2017

Relational Power, Music, and Identity: The Emotional Efficacy of Congregational Song

Nathan Myrick
Baylor University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://elischolar.library.yale.edu/yjmr>

Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [Epistemology Commons](#), [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), [Ethics in Religion Commons](#), [Ethnomusicology Commons](#), [Music Performance Commons](#), [Music Therapy Commons](#), [Other Music Commons](#), [Other Philosophy Commons](#), [Other Religion Commons](#), [Philosophy of Language Commons](#), [Philosophy of Mind Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Myrick, Nathan (2017) "Relational Power, Music, and Identity: The Emotional Efficacy of Congregational Song," *Yale Journal of Music & Religion*: Vol. 3: No. 1, Article 5.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17132/2377-231X.1060>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale. It has been accepted for inclusion in Yale Journal of Music & Religion by an authorized editor of EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale. For more information, please contact elischolar@yale.edu.

Relational Power, Music, and Identity: The Emotional Efficacy of Congregational Song

Cover Page Footnote

Many thanks to Randall Bradley, Monique Ingalls, David Music, Marcell Steuernagel, and Stephen Swanson for their insight and contributions. Thanks also to Melinda Latour, Andrew Mall, Patrick O'Brien, and Tanya Riches for their comments, and to Todd Johnson for setting me on this course of inquiry.

Relational Power, Music, and Identity

The Emotional Efficacy of Congregational Song

Nathan Myrick

Fig. 1: Singer-songwriter Derek Johnson center stage at the 2015 National Worship Leader Conference (photo by author)

September 30, 2015

National Worship Leader Conference

Bent Tree Bible Fellowship, Dallas, Texas

9:30 A.M. CST

It was dark; the enormous auditorium was blackened save for the brilliantly lit stage, which cast the rest of the room in an eerie blue haze. The roughly 500 people (mostly white males aged twenty to thirty-five) seated in the first dozen rows did little to fill the several thousand seats in the room. The stage dominated the front of the auditorium, and several dozen empty picture frames were hung in rows from the ceiling in the middle of the stage, forming a transparent wall that gave the impression of simultaneous depth and intimacy.¹ Several lighting rigs were trained on the stage, their reds, oranges, yellows, greens, and purples dimmed while the blue bathed the

¹ The frames appeared to have been hung to make the enormous stage seem fuller, with only a four-piece rock band at the front of it. Designed to hold a choir and several rows of musicians, the stage would have dwarfed the band had it not been for the “wall” of picture frames.

frames and stage, sending shadows and reflections scurrying about the stage and curtain in front of the far wall as the suspended frames swung gently from their tethers (see Fig. 1).

The emcee strode purposefully out onto the stage and welcomed the audience to the conference. We applauded, and I made my way up the tiered seating in the back of the auditorium to a vantage point from which I could see most of the audience.

The emcee finished his introductory comments, and we joined him in welcoming Derek Johnson to the stage. A worship leader from Sacramento, California (formerly of Bethel Church in Redding, California), Johnson is also a songwriter for Jesus Culture Music.² This morning he had a three-piece band backing him, consisting of a drummer, bassist, and electric guitarist/synthist in addition to Johnson's acoustic guitar.

Johnson opened his set with "The One We Love," the second song on his 2015 album *Real Love*, released by Jesus Culture Music. I was unfamiliar with the tune, and it appeared that the rest of the congregation was as well. Still, several hands went up during the chorus and gradually, haltingly, individual members of the congregation began swaying.

"The One We Love" finished, and Johnson transitioned into Phil Wickham's "This Is Amazing Grace," from his 2013 album *The Ascension*.³ A hit, this song had reached number 1 on Billboard's Christian Airplay for the year 2014.⁴ The congregation was fully engaged, with the swaying increasing in both participation and synchronicity.

I noticed that the section to my left was swaying with greater intensity. The swaying there grew stronger and more synchronized, until the chorus of the song. Then it locked in. Most of the section, about 100 people, were swaying in unison. Their united swaying seemed to attract others, and the sporadic swaying that had been going on throughout the auditorium now included nearly every individual, although only the section to my left swayed in unison. I found myself swaying along—unintentionally—as I took notes.

Music connects us to each other in profound—often unrecognized—ways. It can also inspire strong feelings in its participants. Yet both the causes and the effects of these connections and feelings are debated, and their value questioned. This is particularly true of congregational song—musical worship.

This study examines the complex social and religious factors that facilitate the emotional efficacy of congregational song to generate relational strength, as well as communal and individual religious identity, in participants. It constructs a theoretical framework with which to examine the multivalent ways in which North American evangelical Christians find "modern worship" music meaningful—physically, emotionally, and relationally.⁵ As such, it does not so much try to provide a singular explanation for "why we sing congregationally," but rather to

² Jesus Culture Music is a collective of songwriters and performers of modern worship music based in Sacramento. Jesus Culture is a church that facilitates the production of the group: <https://jesusculture.com>.

³ The song was originally written by Wickham, Jeremy Riddle, and Josh Farro in 2012.

⁴ Billboard, "Year-End Charts 2014," <http://www.billboard.com/charts/2014/year-end> (accessed Mar. 26, 2017).

