

Article

Reimagining Religious Education for Young, Black, Christian Women: Womanist Resistance in the Form of Hip-Hop

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Abstract: How might the black church and womanist scholarship begin to re-imagine religious education in ways that attends more deliberately to the unique concerns and interests of younger black, Christian women? Throughout the history of the black church, despite being marginalized or silenced within their varied denominations, black women have been key components for providing the religious education within their churches. However, today, in many church communities, we are seeing a new, emerging trend whereby young, black, Christian women are opting out of traditional approaches to religious education. They view contemporary church education as insufficient to address their contrasting range of real-life difficulties and obstacles. Instead, these young women have been turning to the work of contemporary black female hip-hop artists as a resource for religious and theological reflection. Drawing from focus groups conducted with young black female seminarians and explored through the lens of womanist theory, I argue this trend is forming a new, legitimate type of religious education where the work of artists such as Beyoncé and Solange are framing an unrecognized womanist, spirituality of resistance for young black women. Both religious educators and womanist scholars need to pay attention to this overlooked, emerging trend. Respectively, I suggest religious education and womanist scholarship would benefit by considering new resources for religious, theological, and pedagogical reflection, one that is emerging out of young black women's engagement with the art and music of specific black female artists within hip-hop.

Keywords: hip-hop; Beyoncé; Solange; religious education; womanist spirituality; solidarity; leisure

1. Introduction

Historically, black women have played an indispensable role within the black church, often serving as the heart of the church's educational ministries; however, many younger black women are not following suit, choosing instead to opt out of these conventional roles. Although black churches have generally been guided by an expectation that young black women will, as practitioners and participants within their respective faith communities, carry the torch of religious education, many young women view current church education to be overwhelmingly out of tune with their lived realities. As a result, many have instead turned to the work of contemporary black female artists as a religious and theological resource in their lives. These young women are often drawn to the art and music of two specific black female artists within hip-hop, Beyoncé and Solange Knowles, who are operating as surrogate religious educators, filling the void that many young black women feel is missing within church education as it is currently constituted. The music and videos that these artists create also allow young black women to engage with popular cultural forms, particularly hip-hop, which are having a significant hand in shaping their faith identity as young black Christian women. Ultimately, recognizing such a reality raises a fundamental inquiry: how might the black church begin

to reimagine religious education in ways that give more serious consideration to young black women's engagement with black female artists within hip-hop?

This article argues specifically for the consideration of new resources in the development of religious, theological, and pedagogical frameworks within religious education. To this end, the purpose of this article is to argue that to be more deliberately attuned to the experiences of younger black women, religious education must prioritize the work of female artists within hip-hop. More specifically, this work explores how engagement with black female artists within hip-hop can provide an unrecognized womanist spirituality of resistance for young black Christian women that can ultimately reshape how the church re-envision the way this population engages religious education.

Within black churches, music has always played a central role in shaping the religious education of black youth. However, the church's continued suspicion of "secular" music forms such as hip-hop has often kept it from recognizing the musical genre as a viable resource in the religious education of Christian young people generally and young black women in particular. The music and art of both Beyoncé and Solange provides an ideal nexus for the development of ongoing research to this end. The vast engagement of young black women with their music alone underscores the significance of these artists. However, because Beyoncé's and Solange's work reflects religious and theological themes, it assumes particular salience for black youths' religious education. While the prevailing trend has been to secularize the music of the Knowles sisters, Beyoncé and Solange have inspired renewed dialogue within religious and theological circles. Yet religious education has not given them sustained attention. I posit that young black women have been accessing their work as a type of religious education in ways that the black church has not acknowledged. Therefore, this paper seeks to fill this gap in the literature by exploring how young black women are engaging with the womanist religious and spiritual sensibilities inherent in two specific works: Beyoncé's "Lemonade" and Solange's "A Seat at the Table."

