

2017

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Recommended Citation

Chaney, C. (2017). Prince Rogers Nelson: from "Dirty Mind" to Devout Jehovah's Witness. *Journal of African American Studies*, 21 (3), 425-442. <https://doi.org/10.2307/45200215>

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Prince Rogers Nelson: from “Dirty Mind” to Devout Jehovah’s Witness

Cassandra Chaney¹

Published online: 26 September 2017
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Abstract Prince Rogers Nelson (born: June 7, 1958) was an American singer, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, record producer, and actor. He was a musical innovator and known for his eclectic work, flamboyant stage presence, extravagant dress and makeup, and wide vocal range. When he passed unexpectedly on April 21, 2016, he had built an immensely successful career that spanned over 30 years. Although Prince is widely known for his highly sexual behavior, we know less about his spiritual beliefs as well as how these beliefs influenced his public persona and private life. Through the lens of social identity theory, this manuscript will examine how Prince demonstrated his belief in God, his values, and the changes that he made in his life after he became a devout Jehovah’s Witness. In particular, this manuscript will provide song lyrics and excerpts from televised and print interviews to qualitatively respond to the following three questions: (1) How did Prince demonstrate his belief in God in his music? (2) What were Prince’s values? (3) What changes did Prince make in his public performances after he became a Jehovah’s Witness?

Keywords Belief · Faith · God · Interviews · Jehovah’s Witness · Music · Prince · Qualitative · Social identity theory · Song lyrics · Spiritual · Values

“It’s a side of him most people don’t know”—Larry Graham, former friend and mentor of Prince “A lot of people will remember Prince for his music. But he’d also want people to know what he learned from the bible. We lost a really good friend and a spiritual brother.”—Larry Graham, former friend and mentor of Prince

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Simply known to his fans as Prince, this enigmatic performer was an American singer, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, record producer, and actor. In addition, he was a musical innovator and known for his eclectic work, flamboyant stage presence, extravagant dress and makeup, and high vocal range. When he passed away unexpectedly at the age of 57, he had built an immensely successful career that spanned nearly 40 years, yet many believed he had many more years ahead. Although Prince is widely known for his highly sexualized masculinity (Fuchs 1996), we know less about his spiritual beliefs as well as how those beliefs influenced his public persona and private life. This manuscript will examine how Prince demonstrated his belief in God, his values, and the changes that he made in his life after he became a devout Jehovah's Witness. As his former friend and mentor, Larry Graham acknowledged: "It's a side of him most people don't know." (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASOwp11UF5k>).

There are three reasons why this topic is worthy of scholarly exploration. For one, because few academicians have provided scholarly insight into the life and music of Prince (Danielsen 1997; Fuchs 1996; Hawkins 2016; Plasse 1996; Touré 2013), the current work will help fill that void. Also, because Prince mentioned God in his music, this work will examine how his view toward God evolved over time. This is important because the meaning and purpose of Prince's life was inextricably linked to his belief in the existence of God (Watson 2016). Finally, since Prince balanced his individual and collective identity through music, this work will examine how this musician used his art to assert his Jehovah's Witness identity. On the surface, such an examination may seem difficult to reconcile given the overt sexuality Prince was known for before converting to the Jehovah's Witnesses. Case in point: In his song "Dirty Mind," he openly and unapologetically admits to "getting a dirty mind" whenever his lover is around (<http://www.metrolyrics.com/dirty-mind-lyrics-prince.html>). In spite of this seeming contradiction, Mark Slobin (1996) acknowledges:

Music seems to have an odd quality that even passionate activities like gardening or dog-raising lack: the simultaneous projecting and dissolving of the self in performance. Individual, family, gender, age, supercultural givens, and other factors hover around the musical space but can penetrate only very partially the moment of enactment of musical fellowship. Visible to the observer, these constraints remain unseen by the musicians, who are instead working out a shared vision that involves both the assertion of pride, even ambition, and the simultaneous disappearance of the ego. (p. 10).

Through these words, Slobin (1996) recognizes that although gardening and dog training are enjoyable activities, they are distinctly different from music. In particular, the former two activities do not require the perfect balance of musician characteristics that simultaneously create a "shared vision" for the audience as well as the need for showmanship (which works to give the audience what it craves). In contrast to gardening and dog training, and as related to the current discussion, one may easily observe how an artist's music has changed over time.

In particular, this work examines song lyrics and televised and print interviews to qualitatively respond to the following four questions: (1) How did Prince demonstrate belief in God in his music? (2) What are key teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses and how

does this religion differ from other Christian religions? (3) What were Prince's values? (4) What changes did Prince make in his public performances after he became a Jehovah's Witness? The next section will highlight key scholarship related to the development of individual and group identity. Included within this work is a discussion of Social Identity theory. Next, I discuss key teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses as well as how this religion differs from other Christian denominations. Then, I will discuss how Prince was introduced to the Jehovah's Witness faith. After this, using song lyrics and (videotaped and print) interviews, I will respond to the scholarly questions of interest. Finally, I discuss how Prince's construction of a religious identity allowed him to reconcile his pre and post Jehovah's Witness identity.