⁵ Monique M. Ingalls, "Transnational Connections, Musical Meaning, and the 1990s 'British Invasion' of North American Evangelical Worship Music," in *Oxford Handbook of Music and World Christianities*, ed. Jonathan Dueck and Suzel Ana Reily (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 425–45; online version (accessed Mar 26, 2017).

tease out the complexities of the “why,” helpfully placing them into conversation with each other.

I call this process “compound ritual entrainment” (CRE). CRE offers a means of synthesizing the affective and physiological power of the phenomenon of musical entrainment in congregational song with the continual negotiation of relational power dynamics in the interactive ritual activity of congregational singing. This theory arises from an ethnographic analysis using participant-observation and interview techniques at the 2015 National Worship Leader Conference (NWLC) in Dallas, Texas.

I begin with a brief historical analysis of the modern worship music performed at the NWLC, and the role that conference plays in the stabilization of the genre. In so doing, I offer insight into the role of music in the theory of CRE by explaining the context of my field research, what the fieldwork site was, and how it functioned in the broader social matrix. I conclude with a brief analysis of the song “Cornerstone,” as performed by Shane and Shane, as a means of illustrating the relational power dynamics at work in the entraining ritual of congregational singing. In so doing, I highlight how the ritual negotiation of relational power dynamics in congregational singing contributes to the experience of entrainment and the emotional significance it generates for participants.

Fieldwork Site: The NWLC and Its Historical Generic Context

The National Worship Leader Conference is a quarterly conference intended to equip worship leaders and music ministers.⁶ Founded in 2007 by *Worship Leader* magazine and its president, Chuck Fromm, the NWLC meets in three or four U.S. cities each year, offering general sessions featuring keynote speakers and performances by influential musical worship artists, along with breakout sessions where practitioners are afforded opportunities to learn new technologies and techniques in worship leading and congregational singing. Nearly all the attendees at the 2015 conference were involved in the production or performance of congregational song on a regular basis. As such, they readily participated in both the activity of singing and the discussion of their experiences in that activity.

For my purposes, a musical genre may be understood as the social and sonic rules that provide a context for the construction of meaning in relation to social values. As such, genres are fluid and dynamic, reflecting the cultural changes of the era and the desires of their adherents. The origins of the genre of musical worship as performed and facilitated at the NWLC can be traced to the music of the Jesus Movement at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa and Maranatha! Music (hereafter, M!M), the record label formed for the purpose of producing and distributing the musical artifacts that movement was creating. In 1971, the pastor of Calvary Chapel, Chuck Smith, founded M!M as way of supporting the several bands and musicians who had been dedicating their art and ministry to the congregation without compensation. In 1975, Smith sold M!M to his nephew, Chuck Fromm, and Tommy Coomes. Fromm soon transitioned the nonprofit M!M into a for-profit company and made what had been an unsustainable business

⁶ “National Worship Leader Conference: About,” <http://wl.events/about/> (accessed Mar 26, 2017).

model into a highly successful one. The genre of music performed at the NWLC is the developed form of the one originated at M!M, although its trajectory has been somewhat indirect.

A helpful framework for evaluating the function of the NWLC within the genre of modern worship music can be found in that of convergence theory as suggested by Tom Wagner.⁷ Wagner applies convergence theory to congregational song to suggest that in participatory cultures (such as those most affected by the genre of modern worship music), the collective intelligence of those participating in the culture is informed by the consumption of common information through highly mediated ecologies,⁸ with festivals and conferences such as the NWLC functioning as sites of mediated negotiation of musical values.⁹

With its connections to M!M and the early progenitors of modern worship music, coupled with its strong multimedia voice via *Worship Leader* magazine and online presence, the NWLC can be conceptually understood as a point of convergence, mediation, and consumption for the genre of modern worship music. In such a context, the musics of the genre are performed and their meanings negotiated in conversation with other musics and performers. In this way, the NWLC functions as a social touchstone whereby the sonic and social rules of the genre, fluid as they are, may be helpfully evaluated and affirmed or rejected by individual practitioners, assuring a relatively stable system of meaning making.

This process of convergence and dissemination is evidenced by the diversity of conference locales: in 2015, the NWLC was held in four cities spread across the United States—Dallas, Texas; Washington, D.C.; San Jose, California; and Kansas City, Missouri. They are further evidenced by the streaming capabilities of the NWLC's website, whereon the entirety of the main sessions are streamed live and in archival form, allowing dissemination and consumption across a further geographically diverse context.

“Picking Right Back Up Where I Left Off”

After the morning session of September 30, I interviewed a young man named Dallas from the section on the left that I had noticed swaying in unison during “This Is Amazing Grace.” Dallas was a student at Christ for the Nations International (CFNI), a missionary training academy that specializes in worship music. He indicated that the people in that section were mostly students from CFNI.¹⁰

Author: Did you have any favorite moments in the worship this morning?

Dallas: When they sang “This Is Amazing Grace,” since I was familiar with that song.

