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April 20, 2011

The Contemporary Worship Music of American Megachurch Youth Groups: An Intersection of
the Sacred and Secular

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An abstract of
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Abstract

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The particular genre of contemporary worship music in American non-denominational megachurch youth groups is influenced by the culture of American pop-rock music and the culture of love in America. My project analyzes the similarities between this form of worship music and these two cultures that exist in American society. By applying content and lyrical analysis, and the Geertzian ethnographic method, this thesis provides insight into this new phenomenon that serves as an example of an intersection of the sacred and secular within a religious institution. I analyzed literature that surveys the performance behaviors of American pop-rock artists and studies; I also analyzed research studies that survey the culture of love in America. In addition, I collected data from my direct observations and personal interviews at InsideOut to compare to my content analyses. This paper accomplished two things: first, it reveals the struggles and theological changes in the megachurch community; second, it proves that the modern discourse of religion and the sacred being clearly demarcated from the secular sphere of society is not applicable to new forms of religious life like this one.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Theoretical Framework.....	2
Methodology.....	3
Foundation.....	9
Sacred and Secular.....	9
Sacred and Secular Music	11
Megachurches.....	12
The Evolution of American Protestant Worship Music.....	15
Analysis of the Performance of InsideOut’s Worship Music.....	18
Lyrical Analysis of InsideOut’s Worship Songs.....	30
Conclusion.....	39
Appendix A.....	43
References.....	44

Introduction

As the students file into the auditorium before the worship service, smiling and talking amongst themselves, they collectively sing along to the music that plays in the background. The songs and their lyrics are familiar to them and are by popular artists such as Justin Bieber, Katy Perry, and the Black Eyed Peas. The lights stay bright and alert as nearly 1,000 high schoolers take their seats in the audience and look towards the stage, waiting for someone to appear. Even as they sit and wait, they sing along with the background music and as it fades away, the whole crowd jumps to their feet and the auditorium goes dark. A synthesizer is heard and fog fills the stage – the students come running from their seats to stand at the foot of the stage, their necks craned to see who will appear. At the high school ministry of megachurch North Point Community Church in Alpharetta, GA, this is how each youth service begins every Sunday. Once the lights appear again, the praise band will be seen and screams from the students will be deafening.

This occurrence is familiar to me on a personal level – I grew up in an American non-denominational megachurch and was actively involved in the youth ministries. The description above was very similar to the opening of each service I attended in middle and high school. As a student, I was also a member of the student praise band; through my years as a keyboardist, I became very familiar with what kind of worship music was played and how each music service was conducted. When my parents had questions about our youth group's weekly worship music, my youth pastor answered by saying, "Your kids can either listen to modern-day Christian music or listen to pop music with terrible lyrics." These were the only two options presented to parents of myself and the

other students. I do not remember much else about this encounter between my parents and my youth pastor, but I certainly recall being very confused by his statement. As a high schooler, I had trouble understanding how these two types of music could be different if they held so many of the same qualities. Although I did not realize it at the time, this was the moment that I began forming thoughts that would eventually lead up to this thesis. My experience as an insider of megachurch youth groups is one of many that have motivated me to pursue this project.

Theoretical Framework

I framed this project with the thought of the concept of religion. Although modern discourse has supported the idea that religion and religious life are inherently demarcated from the secular sphere, it is important to keep in mind a quote by Wilfred Cantwell Smith: “‘Religion’ in its modern form is a secular idea. Secularism is an ideology, and ‘religion’ is one of its basic categories.” The modern idea of religion grew partly out of secular roots, resulting in this understanding of religion: the carving of religious acts, beliefs, communities, experiences, etc. are segregated from other dimensions of human life (Cady 29). This thought functioned as a protection of anything religious, ensuring that the outside would not contaminate its unique essence. In the mid-twentieth century, the demarcation of religion from other facets of personal and social life came into full effect. Linell Cady notes that even though religious freedom was available through this separation, it was also responsible for the inception of a shared secular sphere that rejected religious life. Consequently, scholars’ approach to the study of religion is limited – using this line of thinking results in simply “polishing the mirror,” as Cady calls it, rather than studying culture and society as the context in which religion lies. Cady warns

us that if religious studies is “ensnared in the conceptual grid of the modern religions discourse, it will be unable to attend to new forms of religiosity emerging in contemporary life” (35). She suggests that we, as scholars, should move in the direction of blurring the boundary between sacred and secular and place greater emphasis on what “religiosity” might be instead.

This paper sheds light on an intersection of the sacred and secular, providing insight into a religious phenomenon that blurs the boundary between religion and the society in which it exists. The driving question behind my work is: how does secular American society relate to and influence the sacred in religious institutions? I chose to approach this question by studying the sacred space of Protestant non-denominational megachurches, where many influences from secular society are found. More specifically, my work points to two forces in society that have major influences on the worship music of megachurch youth groups. These are the culture of American pop-rock music and the culture of love in America. My thesis will show which qualities of contemporary worship music are derived from these two cultures. Identifying these similarities and analyzing their roles in the worship music challenges religious studies scholars to rethink the meaning of the terms sacred and secular as well as reconsider that notion that religion is distinctly demarcated from secular society. My thesis is an effort to prove that there *are* new forms of religious life, as Cady points out, that do not abide by the division indicated in modern discourse.

Cultures

Clifford Geertz provides twelve various definitions of the term culture in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. With these options available in defining such a key term,

Geertz reminds his readers that there is not an entirely standard concept of what culture is. However, it is necessary to choose a definition in order to successfully analyze it.

Geertz chooses to address culture as the “webs of significance man himself has spun” and in these webs, man finds meaning and ability to construe social expression. Studying such a culture is not an experimental science, but rather an interpretive one (5).

I will address two different cultures in this thesis, both of which have major influences on the contemporary worship music of megachurch youth groups – the first is the culture of American pop-rock music. It exists as one of the dimensions of American popular culture as a whole. American pop-rock music is a culture by this definition set out by Geertz: a set of standard orientations to recurrent problems. This genre of popular music, along with many others, has historically been known for producing songs that address many of the American people’s most prominent themes in life. American popular music and its genres can be traced back to even the Civil War, where patriotic songs became some of the first popular songs among all classes of people (Pattie 26). These songs addressed the issue of patriotism and since then, American popular music has evolved to touch upon matters such as racism, love, heartbreak, war, sexuality, etc.

Pop-rock music variously includes all of these themes and the fact that it reaches virtually all class levels across America is one of the most significant reasons it is a culture in itself. Today, the pop-rock music culture in America is the largest and most popular it has ever been (Pattie 14). Its iconic figures range from The Beatles to Madonna to Justin Bieber – artists like these have become the forefront of this industry, serving as role models for many. In this paper, I will focus on the current culture of pop-rock music in America, which mainly reaches teenagers to young adults in the white middle to upper

class demographic (17). This culture teaches these key values in its songs: freedom of expression, monogamous love, fun-filled experiences, and financial wealth. The feature of this culture that has the most notable impact on megachurch youth groups is the live performances of American pop-rock music. These concerts are extremely theatrical, equipped with the latest technology and amplified dance-beats (18).