Theoretical Framework

Social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s). Race, gender, social class, clothing, and language are aspects of social identity that have been examined by scholars (Bottero 2004; Crane 2012; Devine 1992; Gumperz 1982; Mandell and Johnson 2017; Shayo 2009; Wharton 1992). Over 30 years ago, Tajfel (2010) proposed that the groups (e.g., social class, family, football team) that people belonged to were an important source of pride and self-esteem. Groups give individuals a sense of social identity: a sense of belonging to the social world. In order to increase our self-image and to make meaning from our lives, we enhance the status of the group to which we belong. Key to a personal sense of belonging is recognizing the inherent interplay between similarity and difference or the ways in which individual behavior is similar to those within the group yet distinctively different from those outside of the group. As stated by Gilroy (1997), "Identity is always particular, as much about difference as about shared belonging...identity can help us to comprehend the formation of the fateful pronoun 'we' and to reckon with the patterns of inclusion exclusion that it cannot help but to create. This may be one of the most troubling aspects of all: the fact that the formation of every 'we' must leave out or exclude a 'they,' that identities depend on the marking of difference" (pp. 301–302). Through the process of social categorization, individuals engage in a normal cognitive tendency to group people together (Tajfel 2010). Thus, individuals learn to divide the world into social groups which are fundamentally based on out-groups ("them") and in-groups ("us"). Over time, individuals learn to see the group to which we belong (the in-group) as being different from the others (the out-group) and members of the same group as being more similar than they are.

Tajfel and Turner (2004) proposed three mental processes involved in evaluating others as "us" (the in-group) or "them" (the out-group), and these occur in a particular order. The first is *categorization*, which occurs when individuals categorize people (including themselves) in order to understand the social environment. For example, many people associate with individuals who believe in God and/or a Higher Power by becoming a member of their religious organization and by becoming actively involved in that religion. Another important aspect of the categorization process is that people define appropriate behavior by referring to the norms of the group they belong to; however, they can only do this if they belong to the group (Sherkat 2014). During the second stage, *social identification*, individuals adopt the identity of the group by

thinking and behaving like group members. Through social identification, individual's emotional attachment and self-esteem grows, especially as one associates with members of the group who have adopted and actively support the changes that others in the group make in their life. The last stage is *social comparison* which occurs after an individual identifies with a particular group; they then compare that group with other groups. It is important to note that if an individual's self-esteem is to be maintained, the group of which they are now a part must compare favorably with other groups. Unless one perceives the in-group to be comparably better than other groups, he will not remain a part of the group.

What Do Jehovah's Witnesses Believe?

With a membership of over eight million, Jehovah's Witnesses have a strong degree of religious commitment. According to a recent study, nine-in-ten Jehovah's Witnesses (90%) say religion is *very* important in their lives, believe in God with absolute certainty (90%), and believe the Bible is the word of God (94%) (Lipka 2016).

According to their official website, jw.org, Jehovah's Witnesses come from "hundreds of ethnic and language backgrounds" yet "are united by common goals." Above all, they want to "honor Jehovah, the God of the Bible and the Creator of all things" and they do their "best to imitate Jesus Christ and are proud to be called Christians." While most Christian religions celebrate holidays and birthdays, accept blood transfusions, support the trinity (or the combination of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit as a single entity), believe in hellfire as punishment, and involve themselves in politics (through going to war, seeking political office, or voting), Jehovah's Witnesses do not support any of these beliefs or practices (Brodd et al. 2013; Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2014). One of the most distinctive features of Jehovah's Witnesses is their high moral standards and participation in the door-to-door ministry. Furthermore, in contrast to other Christian religions, in which only a relatively small number engage in proselytizing for a specific amount of time (Mormons, for example, are required to do missionary work for 2 years), "Jehovah's Witnesses regularly spend time helping people learn about the Bible and God's Kingdom" and make this work a priority their entire lives. Their reason for doing so is based on Matthew 24:14, which states, "And this good news of the Kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, 2014). Because they "witness, or talk, about Jehovah God and his Kingdom," they are aptly known as Jehovah's Witnesses (<https://www.jw.org/en/>). How was Prince introduced to the Jehovah's Witness faith?

Prince's Introduction to Jehovah's Witnesses

Prince was introduced to the Jehovah's Witness faith through Larry Graham, the former bass player for Sly Stone, and the leader of his own group, Graham Central Station. Baptized since 1975, Graham was Prince's bible teacher and spiritual mentor, playing an important role in his eventual conversion to the Jehovah's Witness faith. According to Graham, "I was on tour [in 1997] with Sinbad, Graham Central Station, Earth Wind

& Fire and Teena Marie. We did a show in Tennessee and we were playing the amphitheater and Prince was playing the big arena there in Nashville. He heard I was in town and invited me to one of his famous after-shows. He had all of these questions that he would ask me, and we had Bible study pretty much before and after our show.” (Heigl 2016). After 2 years of studying the bible with Graham (which began in 2001), Prince became a dedicated, baptized Jehovah’s Witness on March 23, 2003 (Lah 2016; Lah and Hannah 2016).

Methodology

To address the research questions, I utilized a qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff 2004; Neuendorf 2016; Schreier 2014; Taylor and Bogdan 1998). This form of scholarly inquiry “entails a systematic reading of a body of texts, images, and symbolic matter, not necessarily from an author’s or user’s perspective” (Krippendorff 2004, p. 3). Specifically, this study will examine words and/or phrases used in song lyrics and print interviews. This method is especially appropriate for research questions that have received little scholarly attention and can produce deeper levels of inquiry (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011; Merriam and Associates 2002; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Taylor and Bogdan 1998).