⁷ Tom Wagner, “Music as Mediated Object, Music as Medium: Towards a Media Ecological View of Congregational Music,” in Anna Nekola and Tom Wagner, eds., *Congregational Music-Making and Community in a Mediated Age* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 25–44.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Andrew Theodore Mall, “‘This Is a Chance to Come Together’: Subcultural Resistance and Community at Cornerstone Festival,” in Nekola and Wagner, *Congregational Music-Making and Community*, 102–21.

¹⁰ Interlocutors' comments have been edited for concision, clarity, and readability.

Author: Was there a particular moment in that song . . . [when] you felt especially in tune with the music or with your fellow worshippers?

Dallas: For sure. The chorus of that song is something that I've always enjoyed. Throughout any place where ["This Is Amazing Grace" is] being [sung,] I think that's just been the high point of that song for me.

Dallas's identification of "This Is Amazing Grace," particularly the chorus during which his section's swaying unified, indicates a possible connection between visible acts of unification and significance in worship. To better understand this possible connection, I asked Dallas:

Author: Can you describe for me how that moment felt?

Dallas: Just warm. I mean it felt, it was a peaceful moment.

Author: Have you had any other experiences in worship previously that were similar?

Dallas: Yes, for sure.

Author: So, what was similar [about the other experiences]?

Dallas: Both same feeling. Both very warm, I mean, they're both very "song from the heart," sung from something that I have experienced or can relate to. I guess they kinda—they both relate in that aspect, to me.

Author: So, did those previous experiences of worship, the similar songs that you were describing, did they make this experience more meaningful or intense?

Dallas: I think they were both incredible moments in worship that I can always think back to and remember. Like, that will be something that I will remember for quite some time, you know, that moment that I had during that song, singing that moment, and then me feeling that expression of the Lord being something that I won't ever forget. I wouldn't say that one pulled from another or made one lesser than [another].

Author: The previous experiences that were similar in worship, and singing together . . . made this experience meaningful even though you [were] surrounded by people you didn't even know?

Dallas: Correct. Correct. Because in that moment that I had, I felt like *I was picking right back up* where I had left off from those experiences [emphasis added]. Like I had jumped right back on that same pathway that I maybe stopped walking for a second, you know—I felt like it was a progression of that moment I was in, kind of that channel. *And whenever that moment had stopped, I feel like I wasn't starting something new, I feel like I was starting right back where I left off on that same kind of way.* . . . It wasn't uncomfortable or—it wasn't something I wasn't familiar with. I said, "I recognize this, I'm familiar with this. I'm going to pick right back up where I left off."

Musical Entrainment

Recent scholarship in ethnomusicology, social sciences, and music psychology has examined the phenomenon of musical entrainment in human beings. As the theoretical explanation of how two autonomous rhythmic oscillators synchronize without direct physical contact, the theory of entrainment offers tantalizing possibilities for understanding human experiences of unity and intimacy in music.¹¹ In a recent laboratory experiment by Wiebke Trost and others, *musical* entrainment has been found to directly influence the generation of emotion and affective feeling.¹² Indeed, in another study by Carolina Labbe and Didier Grandjean, neurological entrainment was found to predict emotional responses to musical participation.¹³

However, there are two schools of thought regarding the study of entrainment in humans. On one hand, entrainment is understood as a law of physics: it will occur naturally in human beings provided the conditions are right, that is, the rates of oscillation (in any part of the human biological system, such as brain waves, heart rates, and intentional gestures) are sufficiently similar to those of another person, and a suitable coupling factor is functionally present. On the other hand, such an understanding seems to preclude human agency in the entraining process, and modes of inquiry such as biomusicology understand entrainment as something that is achieved through practice within the bounds of human volition.¹⁴

While these two understandings are distinct in their points of emphasis, they are not mutually exclusive. As the contributors to the edited volume *Music, Science, and the Rhythmic Brain* suggest by their study of entrainment in human brainwaves through musical listening and participation, entrainment can affect both involuntary rhythmic systems (for example, brainwaves and heart rates) and voluntary ones (such as speech patterns and physical motions). Furthermore, volume editors Udo Will and Gabe Turow suggest that music can effect entrainment through either listening or participation—or both at the same time.¹⁵ Their research seems to indicate that the two modes of inquiry are describing the same event, albeit from different perspectives and with different intentions.

Further clarifying the interrelation of these two ways of thinking about entrainment, Martin Clayton has argued that entrainment occurs both intentionally (as when musicians attempt to

¹¹ For example, Martin Clayton, Rebecca Sager, and Udo Will, *In Time with the Music: The Concept of Entrainment and Its Significance for Ethnomusicology* (N.p.: ethnomusicology.osu.edu, 2005); Martin Clayton, “Entrainment, Ethnography, and Musical Interaction,” in *Experience and Meaning in Music Performance*, ed. Martin Clayton, Byron Dueck, and Laura Leante (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 19–37.

¹² Wiebke Trost et al., “Getting the Beat: Entrainment of Brain Activity by Musical Rhythm and Pleasantness,” *NeuroImage* 103 (2014): 55–64.

¹³ C. Labbe and D. Grandjean, “Musical Emotions Predicted by Feelings of Entrainment,” *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 32/ 2 (Dec. 1, 2014): 170–85.

