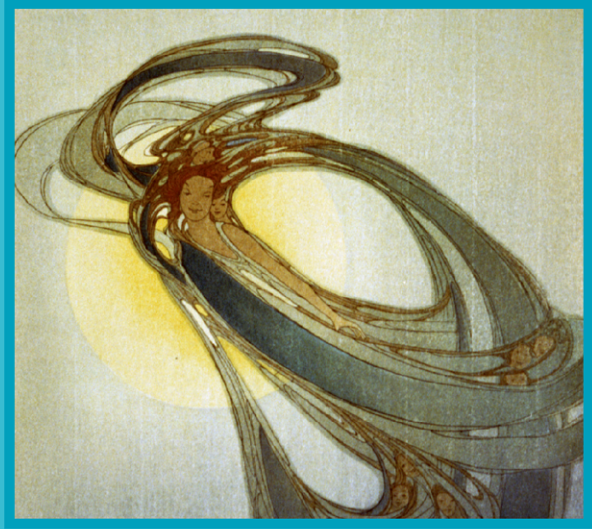


Black Religion / Womanist Thought / Social Justice



Self, Culture, and Others in Womanist Practical Theology

Phillis Isabella Sheppard



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SELF, CULTURE, AND OTHERS IN WOMANIST PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

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Series Editors' Preface

Is it possible to be black, beautiful, woman, and a human being at the commencement of the twenty-first century? Such a question, though *prima facie* provocative, undergirds a profound psychoanalytical doctrine of theological anthropology in the contemporary postmodern world.

For instance, the backdrop of the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment shifted categories of the West in contrast to the worldview of its future (nineteenth-century) African colonies. "I think therefore I am" (Descartes' seventeenth-century epistemological turn to the self) and "what is Enlightenment?" (Kant's eighteenth-century piercing querying essay) mark reification of new forms of hierarchy with life and death and psychological-aesthetic implications for women of African descent. Though such new Western thought categories and questioning unleashed unparalleled progressive patterns of worldviews and freedoms, the European Enlightenment reflection of the modern impulse disallowed room for Africa's embracing of the intriguing subtleties of the everyday grace and trials of the African woman. Now, normative human ontology resided in reason, Greek phenotype, and male status. All three cut against the grain of nature's and creation's gift of the black beautiful woman.

The primordial case in point: the August 1619 violent and forced arrival of twenty Africans to Jamestown, Virginia colony (British and Anglican), marked the symbolic and literal beginning of African Americans, black Americans, Africans in the diaspora, or Americans of African descent. More specifically, it revealed the new creation of a human category called black American women. Why? Because three of the twenty enslaved Africans on the Dutch Man-of-War ship, which stole these enslaved humans to the British citizens of Jamestown, were African women. In that sense, each black American woman today heralds from the genealogical tradition of those three women. At that

time, space, and place, the African American woman was formed. And there the seeds of today's womanist theology can be possibly traced, if not in bloodline then at least in imagination.

Yet, enslavement into Jamestown tells one part. These women were Africans who brought a rich worldview and practice of getting things done for themselves, their families, ancestors, and larger communities. Integrated psyches, sophisticated knowledge and experiences of handling wealth, organizing institutions, educating generations, adjudicating disputes, dispensing medicine, and engineering the construction of societies flowed through the energy in their bodies. These African sojourners were snatched from homelands where parents groomed their children to be proactive thinkers toward practically owning and building communities.

Though hailing from a background where their families owned resources, these three African women crossed the seas as the enslaved and were bartered/sold as private property in modern fashion of emerging capitalism, and they entered a European colony already stamped with preconceived notions of racial pigmentation asymmetry. Yes, it is true that Western Europe's solidification of world racial hierarchy realizes itself in the nineteenth-century "science of man" with its cranial, forehead, nose, foot, buttocks, lips, and other body measurements. Here too, Darwin's survival-of-the-fittest-guesses were grafted into social Darwinism. Here in the nineteenth century, even the political left submitted to the modern progress of history when Marxism claimed that, in the origin of the species, private property, and the state, as well as in the inevitable human progress to socialism, Africa, among all of the world's peoples, had no history.