This methodology involved three steps. The first step involved conducting a Google search using the term “Prince Song List.” After going to the following http://www.princevault.com/index.php?title=A-Z_song_list, I determined all songs in which God appears in the title and/or there was a specific reference to God. This search yielded the following three songs: (1) *God* (1984), (2) *God Is Everywhere* (1985), and (3) *God Is Alive* (1988). Since the song *Controversy* (1981) specifically uses the word “God” and quotes The Lord’s Prayer, it was included in this analysis (Controversy Lyrics, <http://www.metrolyrics.com/controversy-lyrics-prince.html>). In addition, although Prince wrote the song *A Man Called Jesus* (1993) for Mavis Staples (an American rhythm and blues and gospel singer, actress, and civil rights activist), it was also included in the analysis. After this, I obtained the complete lyrics for all of the aforementioned songs from metrolyrics.com.

The second step involved conducting a Google search using the term “Prince and Jehovah’s Witnesses.” This search yielded the following print interviews: “Prince’s Life as a Jehovah’s Witness: His Complicated and Ever-Evolving Faith” (Hoffman 2016), “Prince: Singer’s Conversion to Jehovah’s Witness Faith-People” (Heigl 2016), “As Jehovah’s Witness, Prince’s beliefs were very, very, strong” (Hopfensperger 2016), “Prince Pictured at a Jehovah’s Witness conference with Larry Graham” (Bates 2016), “I Met Prince and He Tried to Make Me a Jehovah’s Witness” (Brown 2016a, b), “Who Gets Prince’s Money? Jehovah’s Witnesses Could Stand to Gain” (Abrams 2016), “Prince ‘Really Embraced’ Jehovah’s Witness Faith” (Chen and Mendelson 2016), “Prince Honored at Jehovah’s Witness Ceremony” (Pratt and Silverstein 2016), “At a Jehovah’s Witness Hall, congregants remember Prince as ‘Brother Nelson’” (Pearce 2016), and “A look into Prince’s private life as a Jehovah’s Witness” (Lah 2016).

The third step involved viewing the videotaped interviews that Prince did with Larry Graham, his bible teacher and spiritual mentor. This search yielded the following

videotaped interviews: “Interview Prince and Larry Graham TROS TV SHOW” (November 28, 2013) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZBxo1_rXPM) and “Prince and Larry Graham talking about the truth & accurate knowledge” (April 21, 2016) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASOwpI1UF5k>). After viewing these videotaped interviews, I typed them verbatim and then highlighted the words and/or phrases that were related to what Prince valued. To answer the question regarding the changes Prince made in his public performances after he became a Jehovah’s Witness, I examined the words and/or phrases used in the following article (McCormack 2016).

Presentation of the Findings

Research Question 1: How Did Prince Demonstrate Belief in God in His Music?

Qualitative analysis of Prince’s body of work revealed five songs that directly or indirectly acknowledged his belief in God. As previously mentioned, the word God appears in the title/or there was a specific reference to God. Three songs specifically had the word “God” in the title: (1) *God* (1984), (2) *God Is Everywhere* (1985), and (3) *God Is Alive* (1988).

The song *God* was released on September 10, 1984, as the b-side of Purple Rain, the third single from Prince’s seventh album Purple Rain. The UK 12” release of the single contained God (Love Theme from Purple Rain), a 7:54 instrumental version heard in the movie Purple Rain, but other worldwide releases contained a completely re-recorded vocal version, simply titled God (<http://www.princevault.com/index.php?title=God>). The song *God is Everywhere* was another unreleased track recorded in mid-July 1985, at the Crosstown Circle Warehouse, Eden Prairie, MN, USA, during recording sessions for Parade. Engineers Susan Rogers and Peggy McCreary mixed the track on 26 September 1985, while Prince was in France filming Under The Cherry Moon, and sent it to him, as he was considering it for use on Parade. It was not included on any known configuration of the album, however, and the track remains unreleased. The track is a piano-led ballad, with gospel-style vocals by Wendy Melvoin and Lisa Coleman (http://www.princevault.com/index.php?title=God_Is_Everywhere). The song *God is Alive* was an unreleased track recorded in June 1988, at Paisley Park Studios, Chanhassen, MN, USA, shortly before the European Lovesexy Tour. Prince worked on the track further on 27 July 1988 at Olympic Studios, London, England, when Mavis Staples’ vocal overdubs were recorded (a clip of this recording session was shown on the Prince - A Musical Portrait documentary). This track was included as the tenth and final track on the 25 September 1988 configuration of Graffiti Bridge, and the following month was included on the 27 October 1988 configuration of Rave Unto The Joy Fantastic. It was also included as the seventh track on a late 1988 or early 1989 configuration of Rave unto the Joy Fantastic, but the album was ultimately abandoned (http://www.princevault.com/index.php?title=God_Is_Alive).

Two songs did not have the word “God” in the title, yet made specific mention of God, namely *Controversy* (1981) and *A Man Called Jesus* (1988). In *Controversy*, Prince specifically poses the question of whether he “believes in God” and then recites

The Lord's Prayer¹. *Controversy* is the first track on Prince's fourth album of the same name, and 6 weeks prior to the album's release, *Controversy* was released as the album's first single. In 1982, the track was included as the b-side of the West German and Japanese versions of the *Sexuality* single. It was also included as the third track on the Australian 12" of 1999, the first single from Prince's fifth album 1999. In 1993, the track was included as the first track on Prince's second compilation album *The Hits 2* (also included as the second disc of *The Hits/The B-Sides*), and 3 months after the album's release, *Controversy* was released as a single. In 2004, a 2003 live version was released as a download from the NPG Music Club's Musicology Download Store (this same version was included on the *Controversy (Live In Hawaii)* single included in the *Prince In Hawaii* book). In 2006, the full-length studio version was included as the third track on the first disc of the compilation album *Ultimate*. While specific recording dates are not known, the track was recorded in Summer 1981 at Prince's Kiowa Trail Home Studio, Chanhassen, MN, USA (during the same session as *Poppa Grooves* and *Tick, Tick, Bang*). The album was completed at Sunset Sound, Hollywood, CA, USA, between 14 and 23 August 1981 (<http://www.princevault.com/index.php?title=Controversy>).