¹⁴ See, for example, Kimberlee F. Strepka et al., *Handbell Artistry from the Inside Out: Laban Movement Theory for the Handbell Musician* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2012).

¹⁵ Jonathan Berger and Gabe Turow, “Introduction,” *Music, Science, and the Rhythmic Brain: Cultural and Clinical Implications*, ed. Jonathan Berger and Gabe Turow (Florence, KY: Routledge, 2011); online version: <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10529255>.

perform a song together) and unintentionally (as when people are walking together). Surveying the work of scholars from a variety of disciplines and combining it with his own case studies, Clayton contends that, by virtue of entrainment's being a law of physics, the intentional or unintentional unification of any two or more independent oscillators should be understood as entrainment. He notes that musical entrainment occurs when human rhythmic oscillations (physical gestures and/or brainwaves) synchronize in a 1:1 relationship for a period of time, drift out of phase, and then resynchronize.¹⁶

Entrainment can occur when two or more individual human beings share an affective state, such as that afforded by musical participation—singing or performing,¹⁷ or simply listening.¹⁸ The affective function of entrainment in this sense orients the participant's emotional posture toward the event in a derivative manner. This is to say that entrainment may contribute to the generation of emotion—either positive or negative—for the participant, and that this emotional state is associated with the event that generated the emotion. However, as several scholars have shown, musical entrainment is made possible and facilitated by many complex social and religious factors, such as relationships, familiarity, ontological perspective, and religious experience.¹⁹ Indeed, not all who share an affective state, such as that afforded by musical interaction, experience it as good, or even significant. Musical entrainment may facilitate emotional experiences for participants, but the quality of those experiences may be determined by other factors—or may itself be facilitated by the factors it in turn facilitates.

Dallas's reflections quoted above highlight several key aspects of how these factors function in congregational song. First, Dallas was familiar with the song that resulted in synchronized swaying and had admittedly sung it before. Second, his comments regarding the continuity of engagement with "This Is Amazing Grace," even if experienced in intervals, suggest that regular participation in the ritual of congregational singing deepens the relational sense of emotional meaning. Third, he had an affinity for the lyrical content of the song and the theology that it represented to him, indicating a symbolic association between the text of the song and the truth of its symbol. Fourth, he was surrounded by people he was familiar with, serving to deepen his sense of connection. Finally, his familiarity with the song was tied to past experiences of meaningful worship, indicating that physical experiences of musical unity are linked to emotional indexes of symbolic association through regular ritual participation. Furthermore, Dallas's identification of the same moment when I observed synchronization to occur as the most

¹⁶ Clayton, "Entrainment, Ethnography, and Musical Interaction," 21–22, 26–28.

¹⁷ For example, Jessica Phillips-Silver and Peter E. Keller, "Searching for Roots of Entrainment and Joint Action in Early Musical Interactions," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 6 (2012): 26; Elizabeth Waterhouse, Riley Watts, and Bettina E. Bläsing, "Doing Duo—A Case Study of Entrainment in William Forsythe's Choreography 'Duo,'" *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 8 (2014): 8–12.

¹⁸ Judith Becker, *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 2–6.

¹⁹ Jessica Phillips-Silver, C. Athena Aktipis, and Gregory A. Bryant, "The Ecology of Entrainment: Foundations of Coordinated Rhythmic Movement," *Music Perception* 28/1 (September 2010): 3–14; and "Joint Drumming in Brazilian and German Preschool Children: Cultural Differences in Rhythmic Entrainment, but No Prosocial Effects," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 45/1 (Jan. 1, 2014): 137–66.

significant in the session indicates that his experience of that event is importantly connected to the generation of positive emotions.

These observations indicate that musical entrainment—if what I observed was indeed musical entrainment, and Dallas’s reflections certainly support this understanding in light of the work done by Trost and her colleagues, Labbe and Grandjean, and Clayton—plays a role in making musical worship emotionally significant. However, Dallas’s experience of “This Is Amazing Grace” was not shared by all. Simon, the director of the CFNI group, identified a different moment of importance—during “I Belong to You.”

Author: Did you have a favorite moment in the service this morning? Like a moment where you felt particularly in tune?

Simon: Yeah, I did actually. It was right towards the very end, and I just had a moment with God and myself. I'm trying to think now, rack my brain what the line was, something about “my life is full, you are all about you,” something like that. And I'm just praying about something at the moment, and it became very real to me, so I just took a moment with the Lord where I just prayed that sincerely from my heart.

He confessed that his experience during the morning session had not been as impactful for him as previous experiences had:

Author: Could you try to describe that feeling?

Simon: I didn't feel it as strong today, to be honest with you. I've had times in corporate worship when I have felt it, that feeling is . . . just a privilege of being in a group of people that have the same cause, the same goal. And it makes me feel stronger. . . . It's like a courage on the inside that rises up . . . just “this is my cause, this is it,” you know, this is the body of Christ coming together. Those are kind of the words that are coming to mind: *courageous, strong, come together*. . . . This morning was different because they sang some new songs, and some, like, familiar songs. So it was just . . . a little bit of a roller-coaster this morning.