Since her emergence on the popular culture scene, Beyoncé has addressed feminist themes within her music and videos. The release of *Lemonade* garnered widespread commercial success, but also marked an evolution in the trajectory of her work in ways that are deeply relevant to the experiences of black women. In *Lemonade*, Beyoncé repositions her art from a feminist to a decidedly womanist lens by using her personal story as a black woman to tap into broader historical narratives of triumph and tragedy within the black female experience. On one level, this album and the accompanying film detail the marital infidelity of her husband, rapper Jay-Z, but while exploring the depth and agony of her personal betrayal, Beyoncé segues into wider experiences of suffering and oppression among black women in the United States (Henry 2018). Compared with her previous body of work, *Lemonade* assumes more revolutionary tones. More specifically, through *Lemonade*, Beyoncé uses her artistic platform to actively denounce the race-, class-, and gender-based oppressions that black women face. Beyoncé's reflections on black women's suffering are steeped in a range of religious symbols and images, including but not limited to those from the Christian tradition.

Since its release, the album has led to much discussion within womanist circles, even leading to the creation of womanist syllabi in some undergraduate and graduate settings and also the development of a Beyoncé mass, a religious service that is inspired by the album's visual and lyrical content and highlights black female presence within the Christian tradition. Still, for many within the black church, and those within religious education in particular, engaging Beyoncé as a religious voice remains problematic. Although Beyoncé grew up in Houston, where she attended a black church, and has at times identified herself as Christian in interviews and music, rumors surrounding her involvement in the occult have led some adults within the church to perceive her with suspicion. Moreover, as a woman who boldly displays her sexuality, Beyoncé challenges narratives of civility and respectability that have long defined expectations for how black Christian women should conduct themselves, especially with respect to their bodies. Despite these ongoing tensions, young women within the black church tend to have a highly favorable view of Beyoncé. In this paper, I explore how young black

female seminarians tap into Beyoncé's music and videos as a means of engaging practices of solidarity with other black women that are central to the formation of their identity as Christians.

The younger sister of Beyoncé, Solange, has lived in the shadow of her sister's success for much of her career. While her first set of solo recordings garnered only a modicum of commercial success, the critically acclaimed *A Seat at the Table* solidified Solange's place as one of the most influential artists of her generation. A central feature of the album's appeal for young black women is a distinct aesthetic vision that reflects clear womanist sensibilities. The album ignites resistance to white norms that have shaped the United States' cultural aesthetic. For example, the album cover, which features Solange posing as the *Mona Lisa*, is indicative of how the album disrupts traditional artistic paradigms by prioritizing and imposing black women's images and voices into these frameworks. Shortly after the album's release, many young black female fans began to replicate the album cover, posting their own versions of it online (Henry 2018). While *A Seat at the Table*'s religious themes are less explicit than *Lemonade*'s, the album's religious import is no less significant. *A Seat at the Table* depicts lament and celebration as equal dimensions of black womanhood in ways that allow young women to tap into religious and spiritual sensibilities. In this paper, I analyze how young black women engage with Solange's music primarily as a leisure practice through which they can recreate sacred spaces.

This research locates the work of these two artists within hip-hop. However, this categorization can be somewhat misleading since Beyoncé and Solange are not typically viewed as hip-hop artists in the way that other female rap artists like Nicki Minaj are. To be clear, I use the term *hip-hop* not in the ways some do, as a synonym for rap music. Instead, I use the term hip-hop interchangeably with the term *hip-hop culture*. Hip-hop culture first emerged in the 1970s among African American and Afro-Caribbean young people living in New York City as a way of igniting resistance to the moral and social ills plaguing their communities. The cultural movement known as hip-hop includes, among other features, forms of music, dance, visual art, fashion and political activism. Though hip-hop originates out of the aesthetic imaginations of black and Latino young people living in urban contexts, today, it has become a global and cultural phenomenon being shared throughout the world by diverse populations who have been drawn to its revolutionary ideals. Despite its broad appeal, hip-hop continues to serve as a primary voice of black youth, a means through which they form a sense of identity and community and a way to resist the structural inequalities confronting their lives. This study is specifically concerned with how young women black women under the age of thirty engage the art and music of certain hip-hop female artists as form religious and spiritual resistance.