A Man Called Jesus was the tenth track on Mavis Staples' second Paisley Park Records album, *The Voice* (included as the sixth track on the 1995 reissue). The track was written by Prince and was initially produced by Prince, with additional production by Ricky Peterson. Prince also played most of the instruments on the track. While specific recording dates are not known, initial tracking took place in late December 1988, at Paisley Park Studios, Chanhassen, Minnesota (during the same set of sessions as *Cat Attack*), and the song was originally intended for Cat's proposed solo album. The proposed solo album was abandoned, however, when Cat announced she was moving to England to work with producer Tim Simenon. When Prince contributed new tracks to Mavis Staples' album *The Voice* in May 1992, he pulled this song from the vault, and Ricky Peterson worked on the track further, recording Mavis Staples' lead vocals in Summer, 1992, also at Paisley Park Studios. (http://www.princevault.com/index.php?title=A_Man_Called_Jesus). [See Table 1 for Song Title, Album Title, Year Recorded/Year Released, and Lyrics].

Research Question 2: What Were Prince's Values?

Qualitative analysis of Prince's interviews revealed several of his values.² In particular, Prince valued (1) using the name of Jehovah God; (2) recognizing the Bible as the Word of God; (3) acknowledging Jehovah's Witnesses as the source of truth; (4) associating with Jehovah's Witnesses; and (5) door-to-door proselytizing.

Prince acknowledged the existence of God and valued using the name Jehovah God. In the YouTube clip, *Prince at his Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Selent 2016), CNN Correspondent Kyuang Lah highlighted several aspects of Prince's

¹ Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses As we forgive those who trespass against us Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever

² According to Schwartz (2012), "Values are used to characterize cultural groups, societies, and individuals, to trace change over time, and to explain the motivational bases of attitudes and behavior." (p. 3).

Table 1 Song title, album title, year recorded/year released, and lyrics

Song title	Album title	Date released	Lyrics
God	The Hits/The B Sides	September 10, 1984	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the beginning There was God He made the earth And the heavens He gave us light To rule the day And another light To rule the night • Now you say God made you God made me He made us all equally
God Is Everywhere	—	Mid-July 1985 (date recorded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without God it wasn't there Now I feel it everywhere • We were always meant to be In paradise eternally Before the truth I did not care Now I feel it everywhere
God Is Alive	—	July 27, 1988 (date recorded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm a livin' witness That God's alive! I'm a livin' witness He's alive! Do U believe that He's alive? Do U believe, oh, He's alive? Ooh, yes He is Sho'nuff He is, well Yes He is Each breath I breathe lets me know Every step I take lets me know Every song I sing, oh, lets me know Oh, God is alive!
Controversy	Controversy	September 2, 1981	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do I believe in god, do I believe in me? Controversy • Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses As we forgive those who trespass against us Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever
A Man Called Jesus	The Voice (Mavis Staples)	August 24, 1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let me tell U about a man I know Had power 2 change bread 2 gold Never did he pray 4 what he didn't need The word of God he always heeded 2 A man called Jesus A man called Jesus • 4 every man, woman, boy and girl This man died 4 the sins of the world, of the world U can have happiness everyday This man's life is proof and his word is the way His word is the way And that word is love (Love) Alright (Higher up)

life. For example, he was born a Seventh Day Adventist and believed an angel cured his childhood epilepsy. As an artist, he weaved his spirituality deftly into his songs and publicly acknowledged the existence of God. During an interview with Larry King, Prince said: “I like to believe that my inspiration comes from God. I’ve always known

that God was my creator and without him, nothing works.” However, in addition to acknowledging the existence of God, Prince used God’s Hebrew name, Jehovah. When he received an award from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 2005, he told the crowd: “Indeed an honor. Thank you so much! Awards are wonderful but all praise and glories are due to the true God Jehovah.”

Prince valued the bible and recognized the bible as the Word of God. During a 2004 interview, he said, “The bible helps you with every aspect of your life. Once you clean out the cobwebs, so to speak, you can see everything more clearly.” In 2015, engineer and producer Joshua Welton told *Entertainment Weekly* that Prince was living a “God-focused life,” recounting how the first time the pair met, “we just stood in the kitchen and talked about Scripture for two hours.” (Greenblatt 2015). *Prince valued his religion and acknowledged Jehovah’s Witnesses as the Source of Truth.* During that same 2004 interview, Prince said “immensely” in response to the question regarding how being a Jehovah’s Witness has changed his life. He went on to say, “Words are inadequate! Now you’re talking about the source of truth!” He rocks forward, eyes shining, as eager as a student in a Bible class, touching my knee to ensure he has my full attention (I’m head down, scribbling to keep up). “Feel me now...” he says. “Feel me now... You want to talk about scripture? We can talk about scripture. But that’s a lifetime right there!” *Prince valued his association with fellow Jehovah’s Witnesses and frequently associated with them.* Although Prince was introduced to the Jehovah’s Witness faith by Larry Graham, he developed close friendships with other members of his church family. He was a member of the St. Louis Park Congregation in Minneapolis Minnesota (Bates 2016; Lonetree 2016; Pratt and Silverstein 2016) and developed close relationships with other individuals in that congregation. When CNN Correspondent Kyuang Lah told Elder James Lundstrom, “You loved him [Prince] very much, it seems.” Clearly showing emotion, Lundstrom replied, “Very much. We shared a lot together.”