Author: So familiarity really has a . . .

Simon: Oh, familiarity is very important. When we sang “This Is Amazing Grace,” which everybody knew, when we sang “Your Love Never Fails,”²⁰ which everybody knew, it was totally different to when we sang his three new songs. And they were nice songs, but . . . it was just kind of different.

Simon’s reflections temper those of Dallas. First, Simon agreed with Dallas’s assertion of the sense of unity that congregational singing can elicit. Second, while Simon did not experience “This Is Amazing Grace” as particularly meaningful, he did identify it as a song that had emotional power by virtue of its familiarity.

²⁰ Simon is here referring to “One Thing Remains” by its sub- or alternate title.

These interviews indicate that the emotional efficacy of modern worship music is crucially facilitated by previous similar experiences. Dallas's reflections draw this out clearly: "I felt like *I was picking right back up* where I had left off from those experiences. . . . And whenever that moment had stopped, I feel like I wasn't starting something new, I feel like I was starting right back where I left off on that same kind of way." This assertion, together with Simon's, indicates that familiarity is "very important" in evoking feelings of unity and relational strength in musical worship. This in turn indicates that regular participation in the activity of congregational singing—that is, in the ritual of congregational song—helps to facilitate the generation of feelings of unity and relational strength that correlate to moments of physical unity in that activity.

"Our Energies Synchronizing Like Cogs in a Clock"

October 1, 2015

National Worship Leader Conference

Bent Tree Bible Fellowship, Dallas, Texas

9:30 A.M. CST

As the emcee welcomed the congregation to the second day of the conference, I climbed to my perch from the previous morning. The morning worship leaders, Shane Bernard and Shane Everett, known as Shane and Shane, led the congregation through three familiar pop songs and hymns, a lone acoustic guitar and some enjoyable harmonies between the two of them.

Before the music had even begun, the congregation started swaying. As Shane and Shane led the congregation in a prayer after their first song, I noticed that a number of congregants directly in front of me were still swaying. I picked one [person] and tapped out the tempo: 72 beats per minute (B.P.M.). I picked another: 73 B.P.M. Another: 71 B.P.M. The song the musicians had just finished, "Yearn," from their 2004 album *Upstairs*, was 56 B.P.M., indicating that the tempo of the swaying was not directly related to the tempo of the music.

The swaying kept up as Shane and Shane led the congregation through another song. I continued timing the swaying, always noting between 70 and 75 B.P.M. As Shane and Shane began their final song, "Cornerstone," the congregation began to sway in unison, hands outstretched. I tapped out the tempo of the swaying and recorded 62 B.P.M., which precisely matched the 62 B.P.M. tempo of the music. The synchronization lasted for several seconds, dissipated, then returned. This pattern continued throughout the rest of the song to varying degrees.

After the morning session of October 1, I interviewed Juan,²¹ another student from CFNI. Juan immediately identified “Cornerstone,” the song during which the swaying united, as a meaningful song from the morning service.

Juan: I think it was around the third song or the second song. It was about, we started to sing about “Cornerstone” . . . that whole concept of that song, the words, the lyrics, it just really resonated with the type of season that I'm in right now . . . made me feel like, like a boldness of strength, you know? Like a reminder that he is your “cornerstone” so, I don't know, it was really impactful to me.

Juan's articulation of the affective power of the song agrees with those of other interviewees, suggesting that while entrainment occurs most easily among people who have been thoroughly enculturated to the activity of congregational singing, it is the moments of entrainment within that familiar ritual context that provide the most profoundly meaningful experiences. While Juan first identified the lyrics and “whole concept of that song” as being the primary source of meaning for him, he quickly noted that this significance was augmented and enhanced by the presence of others engaged in the same activity:

Juan: I was hearing some other people sing, and I could just feel their spirits singing to God, like, just kind of, like their hearts pouring out to God.

Author: What does that feel like? Can you describe it?

Juan: Yeah, yeah. I didn't feel alone. I definitely felt like someone understood me, like someone was also going through something the same, which didn't make me feel alone. Like, “hey this stuff happens,” like, sometimes we are put in this season where we need God and so it made me feel, like, secure. It made me feel like I didn't have to hold back, I could just go at it . . . it felt kind of warm, like, you know when you hug someone? It felt really warm. And I started to tear up, 'cause I just felt, like, that warmth. Just kind of, like, brought me, like, the more warmth I felt, the more the tears would come out.

Juan's description of emotional unity, intimacy, and empowerment further indicates the emotional efficacy of congregational song for its participants. Interestingly, in the process of describing previous experiences of profound efficacy in worship, he described congregational singing in terms surprisingly similar to those used to describe entrainment in academic literature:

Juan: It definitely intensifies when I'm around other people. *It's like our energies are syncing together*, um, I feel like we're *all like cogs in the same clock*. And you know it's like mine's turning, I feel like everyone else's is turning at the same time, or like vice versa; like theirs is turning, mine turns. . . . It's just like we connect and the feeling just intensifies, um, I feel like God's presence just jumps like a fire that starts right in a little bush and then it catches on to another bush and another bush, and the fire just grows and grows and grows.

