555 I'm 666. If you're 555 I'm 666.

If you're 555 then I'm 666. What's it like to be a heretic?

If you're 555 then I'm 666. What's it like to be a heretic?

If you're 555 then I'm 666. What's it like to be a heretic?

If you're 555 then I'm 666. What's it like to be a heretic? (Slipknot, 2001)

The hate and anger the band felt during the recording of *Iowa* is reflected in “The Heretic Anthem.” The song is about consciously going against those around you. In the verses Taylor expresses that he wants to be a sinner as well as that he desires conflict. He puts himself in the position of a heretic, by calling himself 666, which is the “number of the Beast” in Biblical language, as opposed to 555, which is “the fictional area telephone code used in Hollywood movies” (McIver, 126). In “The Heretic Anthem” Taylor aggressively proclaims his hate and anger towards a you that is 555, which possibly stands for US society and its Hollywood ethics, as well as Slipknot’s critics, and names himself a heretic; by doing this he puts himself in opposition to American Christian society.. He uses Christian words, like in “Wait And Bleed” to go against the conservative environment of his home state Iowa (McIver, 127).

Slipknot’s music is an expression of the hate, anger, despair, and desires that the band members feel. Their music and lyrics are just as aggressive as their image and stage performance which is also reflected in song titles such as “People = Shit.” However, this does not mean that their music exists of cursing words and shouting only. In an interview in Germany Crahan explains the ideas behind the song “People = Shit,” he claims that “[a]nything that is wrong in this world, you can blame man for it! All the oil poured into the ocean.. who *made* the fucking oil? Who dug it out? People have the possibility to change everything, but most of you guys take it easy. Men have the answers to change the whole world, but until people change everything, people equal fucking shit!” (McIver, 95). Even though Slipknot’s lyrics are not explicitly anti-religion in the way that NIN and Marilyn Manson are, Slipknot’s image and art positions the band as a non-religious, and sometimes even anti-religious band. For example, the nine pointed star that Slipknot uses as a logo refers to the pentagram, a symbol often used in Satanism and the occult. Also, Slipknot’s use of the goat as an image for their album cover of “*Iowa*” is also a symbol often used in Satanism, and has references to the devil himself. Whether Slipknot is a satanic band is dealt with in the following

chapter. Yet, in an interview guitarist Mick Thompson claimed that “Christianity is a fucking blight on humanity. There is nothing sicker that this world has ever seen than organized religion. People give me shit, because I watch The 700 club and Robert Tilton. Whatever. Know thy enemy” (Bozza, 2001). Thompsons views are overall shared by his band mates. Slipknot might not criticize religion explicitly in its lyrics, the art around their music as well as their answers in interviews show their anti-religious ideas.



Slipknot's nine pointed star



LaVey's Satanic symbol

Furthermore, even though it can sometimes seem that Slipknot's lyrics exist of growls and cursing only, this is not the case, as their songs always have an idea behind them. McIver even goes as far as to say that Slipknot carries out a positive message to their fans. He claims that “[t]here's positivity in Slipknot and their music: a determination to rise above it all, to make good the inner sickness and become better than their enemies” (McIver, 95). Although Slipknot can be interpreted as being subversive, the music also gives out a positive message which includes the importance of individuality and working hard to obtain your goals.

### *Subversive and Satanic?*

Interestingly, of the three bands analyzed in this chapter, the band that is most openly subversive is not explicitly criticizing religion or its role in US society in their music. Slipknot's subversiveness is not achieved by openly criticizing Christianity through lyrics, but through their creepy image,



aggressive music and stage performances, and album artwork. Even though Nine Inch Nails and Marilyn Manson might be interpreted as aggressive, while proclaiming their aversion towards religion in US society, in comparison to Slipknot both acts are rather meek, with Marilyn Manson being the least aggressive of all three, both musically and lyrically. Yet, Marilyn Manson was attacked most by critics for his art because he is perceived to be an atheist, which, ironically, he is not. Does this mean that in US society anti-religious sentiment is deemed more subversive than hateful and aggressive ideas that do not have explicitly anti-religious content? However, it cannot be denied that Manson uses imagery in his critique that Christians deem sacred. Therefore, from their point of view Manson's use of these images is highly blasphemous, and therefore immoral. Therefore, whether Nine Inch Nails, Marilyn Manson, and Slipknot are interpreted as subversive and satanic depends mostly on the listener/viewer's personal beliefs, taste, and overall background. The next chapter will look at what part of these bands image and music the critics picked up on. Which act did they critique the most, and why exactly were these bands singled out? Also, how do fans use music and their fandom to achieve feelings of belonging and empowerment?

### 3. “Your God is Dead and No One Cares”: the reception of Nine Inch Nails, Marilyn Manson, and Slipknot.

The previous chapter has shown that Nine Inch Nails, Marilyn Manson, and Slipknot all critique religion, especially Christianity, and its use in US society in different ways. Also, it has been established that interpretation depends on several different axes: personal belief, taste, and background. Therefore, the interpretation of their music and ideas might differ between fans and critics. First, this chapter will look at how Nine Inch Nails, Marilyn Manson, and Slipknot have been reviewed and criticized in the media and US society. How has their music been received by Christians in the United States? How have the bands reacted to their accusations, and how have other reviewers and journalists reacted to these accusations? Also, as most Christian media sources have criticized Marilyn Manson for being a member of the Church of Satan, and called all three case studies Satanic, what exactly is Satanism? Second, this chapter will look at the fans. What messages do the fans take from the lyrics; how do they apply these songs to their personal lives? Also, how do the processes of identification, belonging, and empowerment work within fandom and how does this have a positive influence on the fans? As the fans are often the topic of debate—the influence of the music on them—it is important to research how fans react to music, how they use messages from music in their daily lives, and what their relationship with the musicians and other fans is.

#### *Critiques and Reviews*

There are many different ways in which journalists, critics, and reviewers can write about bands and their music. There are album reviews, concert reviews, in-depth stories on the people behind the music, and critical essays on the music and art. This chapter will look mostly at the in-depth stories and critical essays. Atheist rock and metal music has been criticized heavily by religious groups on websites and magazines, such as *Christianity Today*. Also, many protests have been held in order to cancel a concert by a band that they deem immoral. Christian communities throughout

the United States have actively protested against and criticized atheist rock and metal acts. This chapter will look at what exactly makes these acts immoral, according to them, and why they should not be allowed to perform, and also how other journalists have reacted against these accusations.