2. Method

Given the sheer frequency with which certain forms of hip-hop can contribute to sexist and misogynistic depictions of young black women, many analyses that engage young women's relationship to hip-hop often posit that the cultural form is corruptive and violent. However, these appraisals of hip-hop are frequently based on the work of male hip-hop artists and has led researchers to routinely position young women as "victims" of hip-hop. To avoid the pitfalls of some of these prior analyses, this paper explores how female artists within hip-hop can shape and inform how the faith identity of young black women is developed, in ways that are empowering. To do this, I draw insights from focus groups that I conducted with five young adults, all of whom were black female seminarians aged 24 to 28 and members of black churches. Participants for this study were not selected randomly. They represent a purposively selected sample where individuals voluntarily responded to the invitation of the researcher. Because the purpose of the research was to elicit insights, rather than offer concrete explanations, a small sample was appropriate.

This research was part of a larger mixed-method study designed to explore the significance of mentoring as it pertains to four central areas of urban ministry practice: ministry efficacy, community involvement, job satisfaction, and vocational retention. I conducted this study as part of a focus group where people from six demographic groups were interviewed. This article is concerned solely with the focus group that composed urban millennials. Given the role that music and religious experience play

in youth and young adult identity formation, the focus group questions explored the significance of popular music as a type of mentoring community through which young black women can develop their religious identities. While the insights from the focus groups cannot be generalized, they offer a slice of the reality. More specifically, they can point to specific ways in which young black women's engagement with black female artists within hip-hop might contribute to re-envisioning religious education. The research process began with a series of interviews with focus group participants. Interviews were recorded and transcribed after each session. The researcher then reviewed the content so as to determine primary themes that emerged from the interviews. Focus group questions explored a range of issues, including forms of mentoring that guide female participants within and beyond their faith communities. Additionally, given the research focus on popular music as a type of mentoring community, questions also examined the participants' engagement with popular music artists. The music that the participants listen to included a range of female artists across varied genres. However, Beyoncé and Solange were selected as a particular focus for this study because participants routinely identified these two artists as addressing themes that most directly related to their experience as black women. Therefore, explorations of these entertainers' music assumed a primary focus in group discussions. This involved probing the religious and spiritual connections young black women make with these artists and their work.

3. Findings

A central focus of this paper is to demonstrate how religious education can be reimagined with young black Christian women by directing increased attention to the work of two black female artists within hip-hop: Beyoncé and Solange Knowles. It asserts the significance of popular cultural forms, such as hip-hop, as vehicles through which young black women can engage a womanist spirituality of resistance that can re-envision how religious education can be facilitated with this population. Overall, the exploration points to the significance of reclaiming a focus on solidarity and leisure as central practices in religious education with young black Christian women. More specifically it highlights two central themes: (1) that young women access the art and music of Beyoncé and Solange as a means of engaging practices of solidarity that are central to how their faith identities are being developed—in ways that reflect a deep commitment to social activism as a form of social witness; and (2) that young black Christian women also engage with these hip-hop female artists as a form of leisure through which they practice self-care as a constitutive yet overlooked feature of their spirituality. The upcoming section discusses both these dimensions in detail. However, I turn first to exploring themes related to isolation being experienced by young black women within the black church. Next, I highlight the significance of hip-hop as a spiritually formative resource in the lives of black youth generally and young black women in particular. Finally, I conclude by exploring how Beyoncé and Solange's music and videos are serving as a womanist form of spirituality within the lives of young black women.

4. Discussion

4.1. *Isolation versus Solidarity in Black Church Education for Young Black Women*

Within national and popular discourses, including a range of discourses from mainstream media to education to who gets researched to who appears on screen in movies and/or is viewed as a favorite novel heroine, young black women have often been negatively represented or altogether omitted. In light of this societal disenfranchisement, many young women look to the black church and religious education in particular for solace and a sense of solidarity in the development of their faith and inclusion in society.