And let us not forget that modern creation of the term "race" was married intricately to the Christian God. Particularly, the overwhelming rationale, or at least the cultural context, for the seventeenth-century explorations, eighteenth-century philosophies, and nineteenth-century colonization projects was Christian adherence to the biblical warrant. In a word, the declassification of blackness as subhuman (the curse of Ham) and woman as subservient (be submissive in church) came from Jesus Christ.

Against such long and complex formations and reformations, Phillis Sheppard has offered us a gift. She puts forth one basic claim: beauty, blackness, and womanhood are the liberating and sustaining gifts from God. Womanism, among other profound and pioneering efforts, asserts that, through it all, black-woman-beautiful remains. She survives and has a quality of life for herself, her family, her church,

and her community. And now that the number one woman in the United States is black, we can also add, for her nation. Yet, survival and quality of life accompanies freedom and liberation, especially in the linking of sexuality with black and beautiful.

Indeed, Sheppard presents a novel thought and way of being in the world. She coins the black-woman-beautiful phrase of a womanist practical theology of the psychological and the cultural. We call her thinking a gift because this theology takes care of black woman's particularity and has arms big enough to embrace all. Isn't that what the womanist tradition has been saying for some time? Perhaps that is why womanists have been some of the leaders arguing for a holistic theology. In the race-gender-class-sexuality-ecosensitive experience of womanists, we encompass all of humankind. Sheppard has, indeed, continued our tradition, which is a good news for theological anthropology.

Phillis Sheppard's theological theory and psychoanalytic practical compassion fall within the best part of this tradition. In fact, it represents one definite dimension of the black religion/womanist thought/social justice series' pioneering conceptual work and boundary-pushing effort. This series will publish both authored and edited manuscripts that have depth, breadth, and theoretical edge and will address both academic and nonspecialist audiences. It will produce works engaging any dimension of black religion or womanist thought as they pertain to social justice. Womanist thought is a new approach in the study of African American women's perspectives. The series will include a variety of African American religious expressions. By this we mean traditions such as Protestant and Catholic Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Humanism, African diasporic practices, religion and gender, religion and black gays/lesbians, ecological justice issues, African American religiosity and its relation to African religions, Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, new black religious movements (for example, Daddy Grace, Father Divine, or the Nation of Islam), or religious dimensions in African American "secular" experiences (such as the spiritual aspects of aesthetic efforts like the Harlem Renaissance and literary giants such as James Baldwin, or the religious fervor of the Black Consciousness movement, or the religion of compassion in the black women's club movement).

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Black As You See Me

When in 1983 Delores Williams asked her question “How (or can) Feminism be ‘colorized’ so that it also speaks the black women’s tongue, so that it tells the very truth of the black woman’s historical existence in North America?”¹ she brought to the foreground black women’s experience as the starting point for engaging in black women’s theological conversations. Experience, of course, is now well established as an epistemological category in black, feminist, and practical theologies. Bonnie Miller-McLemore noted that one of the ramifications of feminist theory on practical theology was that “understanding lived subjective experience becomes an important means of mapping the making and unmaking of culture in a variety of fields in religious studies.”² And yet, well after Williams penned her words, pastoral theologian Carroll Watkins Ali recalled in the same publication as Miller-McLemore that during her seminary education the “literature of introductory courses in pastoral care revealed that the accepted literature in the field omitted issues of race, gender and class. Therefore, irrelevancy of this literature was obvious when I considered my social location, the unmet needs of the vast majority of African Americans, and my own needs.”³ Charles Taylor challenged the discipline by stating that “the main resource that the Black experience can bring to pastoral theology is the experience of a tradition which is outside of the male Euro-American liberal protestant ghetto—yet has ties to it.”⁴

It was not the valuing of experience, even of women’s experience, that made Williams’ pronouncement a radical shift in feminist theological studies, but rather the fact that she made *black women’s experience* the privileged position for theology of, by, and about black women. She forced an analysis of the differences womanists and feminists bring to the table when theorizing “experience”: “We cannot

suppose that feminist/womanist connection in pioneering is smooth and free of tension.”⁵ She made clear the reality of these tensions in redefining Adrienne Rich’s definition of patriarchy by beginning with the experiences of black women. Patriarchy, she said, was

a familial-social ideological political system in which [white men and white women] by force, direct pressure or through ritual tradition, law and language customs, etiquette, education and division of labor determine what part [black women] shall or shall not play, and in which the [black female] is everywhere subsumed under the [white female] and white male.⁶