Juan's description of “energies . . . syncing” like “cogs in the same clock” is telling. It suggests that there may be some recognition on the part of the congregants that they are meaningfully

²¹ Name assigned by author.

connecting to others, and that this connection may coincide with musical entrainment. The repeated descriptors “warm,” “safe,” “close,” and “peaceful” offer insight into the effects of such connection and unity. However, while each of my interviewees, to some degree, expressed the power of congregational singing to shape identity (“If there was one song that expresses my faith,” “what I’m walking through right now,” and so on), only Juan explicitly expressed the identity formation that can occur during affective congregational singing:

Juan: One day we were worshipping, in a corporate setting, and it just hit me like, like God revealed to me what, who I was, who he thought I was, and that was just, like, completely life-changing. I left that room, and I was just, like, “I know who I am,” complete security, everything's over with.

Ritual as Formational Activity

While several of the scholars mentioned earlier have suggested that the concept of entrainment may be a means of understanding the unifying and affective power of music, the social structure of rituals has scarcely been considered as a means of facilitating musical entrainment.²² Rituals are profoundly powerful factors in marking important events and shaping social meaning and experience.²³ Randall Collins, in his book *Interaction Ritual Chains*, argues for the compounding of individual ritual activities so that each succeeding ritual interaction builds up emotional energy (EE, in Collins’s taxonomy). Collins’s work further suggests that the emotions and consciousness built up in human bodies through these ritual interactions increase with each interaction, such that individuals who regularly engage in completed interactive rituals experience social reality as profoundly meaningful.

The experiences of such ritual practices become connected to one another, and when an aspect of powerful ritual experience in the past is indexed by a later ritual experience, the second may then possess greater emotional efficacy. In this way rituals can become strung together—“chained,” according to Collins—building on one another until the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts or the singularity of experience.

Judith Becker, in her 2004 book *Deep Listeners*, connects the idea of ritual chains (although she does not use this term, as her book predates Collins’s) to the activity of religious music—both listening and performing. In contrast to Collins’s emphasis on emotional energy and interpersonal connections, Becker’s analysis focuses on the formation of the individual’s identity through participation in ritual activities such as “trancing” to/in music.²⁴ Taken together, the work of Collins and Becker suggests that regular participation in musical rituals generates relational strength concurrently with individual identity.

²² Ole Jørgansen, “Biology, Cognition, Music and Religion: A Bio-cognitive Approach to Musically Afforded Behavioral Patterns in Religious Ritual” (MS thesis, University of Aarhus, 2009). Jørgansen has demonstrated the theoretical feasibility of this model, but to my knowledge no further work has been done on the subject.

²³ Mary E. McGann, *Exploring Music as Worship and Theology: Research in Liturgical Practice*, American Essays in Liturgy (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002); Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. New Approaches to European History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁴ Becker, *Deep Listeners*, 87–90.

However, not all rituals are created equal. As Theodore D. Kemper has argued in his book *Status, Power, and Ritual Interaction: A Relational Reading of Durkheim, Goffman, and Collins*, certain rituals are effective and others are not. The difference, Kemper contends, is *not* the ability of the ritual to generate emotion (as Collins and others contend), but rather whether the ritual generates relational strength among participants in the dynamics of power negotiation.²⁵ While I agree with Kemper's point, I am reluctant to assign all ritual efficacy to the category of relational power negotiation while doing away with emotion altogether, as this seems overly reductionistic. Rather, I would suggest that relationship and emotion are mutually constitutive, each forming and altering the other as the interactions of individuals are negotiated, often via ritual means.

Relational Power Dynamics in Worship

The synchronized embodied response that I observed on the mornings of September 30 and October 1, 2015, may be understood, per Clayton and others, as entrainment. However, as I have suggested, musical entrainment does not singularly facilitate the significance of modern worship. To provide a thicker description of the context of Juan's stirring reflection, and in so doing tease out the importance of ritual negotiation of relational power dynamics in configuring the emotional efficacy of musical worship, I turn to an analysis of the song "Cornerstone" as performed by Shane and Shane.

"Cornerstone" is a modern worship version of Edward Mote's 1834 hymn "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less." This modern interpretation was originally released by Hillsong United on their 2012 album *Cornerstone*. The Hillsong version replaces the refrain with a chorus and adds an electric guitar/keyboard lead line during the introduction and turn-around sections. The tune most commonly associated with Mote's lyrics, *SOLID ROCK*, was composed by William Bradbury in 1863. *SOLID ROCK*/"My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less" is a strophic hymn comprised of four stanzas, each followed by a refrain. Distinctly, "Cornerstone" is comprised of three verses of Mote's lyrics separated by a new chorus in place of the original refrain. The new chorus, written by Eric Liljero, Reuben Morgan, and Jonas Myrin, features a descending melody comprised of seven three-note phrases.