Prince valued the door-to-door ministry and frequently participated in this form of proselyting. According to Brother George Cook, an elder in the St. Louis Park Congregation that Prince attended, “Prince was a publisher with good standing here in our congregation. He was active, he shared in the ministry every month.” (Bates 2016). When CNN Correspondent Kyuang Lah invited Lundstrom to “tell her about Prince as a Jehovah’s Witness,” his good friend shared: “Oh he would go door-to-door, knocking on doors. You’re familiar with what our ministry is. A woman probably in her early forties I would say, said ‘Nice presentation’ but in the middle of it, the woman says: ‘Excuse me, but has anyone ever told you that you look a lot like Prince?’ Prince said, ‘It’s been said but going back to my ministry here.’ During this video clip, it was shared that Prince ‘knocked on doors monthly’ and ‘studied his bible with post it notes’.”

The validity of Prince’s activity in the door-to-door ministry was also supported by someone outside of the religion. During October 2003, Rochelle [last name unknown], a Minneapolis native, said Prince and Larry Graham knocked on her and her husband’s door. She said, “My first thought is ‘Cool, cool, cool. He wants to use my house for a set. I’m glad! Demolish the whole thing! Start over!’ Then they start in on this Jehovah’s Witnesses stuff,” Rochelle recalled. I said, “You know what? You’ve walked into a Jewish household, and this is not something I’m interested in.” He says, “Can I just finish? Then, the other guy, Larry Graham, gets out his little Bible and starts reading scriptures about being Jewish and the land of Israel.” After staying for 25 min, Prince and Graham “left us a pamphlet” (Susman 2003).

Research Question 3: What Changes Did Prince Make in His Public Performances After He Became a Jehovah's Witness?

In light of what he learned in the Bible, Prince changed the lyrics of several of his songs. For example, shortly after meeting Graham, in 1999, Prince changed the name of his song *The Cross*, to *The Christ*, in light of the Witnesses' teaching that Jesus died not on a cross but on a stake. During one of his concert performances, he said, "Stauros, by definition a wooden stake driven in the ground used to cause torture or death. Starous, perhaps someone lied about the way someone died." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kUH_W3N2SII). Furthermore, Prince took seriously the Bible's admonition at Ephesians 4:31 to "abstain from abusive speech"³ by not using profanity in his everyday speech or music. Most notably, Prince changed the profane lyrics in his songs (*Darling Nikki Lyrics*, <http://www.metrolyrics.com/darling-nikki-lyrics-prince.html>; *Erotic City Lyrics*, <http://www.metrolyrics.com/erotic-city-lyrics-prince.html>; *Sexy Motherfucker*, <http://www.metrolyrics.com/sexy-m-f-lyrics-prince.html>; *Let's Pretend We're Married Lyrics*, <http://www.metrolyrics.com/lets-pretend-were-married-lyrics-prince.html>; *Pussy Control Lyrics*, <http://www.metrolyrics.com/pussy-control-lyrics-prince.html>) to ones that did not use profanity (Semigran 2016). [See Table 2 for the song title, original Prince's lyrics, and new, cleaner Prince's lyrics.]

Although his early performances were marked by explicit lyrics and onstage sexuality, after he became a Jehovah's Witness, Prince did not directly or indirectly condone sexual immorality. In a YouTube clip titled, *Prince "Flees from Fornication"⁴ on The View*, Sherry Shepard, (one of the co-hosts) said the following to Prince: "You don't understand Prince. I have wanted to make love to you for my whole life. I'm sorry." The moment that Sheppard made this comment, Prince immediately stands up, waves good bye to the crowd, and exits the stage. As noted by Robert Angel, who uploaded this video clip on December 11, 2010, "Prince makes a surprise visit to the set of *The View*, but then makes a mad dash off the set when Sherri Shepherd makes an inappropriate slutty comment. As one of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses, Brother Prince Rogers Nelson stays on the higher moral ground." (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEvuMHXfbAM>).

Discussion

This manuscript used a qualitative content analysis to examine how Prince demonstrated his belief in God, his values, and the changes that he made in his life after he became a devout Jehovah's Witness. Although his former friend and mentor, Larry Graham acknowledged: "It's a side of him most people don't know," his post Jehovah's Witness song lyrics and interview commentary provide considerable insight into how the Jehovah's Witness faith supported the social identity of Prince.

³ Put away from yourselves every kind of malicious bitterness, anger, wrath, screaming, and abusive speech, as well as everything injurious (New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures 2013).

⁴ According to JW.org, the Bible clearly states that "God will judge fornicators." (Hebrews 13:4). The Greek word for "fornication," *por-nei'a*, includes premarital sex ([https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/should-we-live-together/#?insight\[search_id\]=4e9f1573-55d5-4568-8229-462f111acaa6&insight\[search_result_index\]=1](https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/should-we-live-together/#?insight[search_id]=4e9f1573-55d5-4568-8229-462f111acaa6&insight[search_result_index]=1)).