She eventually moved from a black feminist perspective to one based on Alice Walker’s description of a womanist. Walker’s notion of womanist was developed in her writing over the course of several years, beginning in 1979 with her short story “Coming Apart,”⁷ about the transformation of a black couple after the woman discovers her husband using pornography. When she persists in asking him why he reads it, why he needs it, and over the course of several months reveals to him that she feels hurt and degraded by his use of it, he stops bringing his magazines home but in resentment accuses her of being a feminist. The wife thinks, “I have never considered myself a feminist, though I am a Womanist. A Womanist is a feminist only more common.”⁸ In this beginning piece, Walker privileges both “common folk”—black women living regular ordinary lives—and an approach that moves between the intrapsychic and the social domains: “the wife” and “the husband” are in New York and are bombarded by images of female prostitutes and life-size dolls, and “the wife” is immovable. “Her face suffering and wondering. . . . Four large plastic dolls . . . one poised for anal inspection; . . . and a Black woman dressed entirely in leopard skin, complete with a tail. . . . For her this is the stuff of nightmares because the dolls are smiling. She will see them for the rest of her life. For him the sight is also shocking, but arouses a prurient curiosity.”⁹ The wife is determined to help—or rather to make—her husband understand her experience. Walker achieves this by providing a social analysis of pornography and the exploitation of black women, and black men’s participation in it. She intersperses with her analysis the work of Audre Lorde and other black feminists. The husband “looks at her with resentment. He realizes he can never have her again sexually, the way he has had her . . . as though her body belonged to someone else. He feels oppressed by her incipient struggle, and feels

her struggle to change the pleasure he has enjoyed is a violation of his rights.”¹⁰ Later he is sick that he has “bought [into] some if not all of the advertisements about women, black and white. And further, inevitably...about himself.”¹¹ During this period the husband and wife are apart for a time: “to clear their heads. To search out damage. To heal.”¹² They involve themselves in self-awareness, regret, mourning, and understanding the way in which social contexts are deeply embedded in the psyche and the experiences of the body. And with this awareness comes suffering in the service of transformation.

Walker’s next, and most quoted, definition of womanism is from her volume *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, where she describes a womanist as being “a feminist or feminist of color. Being grown-up. In charge. Serious. A woman who loves other women, sexually or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men. Committed to the survival of and wholeness of a whole people. Not a separatist except periodically for health. And finally, Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.”¹³ The ethicist Katie Cannon has described womanism as “an endeavor to identify African American women’s moral agency,”¹⁴ and she says that a womanist theological ethic places black women at the center and “is a critique of all human domination in light of black women’s experience, a faith praxis that un.masks whatever threatens the well-being of black women.”¹⁵ Theologian Shawn Copeland adds: “It seems to me that [a] Womanist perspective can contribute to the reshaping and expansion of black theology. The term Womanist gives voice to African American women....”¹⁶ These voices rightly joined the voices already naming the inextricable link between gender and race—a link that could no longer be ignored and that has transformed how we hear and respond to black women’s experience.

In one of her most recent publications, and very late in her professional life, Margaret Morgan Lawrence, the first black person to receive psychoanalytic training in the United States, wrote: “Love, Spirit, or Soul that permits humanization of the other, a recognition of our common humanity, commits us all, I believe, to a concern for justice and peace for all people. It is a commitment which we may share with those with whom we work.”¹⁷ I have never met Lawrence, but I welcome her desire to bring into dialogue black and gendered experience and psychoanalysis. She grew up in Mississippi in a family of privilege in the black community, protected, as far as she knew, from the brutalities of Southern racism. As the daughter of a respected Episcopalian minister, living in a family determined to hold racism at bay, Lawrence matured