During the mid-nineties, when Nine Inch Nails had established itself as a highly popular band amongst the industrial focused audience, several articles were published that focused on the violent and hateful ideas in NIN's music. For example, contributing editor John Leo for news magazine *U.S. News & World Report* published an article which is an argument against Time Warner in general. In his opinion, Time Warner "is doing the most to lower standards and further degrade what's left of American culture" (Leo, 1995). Leo talks about television and film, but mostly focuses on the musicians Time Warner endorses. For example, Leo attacks Time Warner for "cashing in on the amoral singers who work tirelessly to tear the culture apart, glorifying brutality, violence and the most hateful attitudes towards women the public culture has ever seen, ranging from rape to torture and murder" (Leo, 1995). When discussing Nine Inch Nails, Leo claims that "[l]ast week Time Warner bought another chunk of Interscope, the hottest record company around, and now owns 50 percent. This is the cultural equivalent of owning half the world's mustard-gas factories. One Interscope talent, Nine Inch Nails, sings about self-loathing, sexual obsession, torture, suicide, and dismemberment" (Leo, 1995). Leo criticizes NIN's focus on mental health issues and taboos; he calls NIN and Time Warner cultural polluters. Leo only focuses on certain elements of NIN's music, and therefore analyzes them out of context.

In the *Christian Science Monitor*, a news magazine, Frank Scheck published an article in which he compares the success of NIN amongst teenagers with that of Elvis and The Beatles. He claims that "[o]f course, there is a difference. Elvis didn't sing about death and destruction, and the Beatles didn't perform behind a screen with filmed images of decaying animal corpses and dead plants" (Scheck, 1995). Scheck argues that NIN's lyrics "convey a view of life that is relentlessly brutal" (Scheck, 1995). Again, the focus lies on the violent nature of the music and lyrics. As Steve Dougherty and Brian Alexander claim in their article that appeared in *People Magazine*:

Wailing his songs about self-loathing, sexual obsession, torture and suicide over a thick sludge of gnashing and computer-synthesized beats, the 29-year-old rocker, like Alice Cooper and Ozzy Osbourne before him, has built his name on theatrics and nihilism. Nearly all of Reznor's lyrics are unprintable, and his videos, with their frightful scenes of dismemberment and sadomasochism, have been censored or banned outright by MTV. (Dougherty and Alexander, 1995)

In most articles that were written about Nine Inch Nails by critics and reviewers in the few years after the release of *The Downward Spiral*, NIN is portrayed as a brutal, violent, and hateful band. However, as the previous chapter pointed out, NIN's music is the outlet of Trent Reznor, and has an ultimately positive message and nature to it (Garcia, 1994). Most articles do not comment on this part of NIN and Reznor's play with the concept of artistic freedom, they usually only offer a somewhat shallow and superficial analysis of NIN, which, not surprisingly, leads to a negative stance on the band's art.

Although NIN was criticized in the media as being a negative, violent, and immoral band, these negative reviews are nothing in comparison to the criticism that Marilyn Manson has suffered in the nineties. NIN has received media attention mostly in the form of critical articles and essays. However, Manson faced much more opposition from, mostly, Christian groups.

For example, in his article which was published in conservative magazine *Human Events*, Joseph A. D'Agostino discusses why American censorship committee PMRC (Parents Music Resource Center) does not want Marilyn Manson to perform. D'Agostino calls Manson "openly Satanic" and calls its lyrics violent and pornographic. Manson was initiated as a Reverend into the Church of Satan in 1994, however, Manson does not actively preach, nor does he call himself a Satanist. He received the title as a friendly gesture from founder Anton Szandor LaVey. Yet, Manson calls himself spiritual. D'Agostino writes about the concerns that parents have expressed concerning Manson's music; they are afraid it will influence their children in a negative way. Also, The list of Manson antics which were deemed inappropriate by many American civic leaders included:

1. Urging adolescents to “Kill Your Parents.”
2. Ripping up the Bible.
3. Using the U.S. flag as a toilet paper.
4. Simulating homosexual acts.
5. Singing in praise of suicide.
6. Brandishing a swastika-like red and black logo. (D’Agostino, 1997).

Again, it can be noted that D’Agostino, as well as Leo, Scheck, and Dougherty and Alexander with NIN, only focuses on specific details of Manson’s music and performances. He does not look at the overall art of Manson, nor does he analyze it in-depth. As for the first antic on the list, Kevin J.H. Dettmar argues in his article “Ironic Literacy: Grasping the Dark Images Of Rock” which was published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, that a listener must never forget that a song’s lyrics are not always meant literally, but can contain a layer of irony through which the listener must see the music and its message. Dettmar claims that

[t]hat narrative strategy—giving voice to views with which one disagrees as a way to expose that position’s flaws—is called irony. Rock ‘n’ roll has deployed irony as a narrative strategy from its earliest forms. But rock’s has become increasingly sophisticated and understated over time, and with its increasing textual density has come an increased risk that a certain kind of fan will miss the point of a song entirely. (Dettmar, 2000)

Not only Marilyn Manson employs this strategy, NIN and Slipknot both also use irony in their songs. Dettmar wrote his article as a response to conservatives who, according to him, fail to see the irony in rock music and use only small fragments of lyrics out of context to support their claims of how evil rock music is. However, he also shows that anyone can misunderstand rock music; he claims that “[s]ongs, like any other text, can always be appropriated for inappropriate ends—by both rock’s insiders and its outsiders, by despondent teens and slipshod media pundits” (Dettmar, 2000). Even though Marilyn Manson was heavily criticized in the media, he was, at the same time,

also defended by many journalists. Neil Strauss, the co-author of Manson's autobiography, also comments on Manson's use of irony in his article which was published in *Rolling Stone*. He writes: "[t]ake note, kids: Your Marilyn Manson T-shirt with the slogan that says kill your parents is pure sarcasm. It's possible to be Public Enemy No. 1 of the American Family Association and still love your mother" (Strauss, 1997). Strauss and Dettmar claim that not everything a musician sings about should be taken literally.