Traditionally, the roles that young black women have utilized to develop a sense of solidarity and feel included have involved serving as both teachers and students in areas such as Sunday school and children's, youth, young adult, and music ministries within their churches. Yet, for a growing number of young black Christian women, their experiences in the church have only reinforced the

sense of marginalization they feel in other aspects of life. Among the group of female seminarians I interviewed for this study, this sense of isolation is also pronounced. Despite their seminary training and unique position as emerging leaders in the Christian community, many of these young women feel a profound sense of loneliness within their churches. One focus group participant attributed this sense of isolation to her recent decision to step away from her current leadership role in youth ministry (Personal communication 25 June 2018). Other group participants, also serving in various arms of religious education within their churches, indicate a similar desire to opt out of their ministry roles in the near future.

The sentiments highlighted here reflect what numerous studies have now indicated: that young people's involvement in traditional church activities and institutional forms of religious life has decreased. However, where some scholars have taken this to mean that young people have become disengaged from religious life altogether, others have pointed out that young people remain largely interested in religious engagement (Denton and Smith 2005, p. 18). More specifically, some researchers have noted that young people, although less engaged in church activities, are participating in more marginal forms of religious life mediated through popular culture forms such as hip-hop (Miller 2013, p. 138). Next, I turn to exploring two specific factors that have contributed to this trend among young black women.

4.2. Longing for Connection: An Absence of Intergenerational Solidarity among Young Black Women

This research suggests that among young black women, one source of disengagement may be related to a lack of solidarity they feel within their church and its educational ministries. Solidarity in this respect is understood as the church's willingness to affirm and stand with young black women in their quest to develop a relevant Christian faith that fosters resistance in response to the varying forms of oppression they encounter. A focus on solidarity has been central to the life and mission of African American church since its inception. Throughout its history, the black church has served as a haven and gathering place for the black persons, including black youth as they have confronted socio-historical inequalities in the world. Among black women, practicing solidarity through the development of mentoring relationships has been essential to how they have forged resilience in the face of varying oppressions they encounter, including oppression within the black church. In addition, mentoring has been central to how black women have prepared younger women for professional and ministerial roles, including within religious educational ministry. However, today, many young black women view the church as offering little support to these ends.

Within this research, a missing sense of solidarity within the church among young black Christian women finds expression in two distinct ways: (1) an inability to locate female mentors within the church with whom they can authentically engage in dialogue and from whom they can also receive guidance from as they develop in their identities; (2) a tendency on the part of black churches to invalidate the significant role that hip-hop culture assumes in their lives as a spiritual resource. One focus group participant reflects briefly on the first dynamic in the following way:

Mentorship is definitely a missing thing because I have personally reached out to women on my ministerial team like "Hey, I want to sit down [with you]" or "I think I am discerning that I have this affinity for young women in terms of teaching and how do I become part [of what you're doing]? Let me know." I reached out, reached out, reached out, but there is no response. However, then, when I'm not involved in those things, I'll hear these older women say, "You said you had this affinity. Why are you not doing stuff? Why are you not a part of things?" (26 June 2018, Personal Communication).

In the highlighted incident, the lack of response on the part of an older woman when a younger woman reached out for mentorship in the development of her role as an emerging ministry practitioner reflects the missing sense of solidarity many young black women yearn for in their churches. While all the young women interviewed indicate a strong desire to engage with older women in their

congregations, most report that these opportunities are seldom available within their churches. Moreover, when engagement with older black women does occur, many young black women report feeling judged rather than supported in their roles. Tension that leads to separation of older congregants and young adult members is a challenge observed within many churches; however, the lack of mentoring relationships between older and younger black women has some unique implications within the context of the black church. This is because mentoring for Christian black women has been viewed as not only a spiritual responsibility focused on religious formation of younger women but also a means through which younger black women have accessed a sisterhood to affirm their agency as women in church, particularly when they have been silenced or denied equal participation in their denominations. Hence, sisterhood has been one way in which black women have sought to confront the invisibility of black women within church and societal contexts (Higginbotham 1993).