perhaps in greater awareness of her privilege than of the horrors of black-white relations at the time. She was accepted into the Columbia Medical School in 1936, after completing undergraduate studies at Cornell—but only after she had suffered the injustice of being rejected by Cornell Medical School because a black male student, admitted in a previous year, had not performed well. She was one of ten women who graduated from Columbia in 1940. After completing medical school, Lawrence went on to become a psychiatrist and the first African American trained in psychoanalysis in the United States, as well as the first black female pediatrician to be certified by the American Board of Pediatrics,¹⁸ in addition to earning a certificate from the New York Psychoanalytic Institute. She authored two books, *The Mental Health Team in the Schools* and *Young Inner City Families*, and numerous articles. She was a founding board member of the Harlem Family Institute, a clinic providing low-cost psychoanalytic treatment as well as training to clinicians with a post-master's degree.¹⁹

Although her life exemplifies the hopes, pride, and convictions of a southern black family and community, it also reveals the psychic and cultural legacy of racism. As documented in *Balm in Gilead: Journey of a Healer*, the biography of Lawrence by her daughter, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, the stain of racism penetrated far beneath the surface of self, family, and all shapes of relationships in Lawrence's life. As a young doctor in residence, Lawrence had worked at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in New York City. Speaking to her daughter fifty years later, having now lived through the northern version of Jim Crowism—academic segregation, underemployment, senseless obstacles placed in her path, and, regardless of northern myths of racial acceptance, the thorough ugliness of racism—Lawrence briefly relives the self-consciousness imposed by racism. She examines her hands. “If only I had on my white coat . . . I could put them in my pockets . . . Here I am, black as you see me . . . Here are my hands, exposed . . .” What was it that lingered in her memory with such strength as to reawaken half a century later these feelings of difference, self-consciousness, and exposure? After a life of professional and personal success, having made enormous contributions to the field of mental health, this sense of difference remained an old and lasting mnemonic of her consciousness of her black self and the frequent hostility she encountered to her blackness and gender. In laying herself open to her scholar daughter, demonstrating an acute capacity for introspection and a willingness to plumb the depths of her own experience, Lawrence offered valuable lessons of love and integrity for all of us.

Lawrence's life is beautiful in its stark revelation of the complexity of black experience, forcing those of us who witness it into dreaded territory. Her older brother, called Candy-man, died before she was born. "My brother died about two years before I was born; but I always seemed to know that the beautiful boy whose almost life-sized picture graced the living room was my major competitor for my mother's affections."²⁰ He had been the adored, almost white-looking child with light honey-colored skin. The picture of him that occupied a position of prominence in the living room also did so in her psychoanalysis.

Lawrence had dreams of dying beneath this picture—beneath this picture of her almost white-looking brother. And how could she not have dreamt of dying beneath the weight of such a representation of beauty and desirability—such blond hair and white skin? Brilliant and gifted, Margaret Lawrence lived under an oppressive pressure of being "almost white." How had her parents' unfinished mourning become intertwined in her psyche with the near-universal preference for whiteness or at least light-skinned blackness? How does the war between color apartheid and self-esteem take up residence in one's psyche? How is it sustained personally, interpersonally, and culturally? Lawrence suffered under the spoken and unspoken individual, familial, and cultural meanings of her brother Candy-man—meanings that all coalesced around the elevated status of whiteness.

Lawrence, however, does not collapse under this weight. For her faithful commitment to peace and pacifism, she received in 2003 the Sayre Award from the Episcopal Peace Fellowship, an organization in which she had held membership since 1943. She did not collapse, and instead grew personally, professionally, and spiritually. She took seriously the religion and faith that was handed down to her, as we see by the way she ends her article, "The Roots of Love and Commitment in Childhood," with a quotation from Camille Warbrough's book, *Cornrows*: "There is a spirit that lives inside of you. It keeps growing. It never dies. Sometimes, when you're hurt and ready to give up, it barely flickers. But it keeps growing. It never dies..."²¹ The questions evoked by her life are relevant for many of us: What keeps the spirit alive and growing? How did the love of black family and black community counter the debilitating effects of painful family dynamics and life in the Jim Crow South? How did it shape her personal and professional desire—her desire to be a wife and parent, and a physician, psychiatrist, and psychoanalyst in Harlem, serving African American families? How are we to understand the lasting internal effects—and the persistence—of racism? How does the experience of

being black and woman in the United States shape and form us for a lifetime?