However, As D'Agostino already pointed out, Marilyn Manson was a member of the Church of Satan. Therefore, the claim of many critics that Manson was Satanic is not incorrect, however, many critics misinterpreted Satanism, as it is practiced by the Church of Satan. Satanism is most commonly interpreted as a religion in which members worship the devil as their god. This idea is also what most critics of Manson mean when using the word Satanism. However, this is not what the Church of Satan preaches. In the introduction to the Satanic Bible by Anton Szandor LaVey, the founder of the Church of Satan, Magus Peter H. Gilmore claims that "Satanism moves into the realm of religion by having an aesthetic component, a system of symbolism, metaphor, and ritual in which Satan is embraced not as some Devil to be worshipped., but as a symbolic external projection of the highest potential of each individual Satanist" (14-15). Satanists do not worship the Devil as their god; in Satanism the Devil is a metaphor for indulgence. LaVey claims in his Satanic Bible that "[t]he seven deadly sins of the Christian Church are: greed, pride, envy, anger, gluttony, lust, and sloth. Satanism advocates indulging in each of these 'sins' as they all lead to physical, mental, or emotional gratification" (46). Satanism celebrates the carnal nature of mankind, and can therefore be seen as an atheist religion, as it does not promote a supernatural, superior being, but the exploration and celebration of the self.

As LaVey argues, "Satanism is the only religion known to man that accepts man as he is, and promotes the rationale of turning a bad thing into a good thing rather than bending over backwards to eliminate the bad thing" (53). Therefore, "Satanism represents a form of controlled selfishness" (51). LaVey's Satanism places itself in direct opposition to Christianity, which is one of the reasons why LaVey chose Satan as its main inspiration, because Satan is Christianity's main antagonist. Nevertheless, although Satanism preaches a lifestyle and worldview that stands in direct

contrast to Christianity, it does not promote what most Christians think it does; Satanists do not worship the Devil as their god. This would imply a belief in God, which Satanists do not have. Satanism can therefore be seen as an extreme version of atheism. Even though Manson was a member of the Church of Satan, the interpretation by many critics of his Satanic music is incorrect, even though from their point of view Manson is satanic.

Yet, even though “Satanic” was a word many critics ascribed to Manson’s music, critics, especially Christian groups, distributed information about Manson which, at times, turned out to be false information. In his article which was published in music magazine *Rolling Stone*, Matt Hendrickson writes about the protests by New York politicians and conservative groups against a planned concert of Manson in November 1998. It also discusses the strategy used by the same group a year before when the same situation had arisen. Hendrickson argues that

[r]ight-wing groups sent information packets—which contained false accounts of rape and drug use during Manson’s shows—to officials in cities along the tour’s route. These groups are preparing to wage the same campaign against Manson this time out. “Some things went out that weren’t true,” admits Don Jackson, president of the Christian Family Network, which took part in last year’s anti-Manson campaign. “But there was self-mutilation and tearing up of Bibles. The public has a need and a right to know.” Jackson says he was “disgusted” by the Manson show he saw in 1997. “He takes things to an extreme,” he says. “We’re not encouraging people to protest, just to make an informed decision. (Hendrickson, 1998)

Hendrickson shows that conservative groups feel they have the right to inform about their idea of Manson. However, they also show that they apparently are not against spreading lies in order to convert people into thinking the same way as them. In Manson’s autobiography some of these affidavits have been printed. One affidavit in particular, which was distributed by the American Family Association, paints an extreme picture of Manson. The affidavit (Appendix A), claims that Manson—and his fans as allegedly urged by Manson—promotes and commits, in order of mention, animal murder, drug use, masturbation, nudity, sodomy, oral sex, rape, pedophilia, sex in public,

devil worship, violence against children, kidnapping, murder, and bestiality (Manson, 254-258). This affidavit basically claims Manson commits any felony that exists under the sun. Not only is this affidavit false, it is extremely offensive and deceitful. The irony is that when Manson claims Christianity to be hypocritical and false, Christians defend themselves by falsely claiming Manson is one of the biggest criminal in the world.

It comes as no surprise, then, that when two teenagers decided to bring guns to school and started shooting around before committing suicide, that Manson would be scapegoated as having caused the Columbine Massacre. In his documentary *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), Michael Moore also turns his attention towards the accusations by the conservative right of Manson. Moore even speaks with Manson about the protests of conservatives against him and his music as a result of Columbine. In this section of the documentary parts of a speech by a representative of a Christian group is shown in alternation with parts of Moore's interview with Manson:

MOORE: After Columbine, it seemed that the entire focus on why the shootings occurred was because the killers listened to Marilyn Manson. Two years after Columbine, Manson finally returned to Denver.

REPORTER: The Ozzfest of Mile high Stadium bring shock rocker Marilyn Manson to Denver tomorrow.

MOORE: There were protests from the religious right. But I thought I'd go and talk with him myself.

MANSON: When I was a kid growing up, music was the escape. That's the only thing that had no judgments. You know, when you put on a record it's not gonna yell at you for dressing the way you do. It's gonna make you feel better about it.

CHRISTIAN PROTESTER: Some will be so brash to ask if we believe that all who hear Manson tomorrow night will go out and commit violent acts, the answer is no. But does everybody who watches a Lexus add go and buy a Lexus? No, but a few do.



MANSON: I definitely can see why they'd pick me. Because I think it's easy to throw my face on a TV, because I'm in the end a poster-boy for fear. Because I represent what everyone's afraid of, because I do and say what I want.

CHRISTIAN PROTESTER: If Marilyn Manson can walk into our town and promote hate, violence, suicide, death, drug use, and Columbine like behavior, I can say, not without a fight you can't.

MANSON: The two byproducts of that whole tragedy were violence and entertainment, and gun control. And how perfect that that was the two things that we're going to talk about with the upcoming election. And, also, then we forgot about Monica Lewinsky, and we forgot about the president was shooting bombs overseas. Yet, I'm a bad guy because I sing some rock and roll songs. And who's the bigger influence? The president or Marilyn Manson? I'd like to think me, but I 'm gonna go with the president.

MOORE: Did you know that the day that Columbine happened, the United States dropped more bombs on Kosovo than any other time during that war?

