ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE:

THE SOCIALIZATION OF A TRANSFORMED EPISTEMOLOGY

AND KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR PEDAGOGY

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ABSTRACT

On Christian Education in the Digital Age:

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The digital age has changed the way that people interact as a society, operate as individuals and has added a new over-layer of sociality, through the internet and social media. These changes have had an impact on the way people know their world – bringing about a hyper-social epistemology which causes them to depend more within this new sociality and less on traditional sources of knowing. In an answer to Parker Palmer's call to amend our pedagogy based on changed epistemology, this thesis explores and analyzes the way the Digital Age has transformed epistemology and suggests some ways Christian educators can begin amending their pedagogy.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:

A NEW WAY OF KNOWING NEEDS A NEW WAY OF TEACHING

At a Macworld conference in 2007, Steve Jobs took to the stage and unveiled the first iPhone saying, "We're going to make some history together today."[1] The device was indeed revolutionary; it combined the power of a computer with the mobility of a cell phone putting the vast internet network of people and ideas in people's hands. This event seems an appropriate way to also mark the full emergence of the digital age since iPhone was the first to drop the *analog* keyboard in favor of a fully *digital* screen interface.[2] In just the last 10 years, the smartphone, the internet, and all the technology they represent have merged so fully into everyday life that most people admit they spend their entire day interfacing with them from the moment they wake up to before they go to sleep.[3] Of course, the devices are merely the portal. What has had a true impact is the ever-present connected global world of ideas and people, reality and fiction, human and non-human on

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[1] "Steve Jobs Introduced the Original iPhone at Macworld SF (2007)"

EverySTeveJobsVideo, YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3gw1XddJuc

[2] Rene Ritchie, "History of iPhone: Apple Reinvents the Phone," iMore, January 9, 2017.

http://www.imore.com/history-iphone-original

[3] Based partially on interviews conducted by David Castañeda as part of a project researching Ethics in Everyday Digital Life for Drew University.

the other end of that portal. People were granted access to an ever-expanding social space without the restrictions of time or physical location which is fully present at all times.

In this very short period of time, the internet, social media, and communications technology brought instant, everywhere and anytime accessibility to the public in a way never experienced before. Not only could people connect to each other; they were able to conduct business, complete financial transactions, participate in commerce, engage in media… in short they entered a whole new way of conducting everyday *living*. As a result, the digital age has socialized a new set of expectations with an underlying logic for people living within it.[4] This societal re-structuring has been the subject of study by sociologists since the beginnings of the internet started taking shape in the 1960s.[5] One prominent sociologist, Manuel Castells, dubbed this changing social organization "the Network Society" because of the way it replicates the structure and logic of digital networks. This changed societal organization has implications for the socialization of identity, the formation of relationships, and has an impact on the way people make sense of their world – on their epistemology.

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[4] Though the internet is a global phenomenon not all people in the world are able to connect to it. This does not mean that the repercussions of a digital age are not affecting these people, but that its effects are different. This opens discussion into questions of inequality of access which are important but not within the scope of this thesis.

[5] Stephen B, Dobrow, "Rise of the Internet and the World Wide Web." Salem Press Encyclopedia Research Starters, (2015), accessed February 20, 2017.

Epistemology is defined as a philosophical theory of knowing – of which there are many schools of thought.[6] This thesis will not be focused with exploring the many philosophical perspectives, but will define epistemology in the phenomenological and hermeneutical traditions of the sociologists like Peter Berger who propose that the way of knowing is socialized and socially constructed.[7] Thus, like ethicist Brian Brock who explains epistemology through an extensive analysis of Heidegger's philosophical context, this thesis will consider that "Our ways of living are deeply implicated in how and therefore what we know."[8] In other words, our socialized ways of living directly impact the way we know and the social constructs of knowledge. This definition will be important as we explore how ways of living have changed in digital society.

Understandably, since the reality of the digital age has had such a rapid emergence into everyday life, the total impact of a changed epistemology has yet to be fully explored. Like many other social institutions, churches are in a space of trying to figure out how to approach this changing landscape—where people's life practices and

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[6] John Scott and Gordon Marshall, "Epistemology," in *A Dictionary of Sociology*: (Oxford University Press, 2009),

http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199533008.001.0001/acref-9780199533008-e-737.

[7] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge,* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991).

[8] Brian Brock, *Christian Ethics in a Technological Age,* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2010), 4.

the way they process knowledge seem different from before. This is especially true for those in the church with the task of Christian education.

Because Christian education can be defined in any number of ways, for this thesis it will be defined as the task of teaching the concepts of Christian identity as well as becoming part of a Christian community.[9] This concept is presupposed to be developed in the discipleship context of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) – in which the ultimate goal is focused on following Jesus. As evidenced in the letters of the epistles, this task of discipleship has been one of continual deciphering since the beginnings of Christianity. Just as in the writing of John Westerhoff, Christian education will be considered the process of helping persons become initiated and grow into the Christian faith community.[10] Moreover, as an educational endeavor, this thesis will consider Christian education as part of the socializing process of helping individuals *become* Christian as a task of identity development, as described by the writing of Israel Galindo.[11] In summary, Christian education will be approached as the process by which

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[9] While not specifically defining Christian Education, chapter 2 of Parker Palmer's book *To Know as We are Known* describes education generally as the process of spiritual formation into identity and community.