This book grapples with these kinds of questions in order that a way might be cleared for a womanist practical theology that takes seriously the psychological and the cultural. Womanist theology, with its commitment to social and cultural analysis and to a theological theme emerging out of the experiences of black women, is poised for the development of such a practical theology. As feminists and black practical theologians have pointed out, for womanists this is a delicate task because, in the final analysis, we cannot “find the root of [black] women’s oppression [solely] embedded in their psyche.”²² However, without a deep engagement with psychoanalytic theory, womanist theology cannot fully account for the complexities of black women’s experience—the kinds of experiences that precede celebration, love, sorrow, rage, or grief, the kinds of experiences that Lawrence’s life reveals, and the kinds of experiences that many of us have survived. Social analysis and cultural critique are crucial for womanist approaches, but, without a psychoanalytic perspective, they alone cannot offer a robust practical theology.

Particularity and Womanist Perspectives

Since its inauguration in the work of theologians Delores Williams, Katie Cannon, Renita Weems, and Jacquelyn Grant, as well as literary critics Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and Clenora Hudson Weems in the 1980s, womanist theology and thought has, first of all, challenged the dualisms fueled and sustained by racism, sexism, classism, and, to a growing degree, heterosexism; and it has maintained an epistemological standpoint grounded in the experiences and perspectives of black women. As the theological anthropologist Linda Thomas writes, “Womanist theology takes seriously the importance of understanding the ‘languages’ of black women,” emphasizing that “there are a variety of discourses deployed by African American women based on their social location within the black community.”²³ This epistemological grounding is essential. Particularity—who we are and where we stand in relation to each other, along with the effects that social structures have on our lives and on the communities around us—informs us and is a source of knowledge.

This commitment to particularity, Patricia Hill Collins reminds us, “demonstrates African American women’s emerging power as agents of knowledge.”²⁴ Emilie Townes holds that it is the *only* starting place

from which to enter dialogue with others: “I am interested in exploring the depths of African American life—female and male,” she writes. “For it is in exploring these depths, in taking seriously my particularity—not as a form of essentialism, but as epistemology—where I can meet and greet others for we are intricately and intimately interwoven in our postmodern culture.”²⁵ Central to this epistemology is the recognition that black women’s lives cannot be engaged independently of the converging realities of color, gender, and racial categorization.²⁶

In her edited volume, *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, Townes brings together womanist theorists to offer fourteen powerful essays confronting social sin and its impact on black women’s lives. Though these essays do not specifically refer to psychoanalytic theory to examine black women’s experience, they are nonetheless noteworthy for their potential to direct us toward a psychoanalytic turn. For example, M. Shawn Copeland, in “Wading through Many Sorrows: Toward a Theology of Suffering in Womanist Perspective,” declares that “suffering always means pain, disruption, separation, and incompleteness. It can render us powerless and mute, push us to the borders of hopelessness and despair. Suffering can maim, wither or cripple the heart” and “suffering is the disturbance of our inner tranquility” caused by physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual forces that *we grasp as jeopardizing our lives, our very existence*.²⁷ Copeland turns to the slave narratives written by black women to address black women’s experience of suffering. This choice of slave narrative is important to her: most well-known slave narratives are those written by men, yet “male slave narrators often render Black women invisible... [T]hey are depicted as the pitiable subjects of brutal treatment or benign nurturers who help the fugitive in his quest for freedom.”²⁸ “Black women slave narratives offer a stiff antidote to these cultural stereotypes”²⁹ because these women, as the literary critic Hazel Carby reminds us, “document their sufferings and brutal treatment but in the context that is also the story of the resistance to that brutality.”³⁰ Copeland then develops “resources for Womanist resistance” consisting of memory that “gave the slaves access to naming, placing, recovery, and the reconstruction of identity, culture and self.”³¹ These resources of resistance shape aspects of the womanist theology of suffering, which involves the following: (1) “it grows in the dark soil of African-American religious tradition, is intimate with African American women’s culture, and it holds itself accountable to black women’s self-understandings, self judgments and self-evaluation; (2) it repels every tendency toward spiritualization of evil and suffering,

of pain and oppression; and (3) it remembers and retells the lives and sufferings of those who came through (survived) and those who have gone to glory. This remembering honors the sufferings of the ancestors, known and unknown, and it evokes growth and change.”³²

By bringing suffering to the foreground and defining it in terms of its impact on “inner tranquility” and its power to “maim, wither, and cripple the heart,” along with her outline for a theology of suffering’s emphasis on remembering and retelling, Copeland has positioned womanist epistemology to specifically include the intrapsychic domain.