However, the experience of the focus group participant quoted above reflects a different reality at work among women in some black churches. Such instances serve as one factor that may explain why younger black women have become increasingly less involved in the church's religious educational ministries and why they do not believe that the church offers them support to face the struggles they confront.

Previous studies have encouraged the importance of intergenerational engagement within the black church, especially in work with young black men; however, few give detailed attention to the specific implications for work with young black women (Allen 2015, p. 48). While some exceptions do exist, the overall neglect of young black women's needs and concerns within scholarship reflect themes of invisibility that pervade the lived experiences of so many young black women. Here invisibility refers not only to whether they are seen within their churches but also how they are seen in ways that affirm or diminish their sense of agency. In light of these dynamics, an important element for the black church to consider involves asking the following question: In what ways has African American religious education made room to listen to and respond to the concerns of younger black women? Such a dynamic also accentuates why young black women are often drawn to the music of popular artists who make visible and audible their experiences in ways the church does not. Therefore, this study underscores that more deliberately engaging the concerns of young black women within religious education requires paying closer attention to significance of hip-hop culture as spiritually formative resource in their lives.

4.3. Offering Solidarity to Young Black Women through Hip-Hop

In the focus groups conducted with the female seminarians, another theme related to how the church fails to offer solidarity to young black women involves engagement with hip-hop culture. Intergenerational tensions related to hip-hop culture in the church also surfaced in group discussions. In particular, some of the young women express conflict between the way the church traditionally engages religious education and their own affinity for hip-hop. For example, one young woman recounted a recent attempt to engage hip-hop music as a way of reimagining the seven last words of Jesus during a bible study she was asked to lead; however, she notes the resistance she received from several elder members who disapproved of her strategy. She summarizes her experience succinctly and as follows: "There is no room for my brain or my culture in the church." The highlighted dynamic reflects what Evelyn Parker points to as the central generational divide at work within the black church. She writes:

"The struggle of black youth and their adult affiliates to validate hip-hop while debating with adults who seek to reject hip-hop as a viable culture elucidates the contemporary generational divide that needs bridging if the black Church is to be healthy and wholesome and live out its prophetic mission." (Parker 2015, p. 20).

4.4. Exploring Hip-Hop Spirituality: Attention to Liberation Motifs

Here, Parker's assessment suggests that while many black youth view hip-hop as a viable spiritual resource, the church's invalidation of hip-hop culture make it difficult or impossible for them to see church education as being relevant and responsive to their concrete lived realities. In light of this reality, some scholars have observed that many young people who do not feel accepted in churches are recreating sacred spaces through hip-hop. In this sense, hip-hop is becoming a vehicle through which black youth are engaging spirituality (Miller 2013, p. 139). Many of these analyses, however, have pointed out that the ways black youth engage spirituality within hip-hop is diverse. For example, some of these explorations focus on how spirituality within hip-hop among black youth intersects with black Christian tradition and more specifically with liberation theology. In *To Set at Liberty Them that are Bruised: Liberation Theology Within Hip Hop* Welson Merrial McWilliams explores these themes. He writes:

"The spirituality in hip-hop is more than simply rap lyrics that incorporate the use of the word "God" or the new genre called "Gospel Rap," but the spirituality in hip hop is the liberative process that is taking place among those who seek to maintain the values that this art form had at its birth. They were the values of justice and values that spoke out against oppressive and exploitative conditions. Speaking out against the unjust conditions in a particular society brings forth a desire to transform society and produce a more just and egalitarian one into fruition" (McWilliams 2013).