Love is more than a concept, idea, or theme in America. Sociologist Ann Swidler says it “is one of the richest sources” of attitudes, moral deliberation, and action (2). In an even bigger framework, love can be studied as a culture because of this Geertzian definition of a culture: a way of thinking, feeling, and believing (Geertz 4). As Swidler’s study shows in *Talk of Love*, the culture of love is a dynamic force that affects people’s beliefs and shapes the way they interpret their surroundings. Specifically, this paper will refer to the romantic love that appears in this culture. The details and characteristics of this love will be addressed in the body of the thesis because it pertains directly to my analysis. However, it is important to note the demographics in which this culture of love exists. In Swidler’s research, she specifically studied the middle to upper class of white Americans, ages ranging from teenagers to middle-aged adults. This is the group of people who carry out this culture of love, especially romantic love, in America.

Methodology

In order to bring this project to life, the first methodology I will use is content and lyrical analysis. I analyzed literature that surveyed the qualities of American pop-rock music, such as the performance behaviors and style of songs. I also gathered material from various sociologists about the culture of love in America, particularly information about the two figures of the leading man and lady. Lastly, I studied many works about the

contemporary form of worship music used in megachurches and specifically the forms of the songs. I chose several songs from the genre of worship music in megachurches and analyzed their lyrics, comparing them to the lyrics of American pop-rock songs.

Secondly, there is an ethnographic portion of my thesis. Geertz's understanding of ethnography is primarily "thick description," which moves beyond the action or gesture, rather focusing more on the context and meaning of the action itself. In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, he uses winking as an example. In order to distinguish this from any other social gesture, such as a twitch or blink, we must understand what the social understanding of this action is, along with the state of mind of the "winker" when he or she performs the gesture. The "thin description" is the wink and the "thick description" is where ethnography lies – to learn its symbolic import in society or between communicators (6).

I chose to apply this method of ethnography to North Point Community Church, a megachurch in Alpharetta, GA. This church served as a representative of non-denominational megachurches across America. I specifically focused on the high school ministry, InsideOut. The student congregation and choice of contemporary worship music are both typical examples of high school ministries that my analysis is targeted towards. On a more personal level, this particular place of worship functioned very similarly to every megachurch I have encountered in my life, especially the one in which I grew up.

For three months, I attended InsideOut's weekly Sunday worship services as a participant observer. These services consisted of a music set, a sermon by a minister, and finally a time in which students broke up into small groups of approximately ten people. During the worship music segment of each service, I observed and documented the

behavior of the performing praise band, the body language of the students, and the setting of the stage and auditorium.

I also had the privilege of interviewing two high school seniors, Emily and Chandler, who have been actively involved in InsideOut for nearly four years. These students were eager to share their experiences with me, especially their thoughts about the worship music at InsideOut. In addition, I interviewed and was in constant contact with the music director at InsideOut, Steve Underwood, whose job is to handpick the worship songs for each service and choose which musicians play in the praise band. Finally, I interviewed one of the lead singers in the InsideOut praise band, Mark Gibson, who has been singing for the worship services for five years. He was able to speak with me about his experiences and duties as a lead singer. The interviews were semi-structured around a series of twenty questions I created in advance (see Appendix A). However, some of the interviewees had other relevant information to share, so my interviews were not strictly bound to these questions. I met with them either in the church or in various public places, like coffee shops, around Alpharetta.

After recording the answers to the interviews and documenting my observations at InsideOut, I was sure to gather as many details as possible before analyzing it and coming to any conclusions – an important characteristic of “thick description.” I especially inquired as to why this genre of worship music was being chosen at this church; also, I explored the context and meaning of the body language of the students during each worship service.

Although I conducted these methods objectively, my subjectivity has been somewhat beneficial to this study. My previous experiences as a member of a

megachurch youth group have equipped me with the background knowledge of how a ministry like InsideOut functions, which made it much easier to create a set of interview questions about the worship music. As a performing pianist and music major, I was able to utilize my musical knowledge while listening to and observing the instrumentation and structure of worship songs at each InsideOut music service.

Foundation

There are several key concepts that have been referred to in the introduction of this paper, particularly within the theoretical framework. In this section, I will address these concepts with the hopes of establishing a foundation upon which my analyses stand strongly. First I will discuss the concepts of the sacred and secular, how they exist in religious studies, and how they are applied in the discourse on music. Then, I will provide a brief survey on what non-denominational megachurches are and how and when they were established in the United States. This particular branch of megachurches is set apart mostly its unique demographics, which will be included in this section.

Sacred and Secular

Because the sacred is defined by how humans experience it, it is directly relative to each society and time period in which it exists. As historian Mircea Eliade said, the sacred is generally identified as an object or behavior that is definitively experienced out of the ordinary, separated from the common, mundane context of the world in which one lives. The sacred is further separated from the “normal” world when it is elevated, as it is by persons or collective groups who claim to understand it, to hold more meaning than other life experiences. The word “sacred” expresses neither the fundamental nature of the object nor a certain, divine force in the object. In order to fully understand the sacred, it must be examined alongside the profane. Although I will not utilize the term profane in my project, it is necessary to refer to it now in order to fully understand the sacred and eventually the secular.

In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade claims that the profane is nonbeing and the state of chaos – it is exactly what the sacred is not. The polarity of the sacred and the

profane provides humans with a more concrete sense of existence; it provides a more categorical view of their position in the world, thus defining reality. The sacred allows human to experience him- or herself out of the profane world by establishing a position in the world that is no longer ordinary or common (13). This new existence for man does not necessarily refer unambiguously to a religious state, although it possibly could be related to religion; foremost, it provides humans with a specific experience and perspective in the world that is grounded and definite.

The secular supposedly lies within the realm of the profane and is explicitly separated from the sacred and any experiences that surround the sacred. Secular society is often identified as an entity that is deliberately detached from religion. In *Sacred Matters*, Gary Laderman identifies the sacred as a “word signifying religious cultures or communities tied together emotionally and cognitively, but also spiritually and materially by vital rituals, living myths, indescribable experiences, moral values, shared memories, and other commonly recognized features of religious life” (xiv). Because the sacred is inherently a part of religious life, it also is supposedly separated from secular society. This division is one of the driving forces behind our current understanding of religion and the sacred.

However, the field of religious studies has recently encountered phenomena that prove how unnecessary this division is for religion or the sacred to exist in America. Much attention is being paid to various intersections of the sacred and secular that occur in both religious settings and in secular society. For example, Laderman’s *Sacred Matters* sheds light on a number of events in contemporary American society – like sporting events, music concerts, and popular films – in which the sacred is present. These

occurrences take place in secular society, yet the sacred is embedded in these social experiences.