Psychoanalysis and Womanist Pastoral Perspectives

A brief perusal of the womanist literature for the most part reveals a gaping hole when it comes to the appropriation of psychoanalytic perspectives. One need not speculate too long to suggest that this avoidance and/or rejection has to be considered in light of the tainted history of the relationship between the earliest psychoanalytic forays into the psychoanalysis of gender, culture, and race, as well as the (mis)use of psychology to perpetuate stereotypes of African Americans, women, and the poor. Those who reject psychoanalytic theory do so primarily because the theories and clinical practices were developed based on the experiences of white middle-class patients, they retain the legacy of sexism in theory and practice, and are rooted in racist and ethnocentric assumptions. In other words, a distorted and ethnocentric view of culture and a male gender bias have from the outset been deeply embedded in psychological theories. These biases and uncritical assumptions surely account for most of womanist theology and black practical theologians avoiding psychoanalytical reference points.³³ Carroll Watkins Ali ultimately rejects the psychoanalytic model and instead seeks to integrate a black psychology and systems approach. The history of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy as it relates to African Americans is littered with examples of racism and sexism that ultimately render African Americans invisible, irrelevant, or pathological—which “is racial oppression.”³⁴ So Watkins-Ali argues that while “psychological theories based on a dominant culture”³⁵ “can contribute to the construction of an African American pastoral theology, we must acknowledge their inadequacies...The determinism of traditional psychology has not factored in the issues of race, gender, or class...[and] the emphasis on an individualistic approach limits its effectiveness for the

critical psychological needs of the African American community;”³⁶ ultimately, she too abandons the psychodynamic perspective and in so doing, to my mind, loses something important.

We must listen to the interior of a person not only to transform distorted self-images but also to transform distorted theories that perpetuate them. This is especially so when we assume that the content of the inner life comprises an interaction between self and culture and also between familiar and individual meaning-making processes. And this is why we must move beyond models that rely primarily on educational or pedagogical “therapy” in which one *learns* about the impact of racism. Such models define the meaning of the exchange between self and society rather than creating the space for it to emerge as black women’s reflection on their own lives.

Yet there are some womanists who do not reject psychoanalytic theory; among them are Caroline McCrary,³⁷ Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, Elizabeth Walker,³⁸ and Phillis Sheppard.³⁹ These four womanist practical theologians have been psychodynamically trained and have clinical practices. McCrary, in a very sophisticated article, uses W.R.D. Fairbairn’s object relations theory—in particular his concepts of internalization and mourning internal objects—along with Bantu-Rwandaise philosophy and Howard Thurman’s theology of community first to articulate a community of object relations’ perspective on interdependence, and then to apply it toward an understanding of black women and sexual abuse and the need for interdependence. I am very sympathetic to McCrary’s work and find the symmetry between our interests and our theological commitments to responding to the needs of African American women who have experienced violence and abuse compelling and useful.⁴⁰ Particularly useful is her discussion of the need to mourn negative objects⁴¹ that have been internalized and to explore the resistance to such mourning. However, though she creates a model for pastoral counseling with African American women, she does not develop the womanist aspects of her work or address the cultural need for mourning—meaning the need for the community to mourn the violence done to African American women and the ramifications of it in the community. Admittedly, her paper is primarily concerned with the pastoral counseling context rather than with identifying an overarching practical theology. The questions that excite me are related to what happens to the categories she adopts from Fairbairn and Thurman once placed in dialogue with African American women’s experience. Does the engagement with black women’s experience in any way critique or change the psychological theories? Does object relations theory bring