[10] Jack L. Seymour and Donald E. Miller, *Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education,* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1982), 20.

[11] Israel Galindo, *The Craft of Christian Teaching: Essentials for Becoming a Very Good Teacher,* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1998), 15.

individuals are socialized into what it means to be a Christian as a process of forming identity, belonging to community within the call to discipleship.[12]

The socialized changes to society and their subsequent change to people's epistemology creates a growing disconnect between traditional pedagogical approaches and the way people understand. In other words, because people's way of knowing things is different, our approach to teaching – our pedagogy – must also change. This is especially true for the pedagogy of Christian education that endeavors to teach concepts of identity and community with the purpose of faith formation. As theologian and teacher Parker Palmer said, "The way we teach depends on the way we think people know; we cannot amend our pedagogy until our epistemology is transformed."[13] In the spirit of this sentiment, this thesis will provide insight to this budding epistemology from the primary perspective of sociology and including insights from the psychology of identity formation. The goal of this thesis is to help Christian educators understand the underlying epistemology socialized by the networked society of the digital age and suggest some new pedagogical implications for teaching and learning of Christian identity.

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[12] This is traditionally considered to be within the setting of the church. However, this does not mean that the church is the only space where Christian education happens. However for the sake of simplicity we will restrict the setting to within the church as the traditional space of Christian education.

[13] Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey,* (San Fransisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), xvii.

To accomplish the goal of discovering this changed epistemology, we will explore the socializing forces of society and individuality that are its formation. This exploration will be guided by the theory of structuration laid out by sociologist Anthony Giddens in his work, *The Constitution of Society* insofar as it will assume that neither society nor individual agency are deterministic[14]. Rather the analysis within this paper will assume that sociality is a result of the continual interplay between society and the individual. Keeping this in mind, we will begin with a review of research from sociology about impact of the network society and its underlying logic in chapter 1. This chapter will examine the shift from a traditional society—that has a structure based on physical place and temporal synchronization, to a network society—that mimics a changeable Internet network and thus deprioritizes place and time. This shift is also evident in changes to the underlying expectations of people's way of life and to the creation and expression of culture. In chapter 2, we will unpack how these underlying expectations and new culture are also evident in the socialization of individual identity. This chapter will also explore how the digital space has added a new layer of persistent sociality, which acts as another socializing agent in the formation of identity. Chapter 3 will extend this analysis into praxis with Christian education. This chapter will introduce the concept of a hyper-social epistemology—in which the network society, the intensity of individual identity management, and the added layer of sociality create a basis for meaning and understanding that is in need of constant social reification. This chapter will conclude by

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[14] Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), Kindle Edition, chapter 6.

offering potential ways this may play a part in the formation of faith and Christian identity.

Christian educators need to consider the implications of the new age as more than the addition of new technology but as a deeper change to ways of living and ways of knowing. In the connected world, the digital age has arrived in totality regardless of any person's individual level of participation in technology, the internet or social media. In times of transition such as this, it can be simpler to look backward at traditional approaches in nostalgic hope that the way of the past will be the same way of the future. However, just as Isaiah told Jerusalem to cast off the voices of the past that beckoned to them to return to Egypt,[15] so too Christian educators must cast off the nostalgic regard for pedagogy of the past and look forward to teaching to a changed epistemology. The only way Christian educators will be able to teach and lead people in the processes of becoming Christian in the digital age; will be to transform their understanding about the new way of living and its impact on the way of knowing.

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[15] Isaiah 30:21 (NRSV)

CHAPTER 1

ON THE MACRO SCALE, TRANSFORMED SOCIETY

Decades before the sudden emergence of personal communications technologies to public everyday life, nations, corporations, financial institutions and other macro-scale economic and political entities were already adapting to how technology was changing their methods. Ongoing advances in all sorts of technology (like travel, production, energy, computers, and communications), amid other global factors, steadily created a larger and more accessible global arena within which to conduct the business of governance and economy.[16] This globalized setting provided societal entities with the ability to interact with other entities with an ever-decreasing dependence on two factors that had been crucial to the modern era: synchronized time, and place-based location. In contrast, the digital era replaced these factors with an increasing dependence on the connectedness and infrastructure of the Internet and its networked structure. This shift has had implications on a variety of social institutions that make up the socializing environment and on the underlying expectations of living into which people are socialized.

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[16] Geoffrey Garrett, "The Causes of Globalization," *Comparative Political Studies* 33, nos. 6-7 (June 30, 2016), 941-91, at p. 941.