Sacred and Secular Music

The meanings of and the contrast between sacred and secular music shifts along with social and cultural contexts. However, the struggle of setting boundaries between the two has been continuously noted in religious studies. Sacred music is generally thought of as music that is in a church but in *Music and Theology*, Don Saliers does not point to a religious setting as the only place to find sacred music:

We need not work with dichotomies between “sacred” and “secular” music as such. Perhaps we need much more to attend to what can be called the “sacrality” or even the “sacramentality” of music wherever and whenever we are moved out of ourselves and our habitual, common-sense world. This can occur when we cease to be interested in music only for entertainment or “background” purposes, and begin to pay attention to how music points toward the deep elemental facts of our existence. Music may point, for example, to our mortality, our capacity for love and suffering, or to a sense of mystery beyond the commonplace or the mere appearance of things. (60)

Saliers says sacred music exists when we move ourselves out of the “common-sense world,” which Eliade would call the profane. Even though this kind of music is set apart from the profane, the boundary between it and secular music has always been a matter in question. Many religious institutions, including Protestant Christianity, have struggled with defining this boundary. Theologians have even questioned the presence of the sacred in the history of music set in secular society. My thesis will focus specifically on the sacred worship music in Protestant megachurches, analyzing the numerous musical influences from secular society.

This intersection of sacred and secular music is not a new phenomenon in Christian history. Scholars have traced it back to even the twelfth century when three-

and four-part polyphony, drawn from composers in secular society, became the established sacred music in cathedrals across Europe. In the early 1700s, the musical vocabulary of German composer Johann Sebastian Bach was used in both popular performances and music of the Lutheran Church. The early 1900s was marked with the eventual rise of bluegrass music in conservative Protestant churches. Perhaps the most evident of the more recent examples is the tradition of “Gospel” music in African American churches. Music in these churches was bodily expressive and members would embrace the availability of affordable instruments, like drums, guitars, tambourines, brass instruments, etc. These laid the accompaniment under a style of solo singing that became popular in the Pentecostal churches. As these musical trends became extremely popular in the African American churches, they lay the foundation for gospel music to grow outside of the churches in secular society. In the 1930s and 40s, improvisation and the early beginning of the blues began in these churches and eventually moved in the realm of popular music (Vischer, 33).

Megachurches

The shifts in American Protestantism since the 1960s played a significant role in the emergence of non-denominational megachurches. In *The Megachurch and the Mainline*, Stephen Ellingson identifies these shifts: the decline of mainline Protestantism and the ascendance of conservative and evangelical Protestantism, the privatization of religion and growing disenchantment with organized or institutionalized religion among Americans, and how choice has become a normative feature of American Christianity (6). Additionally, postwar America was experiencing an urban sprawl, which resulted in newly developed areas that were ten to twenty miles outside of downtown cities like

Atlanta, Los Angeles, Dallas, Houston, etc. These new landscapes were the birthplace of Protestant non-denominational megachurches. Urban centers provided the space in which all the new American Protestant needs could be met.

These “Christian life” centers were meant to provide more than Sunday morning services – they were built to provide a way of life, including schools, gymnasiums, therapy sessions, and even Christian-themed shopping (Ellingson 227). The first megachurch advocates in the early 1990s were conservative evangelicals who believed they were answering a need among baby boom and younger Christians. These groups were attracted to the charisma of young ministers whose congregations grew upwards of 3,000 members. Megachurches provided many characteristics that were appealing, transforming the church into a place where both adults and children were entertained along with receiving spiritual guidance. Although megachurches range from 3,000 to upwards of 20,000 members, they quickly learned how to elicit a strong sense of community by forming small groups within the church that intimately met the members’ personal needs.

Youth ministries in megachurches utilize numerous forms of entertainment for the students, both prior to and during services. Because these institutions usually expand onto large campuses, rather than place the congregation in one building, there are often separate buildings designed for middle and high school youth groups. These will include large auditoriums with the latest technology, lounge areas, and spaces set aside for various sports or game consoles. Weekly youth services begin after fifteen to thirty minutes of fellowship, which is a free time for students to interact with each other and the ministry’s leaders prior to entering the auditorium for worship.

One of the first and most renowned megachurches is Willow Creek in South Barrington, Illinois. Its founder and first pastor, Bill Hybels, obtained a large amount of managerial experience in order to successfully run the church. By 1995, Willow Creek drew an average of 20,000 people to each Sunday service. Willow Creek became an example for the large number of megachurches that were being established in the 1990s. Towards the end of the decade, virtually all non-denominational megachurches in America faced harsh criticism from other branches of Christianity – these establishments were accused of being shallow, commercialized, and on the path of becoming a “Church-lite” environment. However, the number of megachurches steadily rose after the 1990s and there are now over 1,300 of them in the United States (Ellingson 117).

According to Ellingson, this particular branch of megachurches is targeted towards the middle to upper class of white families, which usually consist of parents between the ages of 30-50 and children of various ages. This demographic generally resides in the suburbs, where megachurches are generally built. For example, North Point Community Church is in Alpharetta, GA, approximately fifteen miles outside of downtown Atlanta. Non-denominational megachurches attempt to reach out to these families in order to complete the idea of Christian-life centers rather than merely a place for weekly worship. The majority of these churches are white; however, it is becoming more common to strive for diversity within the community (Ellingson 46). Attempts for diversity include themed events that showcase music from different cultures and outreach programs in the surrounding schools that target students from all ethnic backgrounds (47).

The Evolution of Worship Music

Once Reformed Christians immigrated to the American colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, worship traditions were inherited from so many European countries, resulting in variations across each congregation that did not follow denominational lines. However, as the First Great Awakening swept across the colonies, a general view of worship was created – worship music was directed towards the church members and those who were outside the churches. The singing of psalms and hymns was introduced in order to appeal to an emotional and spiritual experience among the congregations. But this didn't become the common musical language of worship it was reinforced in the Second Great Awakening (Vischer 46).

During this revival in the nineteenth century, the length of sermons was becoming shorter and the worship music was becoming more prominent in the entirety of the service. Organs and choirs were used in Protestant churches and there was a greater interest in active lay participation during each worship service. Congregational singing was encouraged by the ministers of the church, who noted that fellowship of worship was crucial to the church. The second half of the nineteenth century was characterized with a renewal of liturgical interest in worship practice, including the music. As the twentieth century approached, a tension between form and freedom in worship music was present in each Christian denomination (Vischer 47).

The desire for freedom was expressed through new contemporary forms of worship that replaced the use of hymns in some Protestant churches. The Praise-and-Worship movement became one of the more popular contemporary forms and it emphasized experiencing God, “signaling a shift from a rational toward an affective

approach to worship” (Vischer 332). It was meant to be nourishing for the mind and spirit of the congregation as it encouraged the church to hunger for an encounter with God.