Table 2 Song title, original Prince’s lyrics, and new, cleaner Prince’s lyrics

Song title	Original Prince’s lyrics	New, cleaner Prince’s lyrics
Darling Nikki	“I met her in a hotel lobby/ Masturbating with a magazine.”	“I met her in a hotel lobby/ Taking a personality quiz with a magazine.”
Erotic City	“We can fuck until the dawn/Makin’ love ‘til cherry’s gone.”	“We can work until the dawn/ Takin’ breaks for cherry scones.”
Sexy Motherfucker	“Sexy motherfucker, shakin’ that ass.”	“Flexing monster truck-er, breakin’ that glass.”
Let’s Pretend We’re Married	“I sincerely wanna fuck the taste out of your mouth.”	“I sincerely wanna get a nice little place and move down South.”
Pussy Control	“Are U ready 4 the best Pussy U ever felt?”	“It’s so fluffy I’m gonna die!”

Semigran (2016). Prince won’t use curse words anymore in his songs & sets an amazing example. Retrieved from <http://www.bustle.com/articles/23432-prince-wont-use-curse-words-anymore-in-his-songs-sets-an-amazing-example>

Prince’s pre-Jehovah’s Witness identity was highly sexual, provocative, and controversial. The song *Darling Nikki*, a track on *Purple Rain* about masturbation provoked Tipper Gore to set up the Parents Music Resource Centre (PMRC), to monitor “pornographic” content in rock music and lobby the industry to classify records in the same way as films (Chastagner 1999; Grow 2015). While *Darling Nikki* was labeled one of “The Filthy 15,”⁵ the Prince-penned “Sugar Walls” (sung by Sheena Easton) and “Strap on ‘Robbie Baby’” (sung by Prince Protégée, Vanity) were also noted for their highly sexual lyrics. Paradoxically, even though Prince had a solid image as a sexual libertine, in reality, he had a moralistic streak, disapproving of drink and drugs and forbidding his band from dabbling in either. In essence, this hints to stark differences between the private and public behaviors of Prince as well as how his personal introspection (spirituality) lead him to the Jehovah’s Witness faith (religion) (Chaney 2008; Chicago Tribune 2016; Stark and Iannaccone 1997).

Recall that social identity is a person’s sense of who they are based on their group membership(s) and is based on such constructs as race, gender, social class, clothing, and language (Bottero 2004; Crane 2012; Devine 1992; Gumperz 1982; Jenkins 2014; Mandell and Johnson 2017; Shayo 2009; Wharton 1992). For a social identity to develop, an individual must perceive the group could enhance his life. Prince’s mentor and spiritual teacher, Larry Graham acknowledged “Prince had all of these questions that he would ask me, and we had Bible study pretty much before and after our show” (Heigl 2016). Thus, it seems that Prince was attracted to the Jehovah’s Witness faith because Larry Graham provided satisfactory answers to many of his religious questions. As noted by Tajfel (2010) and Gilroy (1997), a social identity is based on aspects that one shares with group members as well as aspects that one shares with group members that differ from individuals outside of the group. Through the process of making “us” versus “them” comparisons, Prince publicly made known his membership with the Jehovah’s Witness faith by stating during an NAACP Awards Program that although “awards are wonderful all praise and glory are due to the true God Jehovah.”

⁵ (1) Judas Priest, “Eat Me Alive”; (2) Mötley Crüe, “Bastard”; (3) Prince, “Darling Nikki”; (4) Sheena Easton, “Sugar Walls”; (5) W.A.S.P., “Animal (Fuck Like a Beast)”; (6) Mercyful Fate, “Into the Coven”; (7) Vanity, “Strap On ‘Robbie Baby’”; (8) Def Leppard, “High ‘n’ Dry (Saturday Night)”; (9) Twisted Sister, “We’re Not Gonna Take It”; (10) Madonna, “Dress You Up”; (11) Cyndi Lauper, “She Bop”; (12) AC/DC, “Let Me Put My Love Into You”; (13) Black Sabbath, “Trashed”; (14) Mary Jane Girls, “In My House”; and (15) Venom, “Possessed.”

Through the process of categorization, Prince compared what he initially believed against what he later learned in the bible (Tajfel and Turner 2004). Case in point: After learning Jesus Christ died on a stake, or “stauros” instead of a cross, he changed the title of the song “The Cross” to “The Christ,” and during a public performance of this song says the following, “perhaps someone lied about the way someone died.” This public action suggests that when Prince learned the truth about how Christ died, he saw the need to have his music reflect the truth. On a more subtle level, Prince is also urging his listeners to critically examine what their religions are teaching them, as well. Since he was “lied” to regarding the way that Christ died, it is possible that he and others are victims of other religious untruths. Essentially, it was this quest for the truth that motivated Prince to continue studying the bible with Jehovah’s Witnesses. However, this is not to imply that Prince did not believe in God before he became acquainted with Jehovah’s Witnesses. In the song *Controversy* (1981), Prince includes “The Lord’s Prayer,” and in the single *1999* (1982), he narrates a judgment day where life is just a party, “but parties weren’t meant to last.” As previously mentioned, the songs *God* (1984), *God Is Everywhere* (1985), and *God Is Alive* (1988) all hint at Prince’s belief in God. In particular, the song *God* (1984) expresses confidence in the creation account (In the beginning/There was God/He made the earth/And the heavens) as well as God’s impartiality (Now you say/God made you/God made me/He made us all equally). In *God Is Everywhere* (1985), Prince recognizes that “without God, it wasn’t there, now he feels it everywhere” and “before the truth, I did not care, now I feel it everywhere.” In *God Is Alive* (1988), Prince assures the public that his very life supports the existence of God (“I’m a livin’ witness That God’s alive!”). Through the process of categorization, Prince understood his relationship to God and, thus, felt the need to personally identify with the religious group that Larry Graham introduced to him in 2001.