In order to best understand the societal shifts that have taken place, we turn to the analysis offered by sociology. Since its formation, sociology has sought to understand the many moving parts that form societal cohesion or disruption, the distribution and forces of power, and the way that society shapes the individual. Observing society after the industrial age had become fully established, one of the founders of sociology, Emile Durkheim, took a methodical look at the ways that people navigated shifted social realm of his time. In his seminal work, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), Durkheim reflected on the change from a homogenous small village society, to the larger urbanized ones that required many different specializations to maintain. He described two types of social cohesions or solidarities: mechanical solidarity, where people's basis of interaction is based on similarity and shared understanding; and organic, where people's basis of interaction is based on interdependence because of difference. [17] Through his work, he sought to describe the underlying way that individuals interacted with each other and society and thus demonstrate that society's form and functions are an important indicator in understanding humanity.

Sociology also seeks to understand the motivations of, and motivational forces within, social institutions and their effects on the other aspects of society. Because of this pursuit, sociology often reflects on the role of religion in social action and organization. This type of analysis drove sociologists like Karl Marx to famously decry religion as the "opium of the people" in his work *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right.* In Marx's

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[17] Ian Robertson, *Society: a Brief Introduction* (New York: Worth Publishers, 1989)., 318-319.

view, religion was a source of suffering and conformity in the struggle of class and power. It also is the reason why Max Weber centered his analysis on the role that Calvinism played in the rise and flourishing of capitalism in the West.[18] Indeed because sociology must wrestle with the social forces that affect collective action, most sociologists must also somehow address the role of religion and belief in society.

These classical sociologists introduced an analysis of an industrialized world that was thriving on technologies of steam, manufacturing, and urbanization – societies that were growing in education and struggling with change and war. They were considering a time of transition to a modern and post-modern era and attempting to discover the underlying societal forces in action. Sociological thinking and the sociological imagination[19] offer a way to understand the complex workings of a society and the way these forces influence individual everyday life. Thus, utilizing the societal analysis of sociology, this chapter will offer insight from contemporary sociologists examining the emerging pattern of social organization of the digital era.

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[18] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: The Expanded 1920 Version,* 3rd ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company, 2002).

[19] Introduced as a concept by C. Wright Mills in 1959, the "sociological imagination" is an invitation for the use of sociological thinking to analyze individual life. By offering the concept, Mills was inviting sociology to become a way of understanding beyond academic and administrative study. See *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) by C. Wright Mills.

A Change from "Traditional"

Since the concern of this chapter is with the change of society, it is important to classify the attributes of the society that came before for comparison. Each generation creates society while renewing the definition of *traditional* based on their own past. As above, in the writings of Durkheim at the end of the nineteenth century his discussion of mechanical solidarity refers to "primitive" societies or cultures that stood in contrast to the contemporary industrialized society of his time.[20] In addition to the more visible ways of life, he extrapolated the traits of traditional cultures at the time as being societies with high levels of social and moral integration, little individuation, engaged in the same activities and rituals, and regarding themselves as members of the group – as opposed to as individuals with personal options.[21]

Nowadays "traditional" is a much more nuanced term. It is a term that takes on different meaning based on social location, heritage, nationhood, etc. In order to create a contrast, we will distinguish the period before the *Digital Age* (also called the "Informational Age" or the "Internet Age" in much literature) as being a change from what is known as the *Modern Era*. There is some dispute about when the Modern Era began, but it is generally understood to be around the end of the 18th and beginning of the

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[20]George Simpson, *Emile Durkheim on the Division of Labor in Society, Being a Translation of his De La Division Du Travail Social, With an Estimate of His Work* (New York: Macmillan, 1933)., 76.

[21] Frank W. Elwell, "Emile Durkheim's Sociology" *Rogers State University*, (2003)., http://www.faculty.rsu.edu/users/f/felwell/www/Theorists/Durkheim/index2.htm

19th centuries –around the time of the industrial revolution.[22] This was a period defined by industrialized nations, world commerce and exploration, increasing individualism, and the primacy of scientific thought.[23] For western Christianity, this was also a period associated with an evangelical enlightenment where the teaching of Christian identity was becoming enmeshed with culture and media.[24]

The Modern Era brought about the concentration of economic power, political power, and cultural authority around entities that had physical boundaries and resources like nations, business, political elites, urban and eventually super-urban centers. Colonialism and migration during this era, as well as the amassing populations in urban centers meant that the perspectives and realities understood by different cultures became a significant issue for interaction and governance. As different cultures came into contact sharing physical location, they were forced to figure out how to manage difference and space. Physical space was a key force in creating this tension, where proximity is a

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[22] Andrew J. Waskey, "Industrial Revolution," in *Encyclopedia of World Poverty*, ed M. Odekon, 546-547 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2006), doi: 10.4135/9781412939607.n348.

[23] Brent Waters, *From Human to Posthuman: Christian Theology and Technology in a Postmodern World.* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), chapter 1.

[24] Mark A. Noll, "The Evangelical Enlightenment and Theological Education," in *Communication & Change in American Religious History* ed. Leonard I. Sweet, (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1993), 299.

primary determinate of solidarity.[25] Thus, especially in major urban centers the

negotiation between cultures for territory resulted in ghettos of cultural focus; spaces like

little Italy, China town, etc.[26] Here cultural difference was mitigated by physical

distancing, the equivalent of Robert Frost's well known line "good fences make good

neighbors."