This new genre of worship music was led by a praise band and placed at the very beginning of each service as preparation for the sermon. The psalm and hymn text was traded for short worship choruses, less theological content, and an increasing role of drama and visual effects. New worship songs from this genre generally included less scriptural quotes and used more everyday language, such as “you are” and “I love you” towards God, with which the church members felt comfortable (333).

This movement became the standard genre of worship music for megachurches across America, including in North Point Community Church and InsideOut. Praise bands are now the leaders of worship for these churches. This provides a performance aspect of worship services that included the latest technology, like video media, spotlights and light shows, mass amounts of sound equipment, and stage decorations. This is where the culture of American pop-rock music began to greatly influence the presentation of worship music; leaders and music directors within the church have begun to pull qualities and characteristics from this culture into their churches’ worship services. The music directors who write the lyrics to these new worship songs have abandoned the use of Biblical scriptures and instead turn to familiar, everyday language to address the main themes, such as love and salvation.

This brief overview of how worship music has evolved in America and what the most contemporary form now exists in megachurches leads into the main analyses of my thesis. In the next two sections, I will analyze the worship music in InsideOut, which acts as a representative of megachurch youth groups in America, and how many of its

qualities are carved out of forces of American society. First, I will analyze the performance of the worship music, comparing it to the culture of American pop-rock music. Then, I will analyze the lyrics of the worship songs and their striking similarities to the culture of love in America.

Presentation and Performance of Worship Music

In the darkness, a few blue spotlights rotate around the auditorium. A keyboard synthesizer fades into the sound system, gradually setting the atmosphere for the upcoming song. A fog machine begins to emit smoke that fills the entire stage and mists across the people gathered at the front. The crowd roars as the lead guitar begins playing a riff and as the bass chimes in, hands are in the air and there are shouts heard from every corner of the auditorium. Eventually, the entire band plays in sync together and as soon as the sound is complete, a light show full of colors and movement launch across the audience and stage. The bass practically beats through the floor into my kneecaps, wholly encompassing the body and invigorating sight and ears.

Although this sounds like a play by play from a U2 or Lady Gaga concert, for example, it is the opening of the worship service of InsideOut's Sunday gathering. This analysis will shed light on the overwhelming number of similarities between InsideOut's worship service and the concerts performed by secular artists. These similarities are: style of the songs; performer-audience relationship; and theatrical setting of the stage and auditorium.

Style of Songs

The worship chorus is perhaps the most distinguishable feature of contemporary worship music that is comparable to secular top-forty music in America. It exists as the core of contemporary worship songs, around which the rest of the song is built. This structure is identical to the songs in pop culture: verse-chorus-verse-chorus-bridge-chorus. Here, the chorus serves as the anchor of the song, containing the take-home message. Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) takes yearly surveys that

identify the most popular 25 songs used in contemporary Christian worship services, including InsideOut. The surveys returned between April 1, 2010 and September 30, 2010 listed Hillsong's "Mighty To Save" as the most commonly performed song (cite).

The lyrics of its chorus are:

(A)
 Savior
 He can move the mountains
 My God is mighty to save
 He is mighty to save
 (B)
 Forever
 Author of salvation
 He rose and conquered the grave
 Jesus conquered the grave
 Mighty to save

The structure of this chorus exists in two similar sections, labeled A and B, each beginning with a one-worded phrase: "Savior" and "Forever." Although the middle parts of each section differ, their endings are the same phrase, "mighty to save." The phrases in the middle of the two sections, such as "conquered the grave" and "move the mountains," are directly used to support the idea that God is mighty to save. When InsideOut performs this song in a worship service, the chorus is repeated 5 times, each with varying instrumentation. The chorus is used in this same fashion in popular music, such as top-forty artists like Taylor Swift. In one of her singles of 2010, which once held the number one spot on Billboard Music Charts, "You Belong With Me," her chorus functions similarly:

(A)
 If you could see that I'm the one who understands you
 Been here all along so why can't you see?
 You belong with me
 (B)
 Standing by, waiting at your back door

All this time how could you not know baby?
You belong with me
You belong with me

Again, this chorus is broken into an A and B section, which both end in the title and phrase, “you belong with me.” Taylor Swift asks a question as the second phrase of each section, ensuring both parts of this chorus are identical. In Taylor Swift’s performances of this song, she usually repeats this chorus 4 times.

During my interview with the teenagers in InsideOut, they expressed their approval of the worship choruses, saying that their interests in the songs come from the fact that the tune of each chorus is both easy to learn and pleasant to the ears. Emily, a high school senior at InsideOut, noted that singing songs in this format makes visitors comfortable during the worship music segment. She referred to her past experiences at a Methodist church she attended with her older sister, who was active in the youth group. She didn’t hesitate to express her dislike for the worship songs compared to the songs InsideOut regularly plays for the students. She said this Methodist church played hymns, which she found difficult to learn because the melody was not easy to sing along with. Chandler, another senior, chimed in to agree with her, saying the format of these songs make worship more relevant to high school students’ lives and therefore, more likable.

Furthermore, the instrumentation of this particular genre of worship music is also identical to top-forty pop music. A typical band heard on the radio consists of lead and backup vocals, guitar(s), bass, keyboard, and drums. These instruments are also present in InsideOut’s worship band. The band mimics the instrumentation of popular music like Taylor Swift. For example, “Mighty To Save” and “You Belong With Me” share similar instrumentation throughout the entirety of each song. At the beginning of each song, two

guitars are heard, one existing as the rhythmic drive and the other playing a bright, catchy melodic line. The only accompaniment to these guitars is a soft, steady beat from the drums that adds support, yet keeps the sound somewhat sparse. The next layer to arrive is the opening voice with the first verse. From here, the growth of sound is identical in each of the songs. Throughout the first verse, the drums build up to the arrival of the first chorus in which they come to a full volume. Upon arrival of the first chorus, new sounds are added to the mix, including keyboard synthesizer and new riffs from the melodic guitar. From here, the layers transition between these different sounds and every change in instrumentation occurs at the same time in each song.

This most unique similarity of this particular genre of worship music, present in InsideOut and megachurch youth groups across America, and top-forty music on the radio is the resemblance of instrumentation in the songs. Without lyrics being added, songs from the church and from secular society are identical to one another. Emily and Chandler claim they are aware of this likeness and because InsideOut worship songs sound like the music they enjoy listening to outside of church, they and the other students feel more comfortable during music services.