The performance of "Cornerstone" by Shane and Shane at the NWLC was distinct from both the Hillsong and the Bradbury/Mote versions. While on their 2014 album *Worship V* Shane and Shane mimic Hillsong's version, the version they performed at the NWLC was accompanied only by an acoustic guitar. This minimal instrumentation (mostly) eliminated the introduction and turn-around sections, meaning that this rendition returned to the strophic form of *SOLID ROCK*/"My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less," while retaining the chordal structure and chorus of Hillsong's "Cornerstone." Additionally, while there is no distinct harmonic line in Hillsong's "Cornerstone," Shane and Shane's NWLC performance featured a prominent two-part harmony, further emulating *SOLID ROCK*/"My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less." This *via media* performance seemed to index both arrangements simultaneously, affording a deep sense of symbolic meaning.

²⁵ Theodore D. Kemper, *Status, Power and Ritual Interaction: A Relational Reading of Durkheim, Goffman, and Collins* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 5–7; online version: <http://ezproxy.baylor.edu/login?url=http://site.ebrary.com/lib/baylor/Top?id=10490676>.

This symbolic depth was further emphasized by Shane and Shane's demeanor. Their performance affected a posture of worshipful folk authenticity,²⁶ utilizing strained voices and intensely focused facial expressions, while wearing clothing that would not mark them as performers: jeans and tee-shirts accompanied by baseball/newsboy caps. As Alan Moore has argued, the persona adopted by the worship leader has a locutionary function that participates in the construction of meaning for the congregation.²⁷ Drawing on J. L. Austin's performative language theory, Moore extends his argument to include performative gestures as speech acts that perform into being some manner of the content being performed. Monique Ingalls refers to these performative utterances as "authenticating gestures."²⁸ In this way, the presented personae of Shane and Shane at the NWLC contributed to the affective state of the congregation. Of particular importance, the textual presentation of the song under consideration, "Cornerstone," may derive a high degree of its emotional efficacy from the posture of the worship leader/s. Shane and Shane's personae of authenticity conveyed to the congregation that this was a meaningful and authentic event, thereby providing affective context for musical entrainment.

The performance of the song itself was punctuated by dynamic ebb and flow, with the verses beginning softly, the acoustic guitar gated²⁹ heavily so that only minimal sound passed through the speakers and into the room. Shane Bernard's nonharmonized vocal delivery was barely above a whisper for the opening lines of the verse, dropping out for certain lyrics as the singing of the congregation carried the song forward. The first chorus continued this gentle affectation, while Shane Everett's harmonic line added depth. During the second verse, Shane Bernard adjusted his strumming technique so that his down-strum was in a fourfold relationship to the tempo of the song, meaning that each beat received four quick down-strums. Despite this visual intensity, the gate on the guitar prevented approximately half of the strums from registering in the speakers, meaning that while the visual presentation grew in intensity, the audio presentation only slightly conveyed this. In this way, the gestures of Shane Bernard performed into being an affective state that did not require auditory participation to the same degree. The result of this phenomenological reality was the full participation of the collective voice of the congregation. This vocal participation was encouraged by Shane Everett's vocal harmonization and worshipful gestures (facial expressions, outstretched hands, swaying), which continued unabated throughout the second verse.

After this buildup of affective intensity during the verse, Shane Bernard stopped playing the acoustic guitar entirely for the three repetitions of the chorus that immediately followed. He and Shane Everett stepped back from the microphones, singing at the top of their lungs so that the microphone's diaphragms could still register their voices, their eyes closed and arms stretching

²⁶ See Monique M. Ingalls, *Made to Worship: Performing Evangelical Congregations through Contemporary Worship Music* (forthcoming from Oxford University Press).

²⁷ Alan Moore, "On the Inherent Contradiction in Worship Music," in Nekola and Wagner, *Congregational Music-Making and Community in a Mediated Age*.

²⁸ Ingalls, *Made to Worship*.

²⁹ A "gate" is a technical term referring to a dynamic mute function in a public address system. It is used primarily to eliminate static frequency generation when an instrument or "line" is not in use, but can also be used to eliminate quieter frequencies for artistic effect, as demonstrated by Shane and Shane.

toward the heavenly ceiling. The voice of the congregation soared along with theirs, and the room was awash in human vocal utterances, performing into being a profound sense of unity that was evidenced by the synchronization of not only voices but also bodies, as the swaying of the congregation united into what seemed to be a continuous wave.

After the third repeat of the chorus, Shane Bernard began playing the acoustic guitar again, and his vocal utterances returned in dynamic intensity to barely above a whisper for the third and final verse—all the while accompanied by the congregation, which was fully committed to the meaningful moments they were performing into being together. At the close of the third verse, Shane Bernard led the congregation in a short prayer, and then he and Shane Everett left the stage.