McWilliams' analysis is intent on avoiding the kind of reductionist tendency prevalent within some black churches that seeks to delegitimize hip-hop's spirituality as faddish. Rather, he underscores that hip-hop reflects a clear liberative praxis that invites critical theological reflection on one's oppressive circumstances in order to reform them. Such a focus strongly parallels the sorts of prophetic, theological, and educational traditions that have been central to the way the black church has historically defined its central message and mission: to proclaim liberation for the most marginalized members of society. For example, several scholars have reflected on how liberation theological motifs show up in the work of hip-hop artists such as Tupac (Hodge 2010, p. 144). In ways akin to liberation theology, hip-hop spirituality emphasizes God's solidarity with those who suffer myriad forms of systemic injustice. While this is certainly the case, a focus on liberation theology alone proves insufficient to uncover the spirituality inherent in how young black women engage in hip-hop, given that both liberation theology and hip-hop culture have often been read through the lens of the black male experience. Instead, to explore the spirituality in hip-hop engaged by young black women, I employ a womanist theological lens.

4.5. Womanist Theology: A Generational Critique

Womanist theology as a distinct discipline first emerged among African American female seminarians as a corrective to black and feminist theological discourses that tended to exclude black women's voices and experiences in these frameworks. Drawing inspiration from the work of activist and author Alice Walker, who first coined the term "womanist", these scholars use the lives of black women as a hermeneutical device for engaging religious and theological thought. Given the conditions and context that gave rise to womanist theology, attention to the tri-dimensional lens of race, class, and gender analysis has been essential to the development of these models (Williams 2013, p. xvii). While womanist scholars of religion have sought to prioritize black women's stories and experiences and reflect them within theological and pedagogical frameworks within the black church's education, some young black Christian women find it difficult to locate themselves within these theological and educational traditions.

Among younger black women, one critique that emerges with respect to womanist scholarship is that it often excludes serious theological engagement with the work of some black female artists that young women view as important religious resources. Additionally, the negative appraisal

of these black female artists on the part of some womanist theologians serve as a major point of contention that has kept younger women from being able to fully engage with womanist these discourses (Mimitzraiem 2010, p. 342). These tensions immediately surface, for example, when artists like Beyoncé are identified as womanist voices through which religious education for young women might be reenvisioned.

Over the years, Beyoncé's unapologetic display of sexuality within her music and videos has made her the source of immense scrutiny by many within the church and also within womanist scholarship who view the entertainer as reinforcing negative stereotypes of women. These critiques of Beyoncé contend that the artist's music and videos exploit and eroticize the black female body in ways that reduce it to an object of desire and lust. However, many young black women, including those interviewed, view artists like Beyoncé and the ownership of her sexuality as helping to reclaim bodily agency for them in a culture that often views their bodies as property. While the young women interviewed do not always employ the specific language of womanism in their reflections on Beyoncé, many of their descriptions point to womanist sensibilities. Therefore, in the next section, I explore womanist religious and spiritual themes within Beyoncé's *Lemonade*.

Overall, *Lemonade* as a musical and visual work of art demonstrates how the lives of black women can reflect the justice of God. To this end, the work engages a tradition of social activism that has been central to how African American women have long engaged their spirituality, as a form of social witness. Emile Townes observes that womanist spirituality as a form of social witness is ultimately borne out of the struggle and determination of African American women who utilize their faith in God to resist modes of oppression while seeking justice on behalf of all persons and especially black women (Townes 1995, p. 10). Such a spirituality reflects embodied, personal and communal dimensions.

Among focus group participants, commitment to a womanist spirituality of social witness also seemed evident in how they engage with *Lemonade*. This was apparent insofar as they identified a commitment to social activism reflected in Beyoncé's album as an important marker of their generational identity and also an important way in which they engage Christian faith—as an action-oriented response to suffering present in the world. In fact, many of the young women shared that they have been involved in varied forms of social activism sponsored by their local churches and other community-based organizations. In this regard, while some studies have argued that African American youth's engagement in social activism is frequently disjointed from their involvement in Christian community, these young women experience social activism and Christian faith as interrelated dimensions of their lives. However, an important observation being made by these young women is that while a commitment to social activism remains an important feature in their lives as an expression of Christian faith, they take issue with how this tradition has been engaged within both the church and contemporary protest movements. More specifically, they note that, while the church and contemporary protest movements have often focused an activist agenda almost exclusively on highlighting the plight of young black men, *Lemonade* prioritizes the plight of black women as the primary lens through which an activist agenda unfolds.