However, InsideOut does not only imitate the popular music; their worship bands sometimes open worship services with songs from the radio. For example, on December 5th, 2010, a lead singer named Mark Gibson opened the service alongside a visiting female singer named Jacqueline. Without any introduction, the music began and Mark started singing “Just the Way You Are” by Bruno Mars, which happened to be at the top of Billboard’s Top 100 that week. The crowd sang every word along with him and once the bridge arrived, the band transitioned into Taylor Swift’s chart-topping song “You

Belong With Me.” This elicited an even bigger response from girls in the audience, which triggered the boys to scream in mockery, which just added to the roar. Jacqueline sang through the entire song, much to the crowd’s pleasure. As her performance ended, she humbly and silently tiptoed out of the spotlight as the audience loudly applauded. Once she disappeared Mark looked at the band and cued them into the worship set, once again without preface. InsideOut’s students naturally transitioned with the band, just as excited for the upcoming worship as they were for the small glimpse of radio hits.

The crowd’s participation throughout the Bruno Mars and Taylor Swift songs was overwhelmingly enthusiastic, to say the least. When Mark sang the first words of “Just the Way You Are,” groups of high school girls halted their conversation without hesitation and came running from the back rows towards the front, just to catch a glimpse of the singers on stage. As they ran, they screamed while holding each other’s hands, expressions of delight on their beaming faces. Even the boys seemed to be enjoying themselves as they jokingly sang the lyrics alongside the animated girls.

Performer-Audience Relationship

Every week, a different group of musicians fulfill the roles of band members and there is never the same lead singer two weeks in a row. The music directors at InsideOut deliberately place the musicians in a rotation so that each Sunday’s music service is an exciting and fresh experience for the students. It is important to note that the band members do not exclusively work for this high school ministry. Performing at the worship services for InsideOut functions as a case-by-case gig for these musicians. They meet backstage before the service starts, play their set list, and upon completion of their performance they creep out the back door of the auditorium, withdrawing themselves

from the rest of the service. The physical space of the stage serves a function very similar to that of a concert arena in Atlanta, which accommodates a different musical artist every weekend with the hopes of attracting large crowds. In addition, the musicians lack any interaction with the students outside of the worship service. They hold no other role in InsideOut and thus, they are only performers for the ministry.

In *Rock Music in Performance*, David Pattie describes the experience of live performances by popular bands around the world. Particularly, Pattie discusses the performance style of U2 during their 2005 *Vertigo* world tour as an example of the interactive relationship between band and audience in secular music concerts. He points to the lead singer, Bono, as the theatrical focus of the band that makes “repeated movements towards the audience” (25). For example, Bono reaches out to the screaming fans in the front rows and as they take pictures of him, he humorously imitates the camera clicking into his microphone. Between lyrics, he leans his body out into the audience and places the microphone in the mouths of fans that sing the lyrics along with Bono. Actions like these form a distinct performer-audience relationship between band and fans.

In InsideOut, the same interactive performer-audience relationship exists between the worship band and high school students. The crowd of students participates in each song, following whatever the lead singer may set forth for them. Generally, when the lights come up at the beginning of each worship service, the lead singer is the first to be seen. He claps his hands high in the air, gesturing for the crowd to follow along. They do so, meanwhile keeping their full attention on the lead singer as he leads the entire band into the opening song of the service. Just as U2’s first song of every *Vertigo* concert is

their most popular single, InsideOut's worship band always begins the service with a song that resonates popularly among the students. This allows the crowd to fully participate – they sing, jump, and dance to the beat of the familiar music. Most importantly, these actions are pointed directly towards the musicians on stage and this instantly results in a performer-audience relationship.

In Pattie's analysis of U2's performances, he refers to two performance modes that Bono experiments with in each concert: theatricality and sincerity (26). Bono's energy takes him to every corner of the stage, exhibiting his theatrics. He becomes characteristic by bouncing back and forth between each musician across the stage, sinking his body to the ground, only to jump back up and spread his arms to the sky. He also emotionally connects with the crowd, displaying his sensitivity and appreciation for the fans. His sincerity seems to make the crowd feel emotionally comfortable so that they unashamedly participate in the theatrics of the concert, such as singing with eyes closed and arms reached to the sky or clapping their hands in a rhythm assigned by Bono. These two modes of performance are the driving force behind the performer-audience relationship and set up a distinct performance style that is commonly seen in secular music concerts.

The lead singers of InsideOut's worship services also exhibit performance modes of sincerity and theatricality. In particular, 25-year-old Jayce is occasionally a lead singer at InsideOut who distinctly captures both of the performance modes in each of his performances. Although the spotlight firstly shines on Jayce's microphone stand, he opens the worship service by walking to every corner of the stage, clapping his hands and interacting with the audience. His theatricality shines through as he points to the students

in the front row, gesturing them to sing as the familiar opening song begins. At the end of every phrase, he physically jumps around the microphone, sending high energy into the crowd. Once he completes a chorus of the song and begins a guitar solo, he walks to the very front of the stage, and leans over to make eye contact with the students as his fingers move swiftly across the neck of his guitar. These actions strengthen the performer-audience relationship in the auditorium and InsideOut's high schoolers view him primarily as a performer.

Like Bono, Jayce also displays an enormous amount of sincerity. He has an ability to shift the mood in the auditorium from lively to contemplative. The final song of each worship music set, according to music director Steve Underwood of InsideOut, is a reflective number played in a significantly slower tempo. Steve specifically calls these "worship songs," as their lyrics focus more on acknowledging and praising God's characteristics rather than vibrantly celebrating themes such as salvation. Steve commended Jayce's ability to effortlessly transition from the excitement of the rock style worship songs to the contemplative component (cite). While Jayce makes this transition, he uses the same tools Bono exercises in his sincere performance mode.

Pattie says Bono's mode of sincerity is accompanied by a sudden desire for connection between band and audience. From here, U2 plays a slower song that is "stripped back to vocals and effect-laden guitar for half its length, giving Bono and the audience the first opportunity to engage in communal singing" (26). Before and during the instrumental section of the song, Bono shares some experiences of his past, encouraging the audience to do the same in order to reach a common ground upon which to encounter the song. Jayce does exactly the same to motivate emotions among the high

school students at InsideOut. He lightly plucks his guitar as the keyboardist fingers out chords on the synthesizer; meanwhile, Jayce shares a recent experience of weakness in which he allowed God to provide strength and inspiration. He then prompts communal singing with the students, stepping back from the microphone so that the only voices heard in the auditorium are from the crowd.

Successfully completing both the performance modes of theatricality and sincerity, Jayce establishes a strong relationship between himself, and the other musicians, and InsideOut's students. Pattie claims that upon the lead singer's completion of these performance modes, the audience will feel an authenticity in the performer-audience relationship that has ensued. And according to Pattie, this kind of authenticity can only be experienced within this unique relationship.