   The Modern Era also required a societal emphasis on synchronized time. As

explored by Durkheim, the structure of the modern society was based on

interdependence—what he terms "organic solidarity." Briefly, this meant that in order for

the urbanized modern society to function, not all people could do the same tasks. Instead,

different people specialize their labor and *coordinate* efforts at the societal level, much

like organs in the body have different functions that work interdependently. It is precisely

this coordinated dynamic that creates a reliance in Modern Era society on synchronized

time. For example, in order for the baker to sell bread, both the flourmill must deliver on

time, and the buyer must understand when the baker will have the bread available. Not

only does this interdependence foster a cohesion for society, as Durkheim discovered, but

it also created an underlying logic of synchronization that became a socialized given.

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[25] Jan A.G. M. van Dijk, "Inequalities in the Network Society" in *Digital Sociology: Critical Perspectives,* ed. Kate Orton-Johnson and Nick Prior. (Houndmills, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 108.

[26] John R. Logan, Weiwei Zhang, and Miao David Chunyu, "Emergent Ghettos: Black Neighborhoods in New York and Chicago, 1880-1940," *AJS: American Journal of Sociology* 120, no. 4 (2015) 1055-1094,

This reality is evidenced by Modern society's obsession with time management and punctuality as an important virtue.[27]

These attributes of the Modern are what constitute the traditional society of our time. It seems prudent to briefly mention postmodernity, since it is a term often discussed in this type of analysis as well. Postmodernity, however is not an era so much as a cultural and philosophical reaction to modernity itself. As sociologist Anthony Giddens suggests, "rather than entering into a period of post-modernity, we are moving into one in which the consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalized and universalized than before."[28] Thus, postmodernity can be considered a philosophical reaction to modernity and not an era of its own. Postmodernity as a philosophical approach has been the subject of many Christian books and papers, in part because it begins to wrestle with the issues of globalization and cultural difference present in the late Modern Era. However, because this chapter is seeking to contrast periods of societal structure rather than philosophical approaches, for now consider it to be subsumed as a part of our definition of the traditional Modern Era.

The Network Society

The transition from the Modern to the Digital society has been the subject of much sociological analysis. Though it has been approached in many ways, the conceptual

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[27] A search for books on "Time Management" produces hundreds of titles, especially having to do with professionalism and working.

[28] Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 1990), 3.

framework presented by Manuel Castells in his trilogy *The Information Age: Economy Society and Culture* most comprehensively captures the depth of the global underlying societal shift. Through a lengthy analysis of the effects of the information age across different regions of the world, Castells concludes that society has taken on a structure that mimics the internet, calling it the "network society." This change in structure is significant because it shifts priority, authority and power to *connectedness* within the network itself rather than on any specific power or institution within the network. The ensuing underlying logic and expectations of this shift in priority have affected the institutions and people, which are the agents of socialization for the individual.

From its publication in 1998, *The Information Age: Economy Society and Culture* made Castells among the most cited social scientists in the world.[29] In this work, Castells explains a global societal framework that is not rooted in traditional structures like nations and localities but is instead formed, forming and reforming as networks. "Networks," he posits, "constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power and culture."[30] In other words, the course of influence, power and economy, aided through channels available through information technology, spreads in a way that no longer are dependent on the traditional anchors of

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[29] Jackson DeMos, "Castells Named USC University Professor," *USC News*, February 2, 2009., http://news.usc.edu/14206/Castells-Named-USC-University-Professor/

[30] Manuel Castells, *Rise of the Network Society,* 2nd ed., The Information Age: Economy Society and Culture (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 500.

locality, nation, institution or even time. In this analysis, the network itself is not only the *channel* for society but also the *structure* of society itself.

In a thorough analysis of some of the most primary social institutions and forces – economy, governance and even criminal activity – Castells details how various societal institutions have adjusted and restructured themselves enabled by communications technology. These entities released themselves from the traditional structures of nations and physical locations by organizing themselves as networks do – forming nodes of supply, services, funding, and profit wherever conveniences were most apparent. Importantly, they not only form nodes that remain static, but–in keeping with the network framework–are in consistent reforming of the network to maximize their cause. Put more plainly, even a well-established node is never fully considered permanent. This has meant that the organization and management of such entities has also had to change, forming itself in a more horizontally far-reaching way rather than in a condensed vertical hierarchy.[31]

This change in organizational structuring is just as catalytic as it is representative of the network society. It is catalytic because as these organizations have changed the mechanics of their operation, they have also changed the understanding of the way they and individuals within them must operate. As organizations form themselves as reforming nodes, they remove a condition of permanence from the individuals.[32] It is an operational change that shifts an enormous responsibility onto individual actors because

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[31] Ibid., 176.

[32] Ibid., 282.

it requires the individual to also become networked to succeed. As sociologist Jan A. G. M. van Dijk explains, "In traditional modern communities, many people were taken along in the solidarity of proximity in villages, neighborhoods, work places and public meeting places. In post- or late-modern network society, individuals have to organize their own social network."[33] In this way, the societal logic moves from reliance on society to the individual self-reliance. Thus, the catalytic change is one that switches where corporate and governing entities must become the network, while also individual actors within them must also become the network.