For example, the video for "Formation" was shot in New Orleans and contains references to Hurricane Katrina and images that reflect the Black Lives Matter movement. A key moment in the album's accompanying film is when Beyoncé features the unnamed mothers of Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin and Eric Garner as they hold photos of their sons who were murdered. In so doing, she draws closer attention to how violence against black men also impacts the lives of women.

Another key observation being made by young women is the way in which Beyoncé uses religious symbolism and rituals within *Lemonade* alongside images of black women as a means of re-presenting the sacred through black women's lives. One of the stunning visual moments that reflects this thrust is a scene where a group of black women dressed in white are marching in unison towards a body of water. The image is reminiscent of the Christian tradition of baptism but also reflects the African American ritual of escape from slavery, which often occurred by way of water.

For young women, engaging images such as these within *Lemonade* can invite a re-envisioning of how spirituality unfolds in their lives, in ways that are more attentive to the struggles of black women. Moreover, because Beyoncé animates the struggles and images of black women within *Lemonade*, the young women view her as an ally, one who speaks for them and can relate to their experiences of disenfranchisement. Though Beyoncé's wealth and privileged status as an entertainer separate her from the world of these young women in some distinct ways, she is an artist who can offer solidarity to young black women, in ways not currently being engaged within the black church. Ultimately, young women affirm that Beyoncé makes visible their struggles in ways that are often overlooked by others. It's not surprising, then, that Beyoncé for many young women serves as a key religious and pedagogical source.

For example, among focus group participants, one young woman reflected on how, for some time, she used Beyoncé's album *Lemonade* as a type of personal devotional practice during a particularly difficult period in her life when she struggled with forgiving a family member. She notes specifically that she utilized the themes around which the visual album is organized: intuition, denial, anger, apathy, emptiness, loss, accountability, forgiveness, redemption, hope and resurrection as a way of engaging her healing process. While many of these themes also are reflected within Christian tradition, she notes that her use of *Lemonade* was during a time when she felt estranged from the church. Another student reflected on how *Lemonade* provided an important curricular resource through which she was able to introduce taboo topics regarding sexuality in Bible study with her young adult ministry group. A central strategy within the study was to highlight the ways in which motifs of sexuality are juxtaposed alongside themes of spirituality within the *Lemonade*. One example was to examine the way in which Beyoncé in the emptiness section of the film compares sexuality to a form of worship.

The perspectives shared here suggest that all young black Christian women do not engage female artists within hip-hop in the same way. For some, they engage with female hip-hop artists in lieu of church participation; for others, they engage hip-hop as a way of supplementing their church engagement.

Although reflections on Beyoncé occupied a large focus in discussions with the young women interviewed, talking about Beyoncé naturally led to discussions about the art of her younger sister, Solange, another artist with whom many young black women find an affinity. For the purposes of this paper, I focus my reflections on Solange's album, *A Seat at the Table*.

A Seat at the Table is a deeply personal yet political work of art that engages themes of racism, activism, and cultural appropriation that is at the heart of the black female experience. As a decidedly womanist text, *A Seat at the Table* reflects on young black women's narratives in ways that allow them to name the painful realities that pervade their lived experiences (Henry 2018). Among the experiences that focus group participants readily identify as especially pronounced in this album and also in their lives is a sense of exhaustion and fatigue that they experience as young black women. A song from Solange's album that group participants all identified as especially effective in exploring these themes is "Weary". The lyrics of this song reflect many of these motifs:

I'm weary of the ways of the world
 Be weary of the ways of the world
 I'm weary of the ways of the world
 I'm going to look for my body, yeah
 I'm be back like real soon
 I'm going to look for my body, yeah
 I'll be back like real soon
 I'm going to look for my body, yeah
 I'll be back like real soon
 However, you know that a king is only a man
 With flesh and bones, he bleeds just like you do
 He said, "Where does that leave you?"