Theatrical Setting

David Pattie asserts that in order for bands like U2 to perform successfully, theatrics must be a factor in the live performance. He uses U2 as a quintessential example, claiming that their theatrics are among the most impressive in pop music today (25). He describes the opening of U2's *Vertigo* tour in Chicago, Illinois:

Bono climbs up on to the walkway that stretches in a sweeping arc into the auditorium, at the furthest arms raised as strips of paper, red on one side and white on the other, float down around him. He turns and walks back to the main stage; as The Edge plays the main guitar figure from the track, white spotlights at floor level shine briefly and brightly, directly into the audience. U2 have declared themselves, and the concert proper can begin. (Pattie 24)

In this description, the setting exists as the most crucial tool in creating the theatrical environment. In addition to elements such as the walkway, spotlights, and the strips of paper, Pattie points to the color schemes as important components of the stage setting

because they help set concert's atmosphere. During their *Vertigo* tour, U2 chose red and white to shine through the backlighting and spotlights. All these features were uniquely set up for U2, meaning this particular theatrical environment was created specifically for the band's performance to create a certain theme.

InsideOut's worship services are also performed in a distinctive theatrical setting. The technology and equipment used in the auditorium is very similar to those used in live pop concerts such as U2's *Vertigo* tour. Just as each popular artist or band does, InsideOut has special qualities about its setting that makes it distinctively its own. For example, InsideOut's stage features 12 cubes, approximately 3x3x3 feet large, that have clear panes on each side and thick borders that are illuminated with color. These boxes function as the centerpiece of the stage and every other decoration relies on the positioning and color of the boxes, which both change weekly. During my first visit to a worship service at InsideOut, these boxes were arranged in 4 separate stacks, each with 3 cubes stacked on one another. Once the lights were dimmed to indicate the start of the worship music, the only items that were lit on stage were the cubes. The borders were illuminated purple and every flashing light that followed the cubes stayed true to the purple color theme.

Each week, as the cubes are rearranged, a new light show is created to accompany the change in setting. The components of weekly light shows include spotlights in different patterns, rotating light beams, and colored lights. Fog machines are usually added into the light shows for added effect in certain moments. All of these features are coordinated perfectly with the worship music, whether that means the rotating lights move rapidly to the beat of the music or the colored lights are enhanced as the

instrumentation transitions into the reflective songs. Although these ingredients certainly add to the theatrics of InsideOut's auditorium, they also play a role in indicating what part of the worship set the students are in. For example, when the rotating lights begin their path across the crowd, the audience immediately stands up, understanding that these bright lights mean the music service is about to start. When the lights gradually dim and the colors change to a more subtle tone in the middle of the set list, the students quiet their screams of excitement and prepare themselves for a slower, more intimate worship song. Pattie notes that many popular bands in live concert use this kind of technology precisely because it creates nonverbal communication between the musicians and the large audience (24). Coordinated lights often serve as the transition marker and set the mood for what is to come.

The final pieces of technology that complete InsideOut's theatrical setting are the two large video screens, one on each side of the stage. The purpose of these screens is to provide the opportunity for every student in the audience to watch the musicians as they perform. The camera zooms in and out, focusing on the lead singer's face in one moment then showing a close-up of the lead guitarist's fingers next. Pattie says "the video screens enable even those at the back of the largest venues to convince themselves that those are the real musicians on stage far away" (37). In live performances in big auditoriums, seeing the musicians' faces and fingers at work while they perform has become a requirement. InsideOut's facility is so huge that were it not for the screens, half the crowd, if not more, would never be able to catch a glimpse of the band members.

Each of InsideOut's theatrical components serves specific functions in the overall live performance; most, if not all of them serve the same functions as the theatrical

technology used in live concerts by bands such as U2. Pattie's analysis of these theatrics was written specifically in relation to secular top-forty artists' performances. However, it is also applicable to InsideOut – their technology provides similar effects for the performance and is used in comparable ways.

Lyrical Analysis of Worship Songs

As contemporary worship music in churches such as North Point Community Church shift into terms of feeling rather than thinking, there is an importance of “experiencing God” in the worship services. The common themes in the lyrics of this particular genre of contemporary worship songs reflect this shift. The overarching theme is love and devotion between God and human. Topics that fall under this larger theme include, but are not limited to, salvation, desire for closeness to God, and being in awe of God’s beauty. These are the most prominent subject matters in the worship music for megachurch youth groups around America, including North Point’s InsideOut ministry. The significance is not the fact that love is the center of attention in this worship music, rather it is more important to understand what kind of love is expressed through these lyrics. Approaching the analysis in this manner will best show the overlap of sacred and secular influences in InsideOut ministry’s worship music.

Romantic Ideal

In 2000, sociologist Ann Swidler conducted research on the American culture of love and published *Talk of Love*, which exhibited her findings and conclusions. Swidler specifically referred to a culture of love in American society called mythic love, also referred to as romantic love and “movie love.” She traces its existence in secular society back to the eleventh century in Europe, where courtly love poetry and troubadour songs were primarily centered on the tragedy and overwhelming power of love between a man and a woman. These ideals transformed into the bourgeois culture of early English capitalism and “took its quintessential form in the eighteenth-century English novel” (Swidler 112). Swidler points out that the culture of romantic love in present-day

American society still holds many of the same qualities as the bourgeois and courtly love. These characteristics make up the *romantic ideal*, which is exhibited in countless Hollywood movies, best-seller romance novels, and pop songs on the radio.

The *romantic ideal* serves as part of Americans' framework for understanding love. This idea includes a man and a woman who have been united in passion and companionship, overcoming the obstacles of the world in order to be together. This love "has magically transformed each lover into a more virtuous person" (44) and results in a separation from society because the two need only each other, regardless of their surroundings. In love stories based on the *romantic ideal*, the male is the strong, active figure that takes initiative and the female is passive, in need of help, the damsel in distress. The male saves the female and the two enjoy a monogamous relationship in which the male eternally protects the female.

Romantic Ideal in InsideOut

High schoolers around America, including the Christian students in megachurches, are exposed to this theme of romance in society and the majority of them use this framework to shape their understanding of love in all aspects of their life. This kind of love is also displayed in weekly worship services in megachurch youth groups around the country. The genre of worship music found in these youth ministries, including InsideOut, contains songs with lyrics portraying the *romantic ideal* of love between God and humans. The language used in these lyrics points to a loving relationship that is particularly romantic. The congregation sings to God, using words like "you" and "your." This makes the relationship between human and divine much more intimate, an intimacy that stretches further than a spiritual connection. Titles are rarely

given to God or Jesus in these lyrics – “Lord” and “Father,” for example, are rarely seen in this genre of worship music. Rather than applying titles like these to the divine in third person, humans sing to God and Jesus as if it were a personal conversation. In secular love songs heard on the radio, the artist usually speaks to his or her romantic lover in the same way. The lover is addressed as if the artist were speaking directly to him or her. Using this particular language indicates that the intimacy between God and humans closely resembles the romantic love between lovers in any secular media outlet.