MANSON: I do know that, and I think that's really ironic, you know, that nobody said, well maybe the president had an influence on this violent behavior, because that's not the way the media wants to take it, and spin, and turn it into fear. Cause then you're watching television, you're watching the news, you're being pumped full of fear, there's floods, there's aids, there's murder, cut to commercial, buy the Accura, buy the Colgate, if you have bad breath they're not gonna talk to you, you got pimples the girl's not gonna fuck you, and just this, it's a campaign of fear and consumption. And that's what I think that it's all based on. It's the whole idea that keep everyone afraid, and they'll consume. And that's as simple as it can be boiled down to.

MOORE: If you were to talk directly to the kids at Columbine and the people in that community, what would you say to them if they were here right now?

MANSON: I wouldn't say a single word to them, I would listen to what they have to say, and that's what no one did. (Moore, 2002)

Interestingly, Manson not only shows how music cannot be seen as the sole reason for any kind of behavior, he points out that the time of the Columbine Massacre the president made decisions during a war that cost many innocent people their lives. Also, again we see that the protester criticizing Manson claims that Manson promotes “hate, violence, suicide, death, drug use, and Columbine like behavior” without explaining how he came to this conclusion, as well as that he compares the non-harmful act of buying a Lexus to committing violent acts.

Besides Moore, there were many other journalists and scholars defending Manson during the aftermath of Columbine. For example, Gary Burns claims in his article “Marilyn Manson and the Apt Pupils of Littleton” that

[t]he blindness and deafness of the media in the Columbine case are especially pronounced and troubling. It seems that we have a new rite of spring in the form of rightwing violence every couple of years around the time of Hitler’s birthday. *That* is the story—not Marilyn Manson. Columbine happened on “April 20, which is Hitler’s birthday and one day after the anniversaries of both Waco (1993) and Oklahoma City (1995). (3)

Later, when discussing Manson’s supposed influence on Harris and Klebold, Burns asks himself the questions: “What other popular culture did these teenagers consume? Why haven’t Marilyn Manson’s thousands or millions of other fans shot up the local high school? Is ‘shoot up your school’ really a plausible message to draw from Manson’s songs? Obviously, the second question partially answers the third” (5). Burns shows how the scapegoating of Manson was unjust. He also quotes James Blandford, who argued that Marilyn Manson “does not ... promote the illness of society, but forces us to confront them” (qtd in Burns, 5). Both authors argue that Manson does not promote Columbine-like behavior. Burns is critical of conservative voices attacking Manson in the wake of Columbine and concludes his article by claiming that “[i]f our springtime ritual of rightwing violence continues, it will be a sign of deepening sickness, from which we may never recover—and it won’t have a thing to do with Marilyn Manson” (7). Burns claims that the violent behavior shown by Harris and Klebold is the result of a deeper problem in US society, and that

people should stop pointing the finger towards eccentric musicians who dare to criticize US culture.

Not only did some journalists defend Manson in the wake of Columbine, there were also Christian writers, who acknowledged Manson's music as a form of critique and not a way of corrupting teenagers' minds. For example, Ted Byfield argues in his article "Marilyn Manson May Be Frankly Diabolical, But He Teaches Christians A Vital Truth," published in right-winged newsmagazine the *Alberta Report*, that

In one very important respect, therefore, Mr. Manson is doing us a service. He correctly identifies "selfism" with the Satanic. To "believe in yourself," to "harness your own power," he observes, is to abandon belief in God—a fact that even many Christians do not understand. We have church teachers urging upon their students "self-awareness" and "self-realization" and "self-esteem" and "self-fulfillment." A sign outside one Edmonton church proclaims it "a self-improvement centre."

Not that Christianity rejects "the self." Indeed, that we should love our neighbor as we love ourselves is one half of Jesus' central moral assertion. Yet in every practical sense, we are advised that the way to achieve "self-actualization" is to forget about ourselves entirely and to think instead about God and our fellow humans.

As it does in so many instances, Christianity confronts us with a paradox. If we seek to save our life, we'll lose it. If we throw it away in the service of Christ, we'll find it. Unwittingly, Marilyn Manson is reminding us of that reality. (Byfield, 1996)

Byfield shows how Manson's message is not such a strange one. Interestingly, Ted Byfield, who founded and edited the *Alberta Report*, is a devout Christian, yet he understood how Manson is not necessarily anti-religion, but is criticizing Christianity and how it is promoted in US society.

However, not only Marilyn Manson has been accused of being satanic and being the reason why teenagers commit terrible crimes. These accusations have also been directed towards Slipknot. In his essay "Do demons speak out in today's music? Spiritual warfare: evil spirits and their influence in modern music" Duane D. Miller, a born again, fundamental Christian, argues that Slipknot was guided by evil spirits in making their music. He claims that

You might ask why these guys have so much discontentment, despair and hatred, the answer to this question lies with the song title “People=Shit” whose lyrics say “I got changed and I’m sitting on the side of Satan,” and the song “The Heretic Anthem” with lyrics such as “If you are 555 then I’m 666,” not to mention the song titles “I am Hated” which says “We will not repent, this is our religion.” Clearly the motivation here is unholy, and we can see the evil spirits speaking where one of their songs state “I’m teaching your brightest, they’re listening.” (Miller, 5)

Miller claims that Slipknot’s music is Satanic. From his point of view—a Christian who believes Satan and demonic spirits are real—this is not a surprising conclusion. However, Miller also falls victim to the strategy of analyzing and criticizing music by looking at only a few lines in separation from the rest of the song. Even though from a Christian point of view these lines can be considered immoral, one cannot really reach a proper conclusion without incorporating the entire song.

Yet, when it comes to being Satanic, Anthony Bozza argues in his article which was published in *Rolling Stone*, that

Satanism is definitely in the accusation cards for Slipknot this year. “The only similarity we have with Satanism is that we’re self-indulgent,” Jordison says. “One of the main tenets of Satanism is self-righteousness and making yourself happy. I agree with that. It doesn’t mean it’s evil. I agree with aspects of Satanism as much as I agree with aspects of the Bible.” (Bozza, 2001)

Interestingly, drummer Joey Jordison claims they are not Satanic in either way the word can be interpreted. The belief of whether a band is Satanic—when it comes to the Christian interpretation of the word—depends on a person’s personal beliefs.