This analysis of Shane and Shane's performance begins to unpack something of the relational power dynamic that factors into the generation of emotional meaning in ritual practice as suggested by Theodore Kemper. First, as demonstrated by Shane and Shane, the posture, dress, and gestures of worship leaders (who are in immediate, temporary relational power positions over the congregation) powerfully affected the congregation. Second, the ways in which these power dynamics are negotiated are of seminal importance to the emotional sense of unity and intimacy that the congregation experiences; Shane and Shane's tangible demonstration of humility and sincerity invited the congregation into participation, signaling that relational power was being negotiated equitably. This relational power dynamic extends beyond the stage or lectern and includes the narthex or fellowship hall in its domain. For instance, after the session in which he led worship, Shane Everett "hung out" in the spacious foyer of Bent Tree Bible Fellowship, speaking with the conference attendees as his equals and co-worshippers, further cementing the performative utterance of folk authenticity and humility.³⁰

This suggestion of relational power dynamics is not unique to my study, nor is it engaged unawares by many worship leaders. One conference speaker whom I interviewed, a prominent worship leader, explicated as much:

Jack:³¹ I'll be as bold as to say that I structure services in order to facilitate the arrival of those moments [of profound affection and unity in worship]. Uh, mostly because, and I just, I know that for me the subtext of these kinds of conversations are semi-manipulating people's feelings when I do it.

Author: No, that's not the question [here].

Jack: Right. Well, but I'm actually comfortable saying that I am. Mostly because I view it as a part of pastoral ministry to faithfully shepherd emotions, and so for that reason I think I understand how music tethers with, say, the liturgy in accomplishing physical sensations and emotional perceptions that hopefully are congruous with a given liturgical moment, so in a sense I am aware of what those things physically feel like, and I strive to recreate and replicate those things.

³⁰ Monique Marie Ingalls, "Awesome in This Place: Sound, Space, and Identity in Contemporary North American Evangelical Worship" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2008), <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/docview/304494371/abstract/667024D74C684480PQ/3>.

³¹ Name assigned by author.

As Jack illustrates perceptively, the subtext of many conversations regarding emotional manipulation of congregations by worship leaders in power positions is often negative. However, his admission of engaging in this manipulation helps to illuminate not only the reality of such happenings, but also the potential for them to be positive. As Kemper points out, there simply *are* power dynamics that must be negotiated in any ritual setting;³² an acknowledgment of that reality by those who occupy power positions, and subsequent attempts to use that power constructively, are important in the generation of positive emotional experiences of congregational singing.

This analysis further illuminates the ways in which the emotional efficacy of modern worship is configured importantly by the negotiation of relational power dynamics between the congregation and the worship leader (and, by extension, between all participants). When these power dynamics are negotiated successfully such that relational unity is constructed or affirmed, the emotional significance of musical entrainment is experienced and remembered positively. These positive experiences of musical worship are then indexed symbolically in subsequent positive experiences of that ritual, resulting in a process of profound commitment and openness to further enculturation and identity formation—compound ritual entrainment.

The NWLC in Dallas, as an event attended by aficionados of the musical and religious meaning experienced in congregationally sung modern worship music, presented a social dynamic of profound enculturation—both for the event and for the participants. As such, it afforded a valuable opportunity to observe and interact with people who were invested in the musical genre and committed to experiencing the divine presence in their times of congregational singing. This group of committed singers was not necessarily representative of all congregations, but it was a fertile field in which to cultivate an understanding of CRE.

As these interviews demonstrate, the emotional efficacy of congregational singing lies not only in the unique experience of each individual, but also in the shared history of embodied mutual participation in relational ritual activity: it is a mutually constitutive reality. The affective value of a given song, such as “Cornerstone,” depends not only on a participant’s experiential history of the song, which symbolically represents a remembered experience; nor alone on its ability to entrain bodily; nor solely on the contextual, relational ritual setting within which it was performed. Instead, it is the synthetic interaction of each of these three realities that configures the emotional efficacy of congregational song to be a profoundly meaningful and formative activity—bodily, emotionally, and relationally. In this way, I hope to have indicated some sense of how music plays an integral role in the generation of relational bonds in singing congregations through continual participation.

By framing the performative context of the song “Cornerstone” within Kemper’s relational power/status negotiation and Collins’s interactive ritual environment, I hope to have illustrated how the significance of musical entrainment is qualitatively configured. CRE occurs to varying degrees, and whether the congregation experiences it as positive or negative may depend, in some respects, on the negotiation of the power dynamics between worship leaders and congregations. In some settings, certain affective performative utterances facilitate meaningful

³² Kemper, *Status, Power and Ritual Interaction*, 21ff.

worship better than others. In the example of the NWLC, whose participatory makeup was one primarily of practitioners and aficionados, a posture of humility and authenticity, such as that affected by Shane and Shane, “shepherd[ed] the emotions of the congregation” in a positively meaningful way. This begins to illustrate how the emotional efficacy of congregational song may be intertwined with the ritual negotiation of relational power dynamics. While it is beyond the scope of this study to more fully develop the surely myriad ways in which this might be so, it does suggest areas for future scholarship.

I have suggested that this process of physical, emotional, and relational formation through music may be called compound ritual entrainment. As such, it illuminates how some of the complex interworkings of musical relational ritual chains—such as those studied at the NWLC—when experienced and engaged continually over prolonged periods of time, facilitate relational strength and individual identity formation. When this ritual practice is performed as entraining participation in congregational music making, a further depth of emotional significance may be achieved by virtue of physiological unity. This depth is then indexed symbolically and re-performed into being each time the activity is meaningfully engaged in (depending in part on the negotiation of relational power dynamics), resulting in a cycle of deeper and stronger commitment to the ritual of congregational singing.