In each of these worship songs, God is assigned a male role as He reigns supremely in the heavens, bestowing love and grace upon the earth. He is a Savior, strong and reliable, constantly reaching out to humans in the hopes of their making a commitment to Him. In return, the humans assume the female role in these lyrics – they are in need of salvation, fully surrendering their lives to God’s will, and only finding strength in Him. For example, in the few months I visited InsideOut’s worship services weekly, I heard a song called “Forever Reign” played twice. This song was popular among the students and it elicited the most powerful responses from the crowd. The chorus’ lyrics are:

Oh, I’m running to your arms, I’m running to your arms
 The riches of your love will always be enough
 Nothing compares to your embrace
 Light of the world forever reign

This love portrays the *romantic ideal*, including the female figure (the students) “running” to the male figure’s arms in order to be saved. Just like the romantic love portrayed in popular culture, this relationship between leading male and female is sufficient enough to replace any other needs either person might have in the world: “the riches of your love will always be enough.” The word “embrace” provides an

interpretation of God as a tangible being who can wrap His arms around the earthly being in need. It shrinks the gap between earth and heaven, allowing people to envision God as a physical leading male.

This particular chorus seemed to ignite an overwhelming sense of energy among the students. They became enthusiastically participatory once the song began and once the chorus arrived, the acoustic and lead guitars were the only accompaniment to the hundreds of students singing the lyrics. At the beginning of the chorus, there were approximately 50 students with their hands outstretched to the heavens. But once they sang “nothing compares to your embrace,” the number of students raising their heads and hands to the sky at least tripled. As I circled the auditorium, I witnessed the students closing their eyes, some with tears of joy, and placing their bodies in a position of surrender with heads held back and arms floating high. This body language appeared to be attempts to separate themselves from their surroundings; the students seemed to be working towards an intimate connection between themselves and God without anyone else interfering in the relationship. This turns our attention to the subject of monogamy, also a component in the *romantic ideal* of love.

The lyrics of the song quoted above allude strongly to a monogamous relationship between God and human. For example, the bridge of the song contains only 2 lines:

My heart will sing no other name
Jesus, Jesus

These words are repeated four times during each bridge and each time the students’ singing grows louder and louder as if they all are repeating vows of monogamy to God. As previously discussed, another common characteristic of the *romantic ideal* is the ability for one or both of the leading figures to encourage virtuous actions in each other.

In “Forever Reign,” God is the male figure who inspires righteousness and morality; the humans are the female figure whose judgments are enhanced due to God’s influences.

You are good, you are good
 When there’s nothing good in me
 You are hope, you are hope
 You have covered all my sin

In this excerpt of the verse, the female figure is turning to the male to redeem all of her undesirable qualities. In her weaknesses, her companion provides strength; even all her “sin” is washed away by the faith she has in the relationship. Through these lyrics, the female figure assumes a passive role as the damsel in distress. If it weren’t for her male hero, she would have to suffer from her sin and immorality. In addition, she finds a foundation in the male figure that replaces all other needs, another characteristic of the *romantic ideal*. The verse continues:

You are true, you are true
 Ever in my wandering
 You are joy, you are joy
 You’re the reason that I sing
 You are life, you are life
 In you death has lost its sting

The female uses the male figure to shape the framework of her existence and make sense of life and death.

This portrayal of both humans and God appears in many other songs, including the songs in which love is not explicitly the main theme. For example, the song called “Salvation is Here” is a celebration of humans being saved by God’s love and grace. But throughout the lyrics, God and humans assume the same roles as in the song “Forever Reign.” The first words are:

God above all my hopes and fears
 I don’t care what the world throws at me now

It's gonna be alright

The lyrics are from the congregation's point of view, which once again resembles the perspective of a leading lady in the *romantic ideal*. God, given the role of leading male again, provides a relationship for people on earth in which all their needs are met. In this song, the audience claims that nothing else in life matters because their relationship with God is wholly fulfilling.

In the chorus, the passive characteristics of the leading lady are strongly emphasized:

'Cause I know my God saved the day
 And I know His word never fails
 And I know my God made a way for me
 Salvation is here

These words exhibit the passiveness seen in the *romantic ideal's* female role. She is helpless and completely dependent on the leading male to save her and guide the rest of her life. Nowhere in the entirety of this song does the female figure take an active role in her own life. She only speaks of what her leading man has done to make her life better and more enjoyable. Her characteristics, opinions, and qualities are never discussed or celebrated; in fact, they seem to have no significant impact on the relationship.

The Hero and Protagonist

In each of these songs, and in many other songs played in *InsideOut*, God appears as the hero. Just as a man would in any romantic love story in America, God saves His true love and enjoys a life with him or her. He actively reaches out to the leading lady in order to develop a relationship. In other words, these lyrics place God as “an initiator of emotional intimacy” (Swidler 47). He is steadfast and completely reliable, constantly proving his power and strength. As the hero, God never fails to shield humans from the

worries of the world and any dangers on earth, including evil forces. Therefore, He is the primary person upon which the leading lady (humans) depends.

Furthermore, Jesus exhibits the characteristics of a protagonist who overcomes incredible obstacles to be the source of love and grace for the leading lady. Although God appears as the hero and Savior, Jesus is more soft and loving when He assumes the role of the leading man. He holds many of the same characteristics of God, such as being active, reliable, and eternally strong. However, in these lyrics, Jesus' loving embrace is emphasized. Jesus appears in these lyrics similar to a main character in a Hollywood romance movie in which the leading man is tough, yet sensitive towards the leading lady's emotions. Jesus serves simultaneously as the caretaker of humans' feelings and their foundation for strength.

Effects of Romantic Ideal

The next step of my analysis is to discuss how these lyrics and the theme of romantic love relate to InsideOut students' perceptions of God and themselves. These lyrics provide a narrow representation of God's characteristics by only highlighting a select few qualities through each song. God's eternally forgiving love, strength that shines through humans' weaknesses, ability to fill all emotional and mental voids, and act of saving every person from evil and death are the only components of God's character that are emphasized. These are the only qualities that make it possible to portray God as the leading male in the *romantic ideal*.

In my interviews with high school students in InsideOut, I asked them to describe God's characteristics. Emily answered immediately with glowing eyes: she told me that not only does God know her heart and thoughts intimately, He truly wants to be fully

involved in her life. Emily used the word “personal” to describe her relationship with God, claiming that she feels his presence throughout every second of the day. Her words alluded to a physical closeness that is always accessible. In her eyes, God’s love is bigger than any other force in the world. Chandler identified with these words and enthusiastically added, “We can never fathom the extent of God’s love” (cite). He told me that humans are, in nature, conditional and we will always love conditionally. However, God’s love is eternally present in his life and that is a promise on which he can wholly rely. God’s unrestricted love was the only quality Emily and Chandler spoke about. Furthermore, they were incredibly excited to share with me how this love plays such a significant role in their lives.