As the entities that are central to the way of everyday life (through work, citizenship, and commerce) embraced the network structure, the effect was a disconnection with the traditional lifestyle. A significant manifestation of this disconnection was a detachment from the requirement of physical locality. In the network, place and residence is only marginally important in the development of social groups, friendships, and community.[34] This same individual disconnection results in a de-prioritization of the physicality represented by the nation, the city, the neighborhood, etc. As Castells synthesizes, "Localities become disembodied from their cultural, historical, geographical meaning, and reintegrated into functional networks."[35] When the institution

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[33] Jan A. G. M. van Dijk, *Digital Sociology,* 108.

[34] Karen Evans, "Re-Thinking Community in the Digital Age?" in *Digital Sociology: Critical Perspectives,* ed. Kate Orton-Johnson and Nick Prior (Houndmills, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 81-82.

[35] Manuel Castells, *Rise of the Network Society,* 409.

transitions into the network, it de facto removes itself from its traditional heritages placing priority on becoming the network and not on physical permanency. As an example of this, consider that a business transaction can occur on the internet from any connected device without needing to be physically in the same space as a salesperson. This transaction not only removes human presence but also physicality of the store, the store's neighborhood or environment, and even the regional area within which it is located.

Within the network society, there is not only a disconnect with physical space and the traditional institutions which form their basis in location, but also with the concept of synchronous time. A central element to traditional society, synchronous existence went hand in hand with the physical flow of ideas, commodities, and people. To put it bluntly, people existed by sharing time and space together; it took time for things to happen, for things to travel, and for communication to reach others. Yet the network society, aided by communications technology, exists in what Castells calls *Timeless Time*. He elaborates, "Technology compresses time to a few, random instants, thus de-sequencing society, and de-historicizing society."[36] This is not to say that time does not remain a factor, but that its role is no longer as crucial to societal function insofar as synchronization. As an example, consider that the same business transaction above can also occur at any time without needing to synchronize human presence for the transaction: a person can buy jewelry from an online retailer at 3:00AM without needing a salesperson there at the same time. This does not remove the presence of time, but makes time less relevant to the

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[36] Ibid., 386.

transaction itself because the buyer does not need to consider the synchronization of their individual time with store hours or seller.

In sum, the network society is concerned primarily with itself, rather than any individual power within it, and brings about a change to two major organizing elements of the Modern Era: the elements of physical space and of synchronized time. The shift to a networking society is not that *networking* itself is new, but that digital networking technologies, "powered social and organizational networks in ways that allowed their endless expansion and reconfiguration, overcoming the traditional limitations of networking forms of organization to manage complexity beyond a certain size of the network."[37] In other words, the combination of networking as an interaction coupled with the communications technologies of the digital age have intensified the task and concept of networking. This shift was to such an extent that it has moved pivotal societal entities out of the traditional framework completely and into a fully networked mode of operation. For the first time ever, a primary social organizing element of society is not reliant on the physical and temporal anchors that was the dominant socialized logic of Modern society.

A Change to Culture in a Digital World

These changes represent a dramatic turn for our interpretation of culture. In the nature/nurture understanding of human development, culture plays a key role in socializing individuals – providing a meaning-making framework from which to understand the world. Culture defined is "a general term for the symbolic and learned

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[37] Ibid., xviii.

aspects of human society"[38] which include practices, rituals, laws, arts, fashion, food, and etcetera. Indeed, culture is a major focus area for sociology not only for understanding society, but also as a form of social capital from sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu, and as a tool for analysis, as discussed by Jeffrey Alexander.

Within the network society, where locality loses its prominence, a changed form of culture emerges. In this state, the creation and maintaining of culture is not necessarily a direct reaction to locality or natural environment, or as a form of heritage, but rather is as a mirror reflection of culture itself. With the dilution of spatio-temporal anchors in society, culture continues to evolve as simulacra – building on its own iterations, without mooring to a place or time:

> Thus, spatio-temporal configurations were critical for the meaning making of each culture, and for their differential evolution. Under the informational paradigm, a new culture has emerged from the superseding of places and the annihilation of time by the space of flows and by timeless time: the culture of real virtuality.[39]

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[38] John Scott and Gordon Marshall, "Culture." in A *Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199533008.001.0001/acref-9780199533008-e-484.

[39] Manuel Castells, *End of Millennium,* 2nd ed., The Information Age: Economy Society and Culture (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 386.

What Castells calls "real virtuality" is a concept that suggests that because all reality is *perceived* and communicated through language and symbols, all communication of reality can happen through any medium.[40] Thus calling a reality that is communicated through information technology a "virtual reality" is a misnomer. Instead, a culture of real virtuality adopts all perceptions of reality as valid, be they digital or physical.