Slipknot, like Marilyn Manson, has also been blamed for the criminal behavior of teenage fans, although to a lesser extent. In Oklahoma, in the beginning of April, 2011, seventeen-year-old Kyle Smith was accused of murdering his grandparents. Smith “‘admitted to investigators when he was arrested that he was into heavy metal music’ and have removed a Slipknot album from his home as evidence” (Grattan, 2011). It is interesting to note that even the police treats the fact that

Smith listened to heavy metal music as evidence in a murder case. Although Slipknot did not face the same kind of protest that Manson received during the nineties, the fact that Slipknot is seen as an influence for Smith's actions is very telling. Earlier, in 2008, Slipknot was accused of having influenced a South African teenager into taking swords to his school and start slashing around, killing one of his schoolmates in the process (Grobler, 2008). In response, Slipknot singer Corey Taylor stated that

[o]bviously, I'm disturbed by the fact that people were hurt and someone died ... As far as my responsibility for that goes, it stops there, because I know our message is actually very positive. I'm not encouraging anybody to kill anybody. I encourage our fans to express themselves, to stick together and to help each other. (Bosso, 2008).

Taylor denies that Slipknot has, and wants to have, any influence on deviant behavior amongst their fans. He shows that ultimately Slipknot's message is a positive one. When the news came out about this incident and the fact that Slipknot was seen as one of the main reasons, many Slipknot fans immediately voiced their opinions on the internet. They claimed that Slipknot was not responsible and that Slipknot is not Satanic (Blabbermouth, 2008). Slipknot is not the only band backed up by the fans. When discussing Marilyn Manson, Kelly Torrance argues in her article which was published in the *Alberta Report* that

[m]any young fans refuse to take the band seriously. "All my friends laugh at it. We all think it's funny, says 19-year-old Dean. "[Mr. Manson] just chose to know evil instead of good. It's a lifestyle." A lifestyle Dean endorses? "Depends on what side of the bed I wake up on," replies the teenager, who sports a tattoo that reads "EVOL"—"love" spelled backwards. "He's having a good time and making good coin doing it. It's the American dream." Jordan says, "The people that believe it have something vacant in their lives." Of these true believers, Jordan thinks Mr. Manson has "made them look like idiots." (Torrance, 1997)

The ideas expressed by Dean and Jordan are not uncommon amongst rock and metal fans. Moreover, teenagers such as Klebold and Harris are the odd ones out, they are not representative of the large groups of fans.

Nine Inch Nails, Marilyn Manson, and Slipknot have often been interpreted as Satanic and immoral. It has been pointed out that Satanism has two different interpretations, dependent on personal belief. Also, a recurring tendency can be seen amongst critics and reviewers; they isolate a few lines from a song to interpret the entire song. This means that these lines are interpreted out of context and that the message of a song is overlooked by the interpreter. Another tendency which is often employed by Christian critics is that they take the songs literally, they do not understand the irony or exaggeration of the song. Lastly, Marilyn Manson and Slipknot have endured accusations of being the reason why teenagers have committed horrific crimes. Yet, fans have always been eager to prove the opposite. In the next section of this chapter the fan bases will be analyzed.

### *Fans*

When discussing music's influence on teenagers, it is important that one also looks at how fandom works. Interestingly, all three the bands' fan bases have specific names. Nine Inch Nails fans are usually referred to as NIN-fans, however, sometimes they are also called "pigs" because there are many references to pigs on *The Downward Spiral*. Marilyn Manson fans are often called The Spooky Kids, because the original name of the band was Marilyn Manson and the Spooky Kids. However, Manson himself occasionally refers to his fans as The Beautiful People. The fans of Slipknot are called Maggots (which stands for "malicious, arrogant, gut, grinding, offensive, tyrant"). At first drummer Jordison used this name to refer to his band mates, but later the fans started using the name for themselves. This part of the chapter will aim to answer the questions how fans apply the songs of these bands to their personal lives? Also, how do the processes of identification, belonging, and empowerment work within fandom and how does this have a positive influence on the fans?

In his highly influential book *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* (1979), Dick Hebdige

argues that every subculture has an orderly structure (113). Hebdige applies the term *homology* to the style of subcultures. In his chapter called “Style as Homology,” Hebdige starts from the idea that “symbolic objects—dress, appearance, language, ritual occasions, styles of interaction, music—were made to form a unity with the group’s relations, situation, experience” (qtd in Hebdige, 114). However, he also acknowledges that the meaning of these objects can change over time (126). Hebdige calls the giving specific new meanings to objects and actions the *signifying practice* (118). For example, when a person goes to a rock or metal concert, this person will probably see many people at the concert making “devil hands”; the gesture where someone only extends the index finger and the little finger in order to mimic the devil’s horns. Even though most people giving this sign know that it is a reference to the devil, this is not why it is used. Fans make devil hands during a concert to express their excitement and appreciation of a band. The same can be said of “moshing”; a style of dance during which people will slam into each other. This is usually done in the area right in front of the stage, called the *pit*. There are several variants of moshing such as the *circle pit* and the *wall of death*. Even though this is a very aggressive form of dance, it also expresses the excitement and appreciation of the fans towards the bands. Within a subculture, or a fan culture, certain signifiers (such as devil-hands) can have one or several new meanings ascribed to by members of this subculture, changing the signified. Hebdige calls this “the triumph ... of the signifier over the signified” (119). Hebdige’s idea that this concept of signification is in itself a subversive act (Thornton, 93) gives strength to the notion that subcultures identify their relationship with the “mainstream” according to the *Us vs. Them* scheme (Thornton, 115).

In a subculture, many signifiers have taken on new meanings. Only members of a subculture that are aware of these new meanings are considered “authentic” members. This knowledge is what Sarah Thornton calls *subcultural capital* in her book *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (1996). Thornton argues that “[s]ubcultural capital would seem to be a currency which correlates with and legitimizes unequal statuses” (104). Subcultural capital within a subculture revolving around a band also involves knowing the song lyrics, and facts about the band. For example, “authentic” Slipknot fans know all the band members’ names and

accompanying masks. Therefore, within a subculture there is a hierarchy of more authentic members, and less knowledgeable members who dwell at the borders of what defines the subculture in question. In other words, there are members of a subculture who make more investments in their fandom than others.