Prince entered the social identification stage when he became a baptized Jehovah’s Witness on April March 23, 2003 (Lah and Hannah 2016), thereby lining his thinking and behavior with the norms present in the Jehovah’s Witness faith. During a 2009 interview with Tavis Smiley, Prince shared that he did not vote as he “had no dog in that race.” When Smiley asked him why he did not vote, Prince made a subtle yet powerful distinction between himself and Smiley. Even though they were both Black males, at that moment, Prince made it clear they were two Black males that had distinctively different views regarding politics. Instead of implying their political differences were due to philosophically different ways of viewing the world, Prince said, “The reason why is that I’m one of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. And we’ve never voted. That’s not to say I don’t think ... President Obama is a very smart individual and he seems like he means well. Prophecy is what we all have to go by now.” Through these words, Prince socially identifies with Jehovah’s Witness belief of not becoming involved in political affairs (by not campaigning for nor recommending that others vote for a specific political party or political candidate), acknowledges the intelligence of Barack Obama, and yet recognizes that prophecy, as found in the bible, is most important. In particular, he socially identified with Jehovah’s Witnesses by attending congregation meetings, commenting during those meetings, reading the bible daily, and frequently engaging in the door-to-door ministry. Although he was a world-renowned celebrity, Prince willingly adopted the thinking and behavior of the group, which greatly fostered his self-esteem. In particular, Prince socially identified with the Jehovah’s Witness faith by specifically mentioning this during interviews, not directly or indirectly supporting sexual immorality (when Sherry Shepherd publicly admitted that she has

“always” wanted to “make love” to Prince) and by specifically mentioning the name Jehovah during several award shows. Through these examples, Prince uses his celebrity to direct others to the source of truth (Jehovah’s Witnesses), distances himself from his former overt sexuality (he would not discuss sex, even when a female on a television show candidly voiced her desire to have sex with him), and proudly voices the name of God during public award shows.

There were several instances where Prince engaged in the last stage, social comparison. When he received the most acclaimed honor given by Black Entertainment Television (BET), he used this opportunity to compare his pre-Jehovah’s Witness and post-Jehovah’s Witness identities. When he received the Top Honor (Lifetime Achievement) Award at the Top Honor at the BET Awards in 2010 he said, “I was pretty wild in my younger days and you don’t have to do what I did, you don’t have to make any of the same mistakes I made. The future is in your hands now. The world is really yours.” (Prince talk about Jehovah Witness Religion 2016). Through these words, the Jehovah’s Witness Prince accomplishes two things. First, he reminds his audience of his “wild” Pre-Jehovah’s Witness identity, through which he made “mistakes.” Second, Prince reminds his audience of his current Jehovah’s Witness identity, which is evidence that people have the power to shape their own destinies by making notable changes in their lives.

Prince’s social identity was based on the religious foundations of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Therefore, Prince aligned his thinking and behavior with that of the individuals with whom he consciously chose to associate. As a devout Jehovah’s Witness, Prince’s international celebrity did not prevent him from being baptized in the faith, attending religious services, reading his bible daily, or engaging in door-to-door proselytizing. More important, in a world where he is recognized for his immense talent and celebrity, he insisted that his church family refer to him as “Brother Nelson.” As a Jehovah’s Witness, he did not support gay marriage, did not get involved in electoral politics (i.e., he did not vote for the first Black US president, Barack Obama), and did not accept blood transfusions (Hawkins 2016).

Although Prince believed in God, as many of the songs that he wrote for himself and others suggest, this belief was not static throughout his life. According to his friend and collaborator Sheila E., Prince’s belief in God was stronger at certain times in his life than others. She noted, “When I first met him he believed in God, but after that there was a time when it seemed like he didn’t believe in anything, but then he became a Witness, and I felt, for him, that believing in something was better than nothing.” When asked about his conversion to the Jehovah’s Witness faith during a 2008 *Washington Post* interview, Prince remarks: “I don’t see it really as a conversion. More, you know, it’s a realization. It’s like Morpheus and Neo in *The Matrix*” (Boorstein 2016). It is particularly noteworthy that Prince referenced these fictional characters when discussing his social identification with Jehovah’s Witnesses.

In *The Matrix*,⁶ a 1999 film written and directed by The Wachowski Brothers, Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) offers Neo (Keanu Reeves) the choice between a red

⁶ *The Matrix* is a 1999 science fiction film written and directed by The Wachowskis, starring Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, Carrie-Anne Moss, Hugo Weaving, and Joe Pantoliano. It depicts a dystopian future in which reality as perceived by most humans is actually a simulated reality called “the Matrix,” created by sentient machines to subdue the human population, while their bodies’ heat and electrical activity are used as an energy source. Computer programmer “Neo” learns this truth and is drawn into a rebellion against the machines, which involves other people who have been freed from the “dream world” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Matrix).

pill and a blue pill. The red pill allows Neo to learn the truth about the Matrix, while the blue pill allows him to return to his old life. Correspondingly, by offering Prince (Neo—Larry Graham’s spiritual pupil) the red pill (satisfactory answers to his many spiritual questions), Larry Graham (Morpheus—Prince’s spiritual teacher) made it possible for this exceptionally skilled musician to further crystallize his spiritual values (i.e., using the name of Jehovah God, recognizing the Bible as the Word of God, acknowledging Jehovah’s Witnesses as the source of truth, associating with Jehovah’s Witnesses, and door-to-door proselytizing). Perhaps more important, the consumption of the red pill allowed Prince to completely abandon his pre-Jehovah’s Witness highly sexualized identity and create a new social identity in which Jehovah God and the values of the Jehovah’s Witness faith took priority in his life.