The significance of a change to a culture of real virtuality, or one that builds on itself as simulacra absent of physicality and natural connection is paramount to socialization. Within this conceptualization, culture builds not only on pre-existing passed-down, natural culture of the Modern Era, but also on informational culture available through the internet. Information itself becomes a player in the ongoing morphing of culture. Building on the work of cultural sociologist Scott Lash, Burrows and Beer explain, "Information is now not only a means by which we come to understand the world; but it is also an active agent in constructing it."[41] The socializing function associated with culture, transitions to one not fully rooted in historical time, ancestry, nation or locality, but to the amorphous network as well. In this form, culture becomes abstracted from power and meaning is separated from traditional constructs of wisdom and knowledge – causing a change in the role of culture between traditional society and

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[40] Manuel Castells., *Rise of the Network Society,* 404.

[41] Roger Burrows and David Beer, "Rethinking Space: Urban Informatics and the Sociological Imagination," in *Digital Sociology: Critical Perspectives,* ed. Kate Orton-Johnson and Nick Prior (Houndmills, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 63-64.

the digital one.[42] Where in the traditional society, culture was socializing force of

historical transition, in digital society, culture is an expression of self that may or may not

have historical roots or qualities.

A Twist to Media's Role

In the Digital Age media takes an even more significant and central presence to

human life. Media, which for our purposes encompasses the entertainment industry as

well as news, book publishers and recording studios largely exist within the environment

of communication technology. Because of this enmeshed existence, media is *the*

expression of the Digital Age. It should not be surprising that recent reports estimate that

the average U.S. adult spends over 10 hours a day consuming media.[43] Importantly,

media is not only the channel for entertainment or news but becomes culture in and of

itself. Castells describes, "What characterizes the new system of communication, based in

the digitized, networked integration of multiple communication modes, is its

inclusiveness and comprehensiveness of all cultural expressions."[44] Media exacerbates

the changed phenomenon of culture through sheer vastness and availability of cultural

expression.

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[42] Manuel Castells, *Rise of the Network Society,* 458-459.

[43] Jacqueline Howard, "Americans Devote More Than 10 Hours a Day to Screen Time,

and Growing." *CNN Health,* July 29, 2016, http://www.cnn.com/2016/06/30/health/americans-

screen-time-nielsen/

[44] Manuel Castells, *Rise of the Network Society*, 405.

In the traditional era, sociologists like Adorno and Horkeimer considered the potential of media for dominion and subjugation through a "culture industry." [45] However, in the digital era media culture may be presenting itself as just the opposite by intensifying disembodied culture in timeless space. The plurality of media expressing an array of culture lessens the ability for one cultural authority to claim authoritative dominance, and thus to assert dominion. For example, if CNN can claim one news source as trustworthy and Fox News can claim the same source as non-trustworthy within the same medium and using the same method this weakens the authoritative quality from both sources. Yet even while media's influence is not deterministic, its presence is as the only visible and audible components of the network make it a strong socializing force. The media is the boldest messaging presence in the network, which makes it so that any message of culture can only be conveyed within the system itself.[46] In network logic, the only way to exist is to somehow be part of the media network itself. Paradoxically, the media then is the most and least influential space of the network society: the least because of fragmented authority, the most because it acts as it's only constituted presence.

Conclusion

This chapter explored some of the macro scale changes to the underlying structure and logic of the Digital Age through a sociological lens – especially through a review of the network society. The most distinguishable societal shifts in the digital era have to do

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[45] Andy Bennett, *Culture and Everyday Life* (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 16.

[46] Manuel Castells, *Rise of the Network Society,* 404.

with the disconnection of social entities from the priorities of physical location and synchronized time. These shifts in turn have had an effect on culture, a major socializing element, and on the way culture is created and distributed through the media. What is dramatic in this change is not necessarily so much in the practice of networked structuring, but in a societal organizing logic that creates an expectation that de-prioritizes physical location or synchronicity.

Moreover, the network society necessitates its individual actors to operate within a networked individualism, which further erodes individual reliance on traditional conceptions of historical place-based culture. These changes are so pervasive that they are being socialized by the network society and its underlying logic regardless of individual participation in the technology that helps to facilitate the change. These macro level changes to ways of living, impact the frameworks of individuality and knowing that people use to interpret their world, a concept that will be explored further in the next chapter.

Furthermore, because the relatively sudden emergence of communications technology have rocketed individuals into the Digital Age, the current time is further complicated by the liminal space between the societal structures and logics of two eras. This creates a tension between individuals and groups attempting to apply Modern social epistemological constructs to a transformed way of living. It also creates confusion between consciously taught traditional socialization that is being interpreted through a subconsciously socialized Digital Age epistemology. In the following chapter, we will more closely analyze the way these macro changes to social structure, and its subsequent

inherent socialization affect the processes of identity development for individuals in the path toward discovering the causes of the changed epistemology.

CHAPTER 2

ON THE MICRO SCALE: TRANSFORMED IDENTITY

The previous chapter emphasized the macro level shifts of the Digital Age that socialize a logic of a changed social organization. These changes are transforming society from a societal structure that prioritized physical entities that coordinated in synchronized time, to a network structure that de-prioritizes both time and place. This macro organization socializes an underlying logic of networked individualism that must function within an added layer of sociality introduced by the Digital Age. In this chapter, we will review the effect the Digital Age has had on the individual and on formation of relationships within the context of this new social structure. These will be reviewed in order to further explore the causes for changes to people's epistemology. Drawing also from scholars of psychology and communications we will review how this socialization has changed the way which people create, construct, and maintain identity and community.