Having and sharing subcultural capital amongst fans can lead to identification with the band and other fans. As Simon Frith argues in his article “Music and Identity,” identity is not fixed, however, it is a process. Also, Frith claims that music and identity are two closely linked concepts. According to Frith,

identity is *mobile*, a process not a thing, a becoming not a being ... our experience of music – of music making and music listening – is best understood as an experience of this *self-in-process*. Music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body, the body in the mind; identity, like music, is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics. (109)

Music is a crucial part of the formation of identity. Also, as Frith argues, identity is not something inherently one can discover, however, “it is something we put or try on” (122). Music is, besides being the arena where one can perform an identity, also the terrain where one can identify with others. Frith argues that “[t]he experience of pop music is an experience of identity: in responding to a song, we are drawn, haphazardly, into emotional alliances with the performers and with the performer’s other fans” (121). By having overlapping identities, fans can identify with one another and with the performer they are a fan of. This can happen on both an individual level – two fans identify with one another, or a fan identifies with the performer—and on a collective level—a fan identifies with a larger group of other fans, or a group of fans identify with the band – creating many different identification links amongst fan and artist (110).

For example, in her book *Pretty Hate Machine*, Daphne Carr included many interviews with fans about why they are NIN fans. As David, 42, from Youngstown, Ohio claims, “I was struggling to really exist and to be somebody. I heard that music and I felt like it became my voice” (48). He



also explains that “[t]here was somebody who was expressing the hurt I felt or the pain I had, and it was good to me” (51). David argues that because he could relate to the issues Reznor sings about, he was able to work through his problems, which resulted in him being able to change his life for the better. The same goes for Adam, 24, also from Youngstown, Ohio. He argues that he was suffering from depression and that “[m]usic played a big part in helping with it. Like instead of going to counseling, you listened to something that counseled you through your problems by people who knew about them” (55). Ric, 26, from Hubbard, Ohio even goes as far as to say that “if anybody in the universe were going to feel what Trent was saying there, it would be me,” (81) when discussing the song “Terrible Lie.” Therefore, identification with the artist is a crucial element in fandom, which can be so intense that the fan feels the song was written for them, or about their lives, personally.

Also, Thornton’s notion of subcultural capital plays a large role in identification, because it shows how much a fan is invested in his or her fandom. A fan who is heavily invested in a band will identify more with another heavily invested fan than one who does not even know the lyrics that well. This process of identification with other fans can lead to the feeling that one belongs. This notion of belonging is very important amongst fancultures, because this belonging in turn can lead to the experience of empowerment which can also occur on both an individual and collective level. In his article “Is There a Fan in the House?: The Affective Sensibility of Fandom,” Lawrence Grossberg argues that mattering maps are crucial to identification, belonging, and empowerment. Mattering maps are “like investment portfolios: there are not only different and changing investments, but different forms, as well as different intensities or degrees of investment (57-58). According to Grossberg, these mattering maps are mental maps that indicate how one’s identity is constructed. Therefore, two people with overlapping mattering maps will more easily identify with one another than two people who have very different mattering maps. Also, as Grossberg argues, when a group of fans share parts of mattering maps and feel a sense of belonging, they can also feel empowered. Grossberg claims that

[e]mpowerment refers to the reciprocal nature of affective investment: that is, because something matters (as it does when one invests energy in it), other investments are made possible. Empowerment refers to the generation of energy and passion, to the construction of possibility. Unlike the consumer, the fan's investment of energy into certain practices always returns some interest on the investment through a variety of empowering relations: in the form of the further production of energy (for example, rock dancing, while exhausting, continuously generates its own energy, if only to continue dancing); by placing the fan in a position from which he or she feels a certain control over his or her life (as a recent ad proclaimed, 'shopping puts me on top of the world'); or by making fans feel that they are still alive (as Tracy Chapman sings, 'I had a feeling I could be someone'). (64-65)

Empowerment is an important concept; it indicates that through fandom people can experience positive social interactions which can ultimately lead to another positive and powerful experience; empowerment.

This notion of empowerment is something Slipknot tries to achieve in their music, which is partly what they mean by having a positive message. They want their fans to be empowered to overcome their problems. For example, in their song "Pulse of the Maggots (2004)," which was written for their fans, they especially try to promote this feeling of empowerment. The lyrics are:

This is the year where hope fails you. The test subjects run the experiment.

And the bastard you know is the hero you hate. But cohesing, it's possible if we try.

There's no reason, there's no lesson, no time like the present. Tell me right now, what have you got to lose? What have you got to lose? Except your soul? Who's with us?

I fight for the unconventional. My right, and it's unconditional.

I can only be as real as I can. The disadvantage is, I never knew the plan.

This isn't just a way to be a martyr. I can't walk alone any longer.

I fight for the ones who can't fight. And if I lose, at least I tried!

(We) We are the new diabolic. (We) We are the bitter bucolic.

If I have to give my life, you can have it. (We) We are the pulse of the maggots!

I won't be the inconsequential. I won't be the wasted potential.

I can make it as severe as I can. Until you realize, You'll never take a stand.

It isn't just a one sided version. We've dealt with a manic subversion.

I won't let the truth be perverted. And I won't leave another victim deserted.

Do you understand? (Yes). Do you understand? (Yes).

Say it again say it again (we won't die). Say it again say it again (we won't die).

We fight 'till no one can fight us. We live and no one can stop us.

We pull when we're pushed too far. And the advantage is, the bottom line is.

We never had to fight in the first place. We only had spit back in their face.

We won't walk alone any longer. What doesn't kill us only makes us stronger. (Slipknot, 2004)

In “Pulse of the Maggots” Slipknot positions itself in line with its fans and in opposition to anyone who has done them wrong. In the song there is an identification with their fans, the maggots, through the hardship they are trying to fight. This, in turn, leads to belonging – “we are the pulse of the maggots,” note the use of the words “we” and “us.” Slipknot uses the *Us vs. Them* idea very clearly here; everyone who is not a maggot is not a part of the “us.” Eventually, the song is supposed to empower the maggots, which the line “what doesn't kill us only makes us stronger” aptly indicates. This song is a good example of how identification, belonging, and empowerment work on a collective level within a fan culture.