As I dug deeper into Emily’s and Chandler’s perception of God’s character, I noticed that they consistently referred back to the larger-than-life love that He offers. His abilities were never discussed, such as His creation of the world. The topics of salvation, the sacrifice of Jesus, and everlasting forgiveness were never discussed. God’s wrath and desire for justice did not hold an important role in their thoughts. These qualities are exhibited multiple times throughout the Bible, which music directors at InsideOut claim is the source of all the lyrics in the worship songs. These characteristics do not contribute at all to the *romantic ideal* and therefore, have no place in these contemporary worship songs. When God is positioned as the leading male, His purpose for existing lies specifically with personal fulfillment for each individual in the world. The notion that God is a Creator who brings peace and justice to the world is relinquished, as He merely is experienced as the caretaker of human emotions in the lyrics of these songs. In addition, God and Jesus no longer exist as role models for the students. Jesus’ acts of

servitude are no longer praised and appreciated. He becomes more of a friend and companion for the students at InsideOut.

These lyrics also place a limitation on the abilities of the high school students in InsideOut. As previously mentioned, the role of humans in their relationship with God is never dictated in contemporary worship music. Instead, they constantly send requests to God, begging for his guidance. As the students of InsideOut adopt the role of the leading lady, they ultimately surrender themselves to their leading male, identified as God. Their weakness is highlighted and their desperation plays an importance role in reaching out to God. In actuality, the lyrics of these songs denote a lack of any admirable qualities in earthly beings. Just as the leading lady would in any American romance, humans emotionally indulge in their leading man's love rather than find a strong purpose with which to lead their lives. The worship songs of InsideOut encourage students to experience and luxuriate in the romantic love between themselves and their leading man – God.

Conclusion

These analyses of this particular blur of sacred and secular is useful in two ways: firstly, on a smaller scale, it provides insight into the struggles and theological notions of the megachurch community; secondly, on a broader scale, it proves that religion and the sacred are not demarcated from the secular sphere and, furthermore, modern religious discourse is not applicable to studying new forms or religious life such as this example.

As I conducted my analyses and ethnographic methods at InsideOut, it became clear that this ministry was actively choosing to pull from the cultures of pop-rock music and love in America to create a new phenomenon of worship music. Borrowing these qualities and using them in the sacred space of the church serves a specific function in this youth group – it makes the worship music segment of each service a transitional phase for the students. Throughout the interviews I conducted, the students expressed an initial tension at moving from the secular space outside of the church's walls into the at least nominally sacred area of the youth group service. Leaders of the ministry, along with musicians of the church, expressed this same concern. With so many new forms of entertainment for young students, they realize it is becoming increasingly difficult to hold the youth's attention by a mere sermon or classic hymns. The music director of InsideOut shared this concern with me, indicating that he and many other ministry leaders felt that the worship music prior to this particular genre was not meeting the needs of the congregation, especially the students.

In response to this, the music, which contains many familiar qualities with which the students can identify, is purposely placed at the beginning of every service, easing the students into the sacred space of the church. The style of the music, the language used in

the music, and the lyrical themes are all recognizable to the students because they hear such features in top-forty music on a regular basis. The word “relevant” arose in every interview I conducted and it was clear that the objective of including secular music influences was to make each worship service relatable for all students.

On the surface, it may seem that the worship music is designed in this way for the same reason American pop-rock and any other entertainment industry changes its qualities – it attracts the most viewers and listeners and, in turn, the most revenue. However, there are deeper implications in these youth groups. This new form of worship music is theologically changing what is happening within the walls of the megachurches. As stated in the lyrical analysis, these songs provide a narrow representation of God’s character in the students’ eyes. He unconditionally loves without wrath or a need for justice. With God as the leading male and high schoolers as the leading lady, God is becoming much more accessible in these worship songs. This view of God is transforming Him into a being that is no longer out of the realm of human imagination, which is a central theme in Biblical hermeneutics, which is the theory and practice of interpretation of the Bible. Through these songs, there seems to be a physical closeness between God and the high school students. This kind of quality does not exist in the traditional Protestant interpretation of Biblical texts. In addition, the lack of liturgy in this new form of worship music is erasing the need for scripture and perhaps even rejecting the divinity of the Bible.

However, there is one prominent feature of InsideOut’s worship services that has lasted through the evolution of worship music in Protestant Christianity. That is the element of fellowship. Since congregational worship became a feature in the institution

of Protestant churches, the congregation's ability to have a collective experience with each other during worship has been present, regardless of the form of worship music. At InsideOut, it is impossible not to feel this indescribable energy in the auditorium – it is something that cannot be accomplished with only one person participating in worship. The students are able to sing, lift their hands, and even jump to the beat together. These actions create a bond across the congregation that complete the full experience of fellowship. As the students mutually close their eyes and lift their heads to the sky, some with tears in their eyes, there is no denying that they worship as one entity.

On a larger, scale, these analyses have challenged the notion in modern religious discourse that the church exists as a sacred space, demarcated from all other aspects of secularism. Focusing on this intersection of the sacred and secular calls into question the idea that religious life is a force that is separated from all other dimensions of human behavior in society. As the areas of overlap expand and the sacred and secular grow increasingly synonymous, we realize that qualities of secular society are becoming a greater part of the religious life of American Christians than ever before, challenging how we fundamentally understand religion.

With our current understanding of the relationship between religious life and secular influences, the academic study of religion has not equipped scholars with the tools to successfully study any phenomena like this one. It is impossible to redescribe what is happening within the walls of American megachurches without studying religious life in the context of the society and culture in which it exists. Studying this new form of worship music and understanding it would not have been possible without also analyzing the culture of American pop-rock music and the culture of love in America. As parts of

American society collide with aspects of religious life, we as scholars are left questioning them meaning and origin of terms that supposedly oppose each other, like sacred and secular or religion and society. As Cady says, scholars will not be able to attend to new forms of religious life if we do not escape the confines of modern discourse. Perhaps we can move in the direction of abandoning the strict boundaries placed between Americans' religious lives and the society in which they exist.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been involved in InsideOut's ministry?
2. What is your role in this ministry and how do you fulfill that role?
3. Do you enjoy the music you hear or play at InsideOut?
4. Why or why not?
5. What do you enjoy about the music?
6. Do you prefer this worship music over others?
7. Why or why not?
8. Do you like having the music at the beginning of each service?
9. Why or why not?
10. What are your favorite themes of the lyrics of these songs?
11. How is love portrayed in the songs?
12. How do the words inspire you to think about God?
13. What are your favorite characteristics about God?
14. Are there any particular characteristics of the setting that enhance your worship experience?
15. What do you think of the praise bands?
16. How do the musicians and students interact during the worship service?
17. Do they interact before or after the worship music?
18. Why do you think the praise band will sometimes play a song from the radio to start the service?
19. Have you ever brought visitors to the worship services?
20. If so, do they enjoy the music?

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