Identity

The topic of identity and the development of the self is one of much scholarship and debate among the social sciences, and no less in the field of psychology.[47] From

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[47] Trudy Mercadal, "Identity Formation," *Salem Press Encyclopedia Research Starters* (2014), accessed March 22, 2017.

Freud's foundational triune self,[48] Jung's individuation among archetypes,[49] and

Erikson's stages of development,[50] one thing appears to be agreed upon within the field: a

process of defining the self involves a negotiation of appropriating or differentiating self

from the external Other.[51] The understanding of what constitutes this Other is manifold

but generally encompasses the socializing groups surrounding the individual. These

groups are traditionally considered in the spheres of: family, community, and greater

society. Especially when conceptualizing developmental socialization from early

childhood, these groups are often pictured as if in concentric circles starting with the

individual in the middle and moving outward toward greater society.[52] Yet in the new

age, this traditional conceptualization of Other is challenged by network logic and new

ways of access to each of these socializing spheres.

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[48] Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1939), 148-149

[49] Don S. Browning, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies: a Critical Conversation in the Theology of Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986), 172.

[50] Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963), 235.

[51] Dori Laub, "Reestablishing the Internal 'Thou' in Testimony of Trauma," *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* 18, no. 2 (June 2003), 184-198.

[52] A good example of this can be found in Gabriel Weibl's article "Cosmopolitan Identity and Personal Growth as an Outcome of International Student Mobility at Selected New Zealand, British and Czech Universities" in *Journal of International Mobility* no 3. (2015), 31.

Interestingly, during the beginning popularity of the internet in 1990s the expectation was that this new landscape of 'virtual reality' would not be intrusive to the self but rather be a space for experimentation with multiple made up personas. Yet research that is more recent suggests that rather than external experimentation, the internet and the various outlets of social media and modes of expression have given individuals a way to extend their internal selves into a network space creating another layer to their own reality – a re-formed social landscape.[53] As part of this extended reality, online social space has been proving itself to be an addition to (rather than replacement of) human contact and relationship development.[54] In other words, the Digital Age has been marked by a shift in normatively acceptable ways of expressing the self and engaging in relationship to one where online contact and presence is commonplace, expected and in some instances even preferred.

The implications of the digital space as an extension of the self are as boundless as the Digital expanse itself, which require more study than is currently available. Psych journals are filled with articles that wonder about the impact of digital presence on

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[53] Zizi Papacharissi, *A Networked Self: Identity, Community and Culture on Social Network Sites* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 309.

[54] Harrison Rainie and Barry Wellman, *Networked: The New Social Operating System* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 144.

disorders, neuroses, alienation and belonging; still results are uncertain.[55] Even in the

practice of psychoanalysis, the digital has presented a different analytical space. As

Sherry Turkle reflects, "Now, therapists are more likely to appreciate the extent to which

online lives are evocative objects, tools for thinking about the self. They are dream spaces

for the digital age."[56] As psychologists consider the impact to development, they must

also wrestle with a new paradigm for identity itself. The digital space and the traditional

understanding of the individual mind-space have blurred where what we think of as two

are really a single identity that is constantly mediated and monitored by the individual.[57]

      In a sense, the inherent logic of the Digital Age socializes against the traditional

understanding of the self as a construct that is a confined property of an embodied person,

to one that is networked and thus hyperaware of the external Other. In keeping with the

language of Castells, Rainie & Wellman, and Papacharissi, this is the concept of the

"networked self." This networked self is characterized as extremely focused on a

customization of identity, maintaining of reputation, and on appearing before multiple

communities of relationships that seamlessly flow between the physical and digital planes

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[55] Conducting an academic search on "Psychology" and "Social Media" brings up a
number of articles on the subject ranging in analysis from detriments of addition
disorders to benefits of protective factors and political involvement.

[56] Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New
York: Penguin Press, 2015), 131.

[57] Ganaele Langlois, *Meaning in the Age of Social Media* (New York.: Palgrave
Macmillan, 2016), 116.

of existence that constitute their reality. In this changed paradigm, the basic spheres of socialization remain, but their concentric conceptualization does not. In its stead, the individual must contend with an intensified inner self that is negotiating directly within dynamic spheres of socialization.

Identity Intensified

The public space evident in social media, and the invisible undercurrent of internet surveillance present through things like recommendation software, are creating an intensified public forum within which identity is constructed. It is a layered space that requires individuals to constantly manage expressions of themselves through various outlets and across multiple distinct audiences. In this way, the digital world is exactly as Turkle describes, "a place to explore the self" incessantly.[58] By always being accessible and present, the digital world also acts as a sort of over-layer to existence that enables an infinite presence of the iterative Others within it. This layer is continually giving the individual feedback about himself or herself as a participant in their ongoing identity formation. In this way the emphasis on identity and the question "Who are you?" is exacerbated and the focus on identity is intensified.