According to subculture theory, processes of identification, belonging, and empowerment make for positive experiences in fandom. Music is generally used by fans to explore their own identity, take on new segments of identity, and overcome issues that they are struggling with by dealing with them through music. Also, as “Pulse of the Maggots” has shown, empowerment is a powerful sensibility within fandom. Even though many fan cultures position themselves against the mainstream, as *Us vs. Them*, this is not necessarily subversive or negative, because it can help fans to learn about themselves, and their identities.

### *Empowerment and Agency*

Many Christian critiques on Nine Inch Nails, Marilyn Manson, and Slipknot involve the idea that these bands have immoral and subversive messages. They accuse these bands of trying to convey

the “wrong” ethics to their fans and convince them to commit horrible acts. However, by stating that, for example, Marilyn Manson “always has the crowd kill the puppies so innocent blood will be on their hands,” these writers forget the fans’ agency. In these extreme critiques fans are put in the role of passive fan who would do anything to please their idol, which, ironically, is exactly what Manson is claiming Christians do. In any case, fans will always have their own mind and will, and the idea that fans will do whatever their idol says would ignore the notion of agency, which is very important in understanding fandom. Moreover, through fandom the sensibilities of identification, belonging, and empowerment can be reached, which, combined with agency, go against the idea of fans as mindless followers, and therefore against the idea that a rock musician can be the sole influence of two youngsters such as Dylan Harris and Eric Klebold murdering their teachers and classmates.

## *Conclusion*

Even though there has been a rise in atheism in the United States since 1859, atheism has never truly been accepted in the United States because of the general disbelief of religion atheists endorse. As a result, atheist musicians are also not accepted by general American society. Moreover, because rock and metal is already interpreted as subversive by general American norms and values, atheist rock and metal musicians and fans are therefore definitely unaccepted. The three case studies of this thesis—Nine Inch Nails, Marilyn Manson, and Slipknot—are therefore seen as subversive in American society, because they are, or they are assumed to be, atheists rock and metal musicians. They criticize religion in their art. Even though they all have their own way of doing this, they do use imagery that is considered sacred by religious people. From a religious point of view, these bands are very much subversive, yet, from the atheist point of view, these bands are merely expressing their opinion; in their eyes pointing out the hypocrisy and flaws in religion, especially Christianity, is logical. Also, one must not forget that the United States' constitution does not support any one religion, and gives atheists—just as much as Christians—the right to express their beliefs.

Yet, this democratic view of freedom of religion is not exactly endorsed by the American media. Every critic and reviewer has his or her own ideas through which they see the art of these bands. Therefore, and not surprisingly, many articles show the ideas and beliefs of the writer. Interestingly, the bands analyzed in this thesis are all criticized by conservative or religious writers for having an “immoral message” that would influence teenage fans to commit crimes. Some of these writers, as well as protesters, have fabricated information in order to show how immoral these acts are.

On the other hand, there are also authors who do not believe that music can be the sole reason why teenagers would commit crimes. Therefore, there is an intense debate within the American media about the influence of atheist rock and metal on teenagers, which was especially heightened in the aftermath of the Columbine Massacre. Even though there will never be a consensus amongst critics

and reviewers on the level of influence music can have on its audience, subculture theorists do show that fandom creates for positive sensibilities amongst fans. Through identification, belonging, and empowerment, a fan is able to create ways of overcoming hardship with the help of music. These theories negate, for a part, the idea that “negative” music can only have a negative influence on its listeners. Therefore, the idea that even atheist rock and metal music can create empowerment amongst its fans and therefore a way to face hardship in life, makes it a powerful but positive force.

Also, even though rock and metal is commonly interpreted as subversive, one must not ignore the fact that Christian rock is a strong growing genre within the American music industry. It is interesting for further research to find out what place Christian rock holds in US society, and whether Christian rock is seen as subversive, it would give more insight as to how an aspect of religion can transform a music genre that is seen as subversive into a more accepted genre. Furthermore, even though this thesis mostly focuses on atheist rock and metal vis-à-vis religious America, it would be interesting to look the role of religion in Western popular music for a broader understanding of the link between religion and music.

Atheism still holds a minority position in the United States. This is because atheists have beliefs that clash with general norms and values that are celebrated in American society. Also, most importantly, they do not endorse any form of religion, whereas religion is inherent to the American identity. Throughout the twentieth century, atheists have fought to expand the lines of morality drawn by religious Americans, mainly Christians, in order to have their ideas accepted and represented in American society. Yet, this has proven to be an almost impossible task in a country where religion is at the basis of society. Also, this thesis has shown that sources of popular culture are not only entertainment. As many journalists have expressed their concerns that atheist rock and metal supposedly has a negative influence on adolescents, it shows that music, and music videos, are seen as being able to persuade their audience into having certain ideas; in this case atheist ideas. The idea that music can be of such influence in adolescent’s lives shows the place it has in American society; music is an important touch-stone of identity, expression, and belief. Therefore, the debate about atheist rock and metal music shows the broader debate of the place of atheism in American society. When critics attack an atheist rock and metal band for being immoral, it shows

that they believe atheism in general is immoral. Rock and metal music in this case is the platform on which the debate concerning the role of religion in American society is held, which is why research into atheist rock and metal music is important; it gives insight into the place of atheism, and popular culture, in American society.

As to whether atheist rock and metal music is subversive, satanic, and un-American; it depends on the interpreter. Nine Inch Nails, Marilyn Manson, and Slipknot use extreme ways of expressing their anti-religious ideas, yet, they are only subversive and satanic in the eyes of those who are criticized in their music, or whose ideas and beliefs are criticized. However, they are not un-American. Their criticism and anger towards religion, and especially Christianity, has root in the ubiquity of religion in the US; their ideas are a product of US society.

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*Appendix A*

AFFIDAVIT OF

[name withheld]

STATE OF OKLAHOMA  
COUNTY OF OKLAHOMA

I [name withheld] hereby swear, affirm, declare and affitt:

1. I am a seventeen-year-old male, and reside at [address withheld] Oklahoma City, Oklahoma [Zip Withheld].

2. Three years ago I was a runaway fourteen-year-old when I first met Marilyn Manson (Brian Warner) and was accepted by him into his circle of friends or “family.” Over the course of the past three years I have spent periods of time with Manson on twenty specific periods of time, the most recent being two months ago. I did see him last month briefly.