something to the theology that is new and necessary? Is Thurman critiquing a deficit in Fairbairn's work or do these ideas run on parallel tracks and intentionally not interrogate each other? And, finally, what are the implications of McCrary's work for how we understand the task of practical theology? Elizabeth Walker appropriates a self psychology, in a correlational model that appropriates Tillich's theology of process of grace, for the articulation of a model for pastoral counseling with African American women. Walker's focus is on the damaged self-esteem of women who have a destructive self split originating from the internalization of flawed images and early relationships.⁴² Finally, by not engaging Kohut's concepts of selfobject and cultural selfobject, Walker has missed an opportunity to make her connection between culture and self. My work resonates with these scholars' work and I think they raise crucial questions and contribute to any womanist discussion aimed at engaging the internal and external experiences making up aspects of black women's lives.

Womanist theologians would also benefit from examining how black feminist theorists beyond the boundaries of womanist theology make use of psychoanalytic theories. Specifically, for example, Claudia Tate, a black literary critic, uses psychoanalytic theory but also recognizes that doing so makes her "suspect" to some, "because I refer to psychoanalysis to advance my investigation... some will no doubt claim I'm having my 'roll in the hay' with Freud and company. Such a charge would insinuate the misgivings that many African Americans have about the relevance of psychoanalysis to black liberation, thus the general absence of psychoanalytic models in black intellectual discourse."⁴³ Both Tate and womanists privilege black women's literature as a source for analysis. Womanist Stacey Floyd-Thomas recognizes that to some degree "black feminist literary criticism and Womanist ethicists' analyses of literary texts are analogous in as much as they both seek to correct damaging... stereotypes of black women... yet... they are divergent in both their methodological means and theoretical ends."⁴⁴ A difference that separates them, she posits, is that literary criticism is not the end point for womanists. Womanists turn to the text to hear within them the "the strong tradition of charting the crux of black women's spirituality—their persistent questioning of theodicy, their spiritual strivings, and their radically immanent concepts of the divine."⁴⁵ I think Floyd-Thomas' perspective is a necessary reminder about the ultimate purposes of womanist analyses, but I also think she imposes too narrow an aim on literary criticism. Tate calls for a "racially contextualized model of psychoanalysis" to "help us to analyze black textuality.... Such a

model...can *advance our understandings of racialized behavior in other social settings as well*,⁴⁶ for she believes that “*psychoanalysis can help us to not only analyze black textuality but also effectively explain important aspects of the deep psychological foundations of the destructive attitudes and behaviors of racism*.”⁴⁷ Tate’s position is that race “remains a salient source of the fantasies and allegiances that shape our ways of reading all types of social experiences”⁴⁸ and requires more than a critical social analysis.

bell hooks expressed her longing for a dialogue between psychoanalysis and black experience. Her *Yearnings: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* stated it clearly: “I would like to see the production of a body of work on psychoanalysis and black experience. In my own life, I have been helped by reading the work of Alice Miller (though I think she has elements of mother blame). Her work in particular and other work that attempts to understand how the experience of trauma shapes personality and actions from childhood into adult life seem an important contribution for black people not sufficiently explored. We also need more black men and women entering the field of psychoanalysis.”⁴⁹ We cannot—must not—adopt psychoanalytic theories without a womanist critical reading and black women’s experience in an interrogating engagement. Yet, if we begin to appropriate the intrapsychic in womanist analysis, we will more fully represent the great complexity of black women’s relationships to their varied environments, as well as establish a basis for articulating the relationship between self and culture within their psychoanalytic theories. These features are essential for womanist practical theology.

Self psychology posits that mirroring is necessary for the formation of a cohesive, positive sense of self. “Observation has taught us,” writes psychoanalyst Esther Menaker, “that cultures and subcultures have profound effects on the social institutions through which personality is formed. Culture is the medium in which the self grows.” So what happens to this development of self when culture—a source for mirroring—offers a distorted and exploited reflection of the self? What happens when one’s body is exploited and violated by those who should provide this necessary mirroring?

To answer the question of what might be the relationship between self-development and culture, Western society has generally focused on the mother-child dyad, or the family system—nuclear and extended. We have yet to understand how broader cultural dynamics inform who we become or how we understand ourselves. For example, consider the issue of gender from a self psychological perspective. Heinz Kohut in