And “Do you belong?”
 I do, I do
 Be leery bout your place in the world
 You’re feeling like you’re chasing the world
 You’re leaving not a trace in the world
 However, you’re facing the world

In “Weary,” Solange captures the sense of distress and fatigue that permeates the life narratives of the young black women in the group. Within this song, weariness for Solange assumes two forms: first it is dispositional—rooted in a certain suspicion and wariness that black women have to arm themselves with as they move through the spaces that continually devalue their personhood. Second, weariness alludes to the physical, mental, and emotional distress that result from young black women having to face varying forms of pressures and oppression in their worlds. Some group participants relate this second sense of weariness in their own lives to their experiences in the church. Within the church, these feelings of exhaustion are the result of feeling overworked in their roles as ministry leaders. However, these feelings of fatigue also result from the need to constantly defend and prove themselves to others, primarily elders within their faith community.

Overall, the sonic and lyrical presentation in “Weary” functions as a type of prophetic lament that sounds out these experiences of distress that young black women experience within their worlds, including within the church. This lament, however, is not one rooted in hopelessness; rather, it signals the need for transformation and change. Specifically, for Solange, weariness accentuates the need to retrieve a sense of holistic well-being that involves attending to one’s mind, body, and spirit. Within womanist thought and practice, attention to holistic well-being is a central pedagogical focus. A focus on holistic well-being is one feature of a womanist spirituality of teaching that affirms the pedagogical process as a holistic and sacred encounter (Smith 2007).

In “Weary”, Solange reflects this dimension of womanist spirituality. Moreover, attention to well-being in Solange’s art also illuminates the specific ways in which engagement with hip-hop shows up in the lives of young black women, specifically as a leisure practice. Within the black church, leisure has assumed a prominent role in the following three ways: as a means through which African Americans have developed a sense of solidarity as they confront socio-historic realities, as a way to foster social and physical well-being, and as a sacramental practice (Waller 2010). For young black women, leisure assumes an especially important role in their lives, given the sense of fatigue and weariness they report experiencing. The forms of leisure they tend to engage in are different from their elders. Some of the primary leisure practices engaged by young black women in the group involve listening to black female hip-hop artists. In this regard, however, leisure does not serve as a mindless activity but rather as a means through which young black women engage in self-care while also entering into sacred encounters. One young woman offers reflections that demonstrates how this occurs:

Two weeks ago, when I was having my midweek crisis and feeling extremely overwhelmed, I put on *A Seat at the Table*. From beginning to end, I just watched the visuals. It starts off angry, but by the end you have this clarity. It forces me stop and slow down. I like the progression of the album. It moves from hurt and anger to a sense of peace. After listening to the album, I feel refreshed. That is when I feel closest to God. (25 August 2018, Personal communication)

While this young woman’s statement points to the meaningful ways that young black women can engage in leisure practices through listening to artists like Solange, the church tends not to pay attention to this aspect of young women’s lives. Instead, the prevailing tendency has been to depict the leisure practices of black youth, especially those connected to hip-hop, in negative ways or to ignore them altogether. However, this research reflects that young women listen to hip-hop as a sacramental practice. Sacramental experiences are those that attune us to the mystery of life and the mystery of God

(Reichart 1987, p. 5). Here, a sacramental understanding of leisure begins first with viewing all of life as sacred. Such a view helps us to avert binaries of sacred and profane that might lead to overlooking leisure practices that young black women engage as devoid of spiritual significance. Second, a view of leisure as sacramental in the lives of black women also affirms self-care as a constitutive dimension of their spirituality. Here, listening to hip-hop artists like Solange is one way in which young women demonstrate care for themselves. Caring for one's self not only fosters personal renewal but also invites sacred encounter.

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