3. I have been present in the concert venues both in the audience and backstage and behind the scenes at many Manson concerts including the current *Antichrist Superstar* tour six times.

4. Each concert starts out a little bit different but most of the time there is a light show before the concert starts. Manson will come out on stage by himself dragging a big bag either just before the starts playing or the band will start jamming and then stop abruptly as Manson comes out with the big bag. I have witnessed Manson pull out small chickens, several puppies and kittens out of the bag and throw them into the audience. These are live animals. I know because I helped to get some of these animals from the dog pound for Manson. Manson will then tell the audience to make a sacrifice to the music and he will not start the show until all the animals are dead.

5. I witnessed the crowd ripping the animals apart, pulling body parts of the torso of the animals. They would bleed to death or they would be smashed into the ground. Manson told me they represent the killing of innocence. I have seen this animal truck which is like a pick up truck with a camper top on the back with cages full of different animals for concert sacrifices. I had gone with [name withheld], a friend who runs lights and sounds for the concert, to get twelve puppies,

but Manson had many animals already in the truck. Manson always has the crowd kill the puppies so innocent blood will be on their hands before he does the concert.

6. The concerts I've been to are tightly controlled by Manson security guards. No police are ever allowed into the concert area. If a police officer happens to get by a guard, Manson is instantly notified through his headset he wears. Manson has a team he calls his private Santa Clauses. They come at the crowd from the sides and throw out bags of pot and cocaine throughout the entire audience front to back. Everyone attending the concert gets [so] high [that it] saturates the auditorium. All of the security guards are very clean cut looking. Manson always comes to town giving the idea that this will be a very innocent rock and roll show to the press and the general public.

7. I witnessed Manson pull out his private body part and play with it openly in front of the crowd. It's his penis he plays with, not anything artificial. I have witnessed him go over to his female guitar player, who is usually totally naked, and play with her private parts in front of the crowd. Manson always exposes himself in each concert and the female is always nude in every concert.

8. I have witnessed Manson band member performing anal intercourse on each other on stage in front of the crowd.

9. I have witnessed various band member come over to Manson and perform oral sex on Manson throughout the course of the concert.

10. I have witnessed Manson pull members of the crowd on stage or his security guards will bring an audience member on stage and strip all of their clothes off. Manson will then play with them in a sexual way. They are then usually taken back stage where Manson do anything he feels like doing with them when he is off stage. Manson will take as many females from the audience as he can all throughout the concert. I have witnessed some females who were fighting to keep the guards from taking them on stage. I believe it was clearly against their will. But most of the females were thrilled to have Manson take them for sex.

11. I witnessed Manson bring a little boy up stage who was celebrating his tenth birthday. Manson sang happy birthday to him and then had this little boy stand on stage while Manson performed sexual acts, including oral sex, while asking the little boy if he would like to do this and would he like to do this.

12. I witnessed the security guards throwing out dozens of condoms into the crowds while Manson ordered the crowds to have sex with anyone. I have witnessed members of the audience

having sexual intercourse and performing other sex acts at every concert I've been to with Manson. I believe about thirty percent of the Manson concert crowd participate in open, overt sexual activity at an average Manson concert. I have witnessed rapes at most concerts. The crowd gets into a frenzy and females are held down against their will and raped many times as Manson prods them on.

13. I witnessed the Manson security guards giving liquid ecstasy to children and as those children, nine, ten, eleven years old were effected by the "love potion" drug, they became willing to have sex. I have witnessed children having sex in the audience at Marilyn Manson concerts.

14. I have witnessed Manson masturbating on stage before the crowd and then ejaculate into the crowd.

15. I have witnessed Manson perform a satanic church service toward the end of the concert in which he preaches from the satanic bible, and books called, "Orange Magic," "Green Magic" and "Black Magic." The length he preaches depends on how high he is at the time. Manson gives an invitation to receive Satan into your life and a hypnotic voice comes over the sound system saying you must go forward to the altar. This whole area where the mosh pit was. He opens the whole front up. This invitation is especially potent because by that time 100% of the audience is high.

16. I witnessed Manson call for the virgin sacrifice in which all the children in the concert arena are pushed forward by the crowd to be dedicated to Satan.

17. I witnessed Manson sharing from the satanic bible, pronouncing some words over the ones who have come or been pushed forwards and then Manson pours pig's blood over everyone who has been in this group. Then Manson calls forth his "priests" to minister each person and they take their names, addresses and phone numbers for continued contact. Manson hands out satanic bibles and addresses of satanic churches they should go to.

18. During the concert I witnessed Manson bring underaged teenagers, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, out on stage and put them into a cage. The cage is then put out into the audience and Manson wants the crowd to beat on those inside the cage. These children are part of Manson tour.

19. I have been on Manson's special tour bus half dozen times and have witnessed underage girls and some boys stripped naked and handcuffed to the bus seats. Every time I've been on the bus, the faces are different. I have seen some of those faces on television as missing children or runaways.

20. I witnessed a video tape that Manson played for me in November of 1996. He called it his “Blood Bath” video. The video showed Manson playing a guitar. Surrounding him were people playing a vampire game in which they started biting each others’ necks. Then one man came out of the group and stabbed a female several times. Then about ten other people came over to the bleeding female and literally scooped up blood from her body and bathed in the blood. They covered their bodies with the blood. This was offered as a sacrifice to Satan. They all looked like they were drugged and the female victim that was killed seemed willing to die.

21. This experience with the “Blood Bath” video made me fear for my own safety and I became so scared, I decided I must get away from these people. They have sent me a half dozen tickets and backstage passes to the Oklahoma City concert on February 5, 1997. They do not know I’ve turned my life around and I am now fully involved at [name withheld] and have given my life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

22. I witnessed Marilyn Manson bring a sheep out on stage, and from my viewpoint from the stage, I saw Manson perform sexual intercourse on the sheep.

23. Further, your Affiant sayeth not.

Executed this 21 day of January, 1997

[name withheld]            [address withheld]

- Fake and defamatory affidavit distributed by the American Family Association.  
(Manson, 254-258)