In a 2001 interview, Prince appears to express internal conflict regarding his own sexual lyrics. He said: “When I look at the violence, I wonder where the parents are, but also where is God in their lives? A kid is an open computer ready for programming. Some weird relationships happen, smoking too early and sex.” While these words may seem contradictory from the man who skyrocketed to fame by singing sexually explicit lyrics in bikini briefs, it appears that on a deeper level, Prince realized the potential negative impact of his lyrics, especially on children. While his membership with the conservative Jehovah’s Witness faith may appear strange, Prince’s actual values, even before becoming a Jehovah’s Witness were more conservative than what appeared. As noted by Touré (2013) in the Prince biography *I Would Die 4 U*: “Prince intended sexuality to be linked the worship of God, and he filled his music with classic Christian messages” and that although Prince “was sexual” he was “ultimately, very conservative.” Part of his conservatism may have been linked to his Seventh Day Adventist upbringing (Garrison 2016, http://www.al.com/living/index.ssf/2016/04/the_faith_of_prince_seventh-da.html). Thus, it appears that the Jehovah’s Witness faith was already compatible with Prince’s intrinsic conservatism, belief in Jehovah God, his value of the Bible, and motivation to publicly share bible truths with others.

Conclusion

While Prince set the record of five albums in the Top 10 of Billboard’s 200 Chart (Caulfield 2016),⁷ and was noted by Billboard as “The greatest musical talent of his generation” (<https://twitter.com/billboard/status/740302414167855104>), as evidenced by videotaped and print interviews by Prince and those who knew and loved him, he regarded the Jehovah’s Witness faith as seriously as he did his music. As noted by CNN Correspondent Kyuang Lah, and supported by various individuals within his St. Louis Park Congregation in Hopkins, Minnesota, Prince was committed to “working as hard at his religion as he did in his music career.” However, Prince’s closest friends would not necessarily agree with this statement. His good friend and mentor Larry Graham poignantly noted what Prince would want to most be known for: “A lot of people will

⁷ On the list dated May 14—reflecting activity in the week ending April 28, the first full tracking week following Prince’s death on April 21—the artist is found at Nos. 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7 with *The Very Best of Prince*, *Purple Rain*, *The Hits/The B-Sides*, *Ultimate*, and *1999*, respectively. In total, Prince has a record 19 albums on the 200-position list.

remember Prince for his music. But he'd also want people to know what he learned from the bible. We lost a really good friend and a spiritual brother." Even though Prince's spiritual brothers and sisters miss him, they are confident in God's promise that they will see him again. As noted by Brother Lundstrom, "We expect Brother Nelson to be resurrected here on earth just like the Bible says." (Lah 2016).

Even though he was a world-renowned artist, Prince wanted the world to know that he was a Jehovah's Witness. Although notoriously private in his personal life [1 year after his death, his first ex-wife Mayte Garcia (2017) discusses her relationship with the enigmatic musician], this immensely talented performer was searching for purpose in his life. In one of his most-famous songs, *1999* (1982), Prince makes the following declaration: "But life is just a party and parties weren't meant to last." Through these lyrics, Prince acknowledges that one cannot build a truly meaningful life through constant revelry. By becoming a baptized, Jehovah's Witness, Prince in essence, buried the highly sexualized persona that catapulted him to fame and replaced it with an identity that is shared by almost eight million individuals and offers him a secure future. It is especially noteworthy that during the BET Awards in 2010, Prince shares that even though he was "wild in his younger days," people do not have to emulate him or "make the same mistakes that he made." During this moment, Prince uses this vocal space to advise anyone who seeks to imitate him or believes that he has no regrets, that he regards his pre-Jehovah's Witness behaviors as a "mistake." Although he does not specifically state what those mistakes were, it is evident that Prince does not want to be remembered for the persona that may have directly or indirectly caused others to stray. Recall that "values explain the motivational bases of attitudes and behavior" (Schwartz 2012, p. 3), and by using the name of Jehovah God, recognizing the Bible as the Word of God, acknowledging Jehovah's Witnesses as the source of truth, associating with Jehovah's Witnesses, and door-to-door proselytizing, Prince aligned his attitudes and behavior with the standards of his faith.

In the Prince biography *I Would Die 4 U*, Touré (2013) noted: "He [Prince] created a cosmology and a spiritual outlook that made sense to him. His way of explaining that great blessing to himself was that he was blessed by God, he was anointed. His work and his creative life was proof of God and God working through him." In this memoir, Touré (2013) recounts a conversation with Prince Guitarist Dez Dickerson, through which they discussed three distinct social identities present in this artist. "There's maybe three Prince Personas. One of them is a very calculated marketing mind. That's where the 'embodying pure sex' thing comes from. Another of them is 'I'm gonna be the baddest musician there ever was.'" "And then there's the guy who really is thoughtful and introspective and holds religious considerations close to his heart and ponders those questions sincerely and genuinely and deeply. And those are the three guys who, over the years, have vied for the microphone." For those that knew him best, during the last 13 years of his life, Prince's "sincere, genuine, and deep" religious convictions overshadowed his "calculated marketing mind" and "baddest musician" identities. Although Prince has been dubbed "the world's most famous Jehovah's Witness" (Ranker 2016), the world will never forget his indisputable talent nor how he publicly transformed from the "dirty mind" crooner to a devout, Jehovah's Witness, simply known to his church family as Brother Nelson.

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