Identity construction of networked individualism is constant and plays out in a public arena beyond the stage-based self-actualization reflected in classical psychology. The most visible example of this public arena of the self is the balance of personal and professional identity. In this context, social spaces like social media force the individual into considering multiple audiences for their identity. For many professionals, a visible

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[58] Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 6.

public presence on social media is a work necessity (it may be more appropriate to say

this is true for *all* professionals within the context of the commodification of the

networked individual as discussed by Castells). This creates the potential conflict for the

individual: do they represent the identity expression of their professional self or of their

personal self? Yet in the Digital Age, these are not two distinct identities but rather a

collapsing of multiple identities into one. Therefore, the answer to the question is one of

managing multiple audiences between expressions of professional, public and private

personas.[59] This dynamic also reinforces the socialization of the networked individual

performing the task of continuous identity construction.

The reality of multiple platforms or outputs for identity expression also adds to

the active requirement of continuous identity construction. Social media is not just one

output but many (Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn, etc.), each with its own

dynamic. Thus as Dawn Gilpen explains, the construction of identity is a negotiated

collected expression of self:

> Identity construction can be seen as the sense-making process by which
>
> people selectively organize their experiences into a coherent sense of self
>
> (Fisher, 1987; Giddens, 1991; Ricoeur, 1985; Somers, 1994). Recent
>
> literature on identity shifts attention away from subject attributes to
>
> dialogic processes of negotiation and performance constructed through
>
> interaction over time (Somers, 1994; Wiley, 1994). Polillo (2004) expands
>
> on Wiley's (1994) concept of the 'semiotic self' by incorporating

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[59] Papacharissi, *A Networked Self,* 307.

contemporary understanding of social networks. In this view, identity is

constructed as the result of structural and power dynamics, and subject to

constant negotiation of boundaries. [60]

As the individual is forced to also become a network themselves they must navigate this

blurring of lines between work and home life to essentially always be *on,* realizing their

professional reputation is always at stake.

In addition to the internalizing processes of constantly negotiating the self, the

digital sphere pushes back as a mediated mirror with which to evaluate the output of

identity. People are not the only forces of concern within of the digital sphere. The self

also increasingly experiences nonhuman socializing forces by way of tracking algorithms

and media. As digital behavior is recorded on social media platforms and browsers, the

data they capture can be mined and reflected back to us through advertisement and

recommendation software. Langlois describes this in terms of media ". . . that act like

palm-reader psychics, that scrutinize patterns in order to predict and potentially orient

actions."[61] Thus, the individual actor must also negotiate the way that their identity is

perceived and reflected back to them in their nonsocial behavior as well.

Finally, the network brings about a data-driven self-worth paradigm that presents

itself both socially and privately. In the social arena, the individual's relationship to

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[60] Dawn R. Gilpin, "Working the Twittersphere: Microblogging as Professional Identity

Construction," in *A Networked Self: Identity, Community and Culture on Social Network

Sites*, ed. Zizi Papacharissi (New York: Routledge, 2011), 233.

[61] Langlois, *Meaning in the Age of Social Media,* 111.

others becomes quantified through several statistical determinants: from the number of "Friends" or "Followers" on an account, to the number of likes, reactions or comments to a post. Even as research continues on this new phenomenon, current findings corroborate that social media is a factor in self-esteem.[62] This same data-driven evaluation of self takes place privately with the increased use of devices, like fitness trackers, which track activity and provide data to measure change or progress. In *Reclaiming Conversations*, for example, Turkle describes the experience of one person's use of an application called the Happiness Tracker which induced her to evaluate herself, interpreting the data as "a 'failing grade'"[63] and bringing in her a desire to act on it. In essence, data-driven self-evaluation, externalizes what was traditionally considered an internal human sense making process onto nonhuman systems.[64]

Relationships and Communities

These changes to the process of self-creation are in large part a shift to more power to the externalized agents of socialization. These external factors and the method for interacting with them have themselves undergone shifts that are intertwined. For the purpose of simplicity for this exploration, we will remain with the external factor of "community" (especially because of the prevalence of the term). With the technology of

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[62] Anthony L. Burrow and Nicolette Rainone. "How Many Likes Did I Get?: Purpose Moderates Links Between Positive Social Media Feedback and Self-Esteem," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 69 (2017), 232-236.

[63] Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 96.

[64] Langlois, *Meaning in the Age of Social Media,* 112.

instant communication, and the detached essence of the network society (removed from physical space and synchronized of time), the method of relationship also changes with multiple channels for engagement. All these changes have the cumulative effect of deforming traditional concepts of community and relationship, replacing them with emerging forms embedded in network logic.

The concept of community is itself a difficult one to define and has a complicated intellectual history.[65] Yet, it seems to generally involve two notions: 1) it is a grouping of individuals that are not structured as a nation-state or corporate entity; and 2) a form of affinity or care among the members of the group. Traditionally the term would also imply a geographical proximity as necessary component but has instead become a more psychological or social term in the digital age.[66] The word *community* is used so often and in so many contexts that it can be difficult to remain faithful to even this definition. This is in part the difficulty of the term, but also due to the transferred prioritization of the *individual* member of the group than of the group itself. As stated by Rainie & Wellman, "It is the individual—and not the household, kinship group, or work group— that is the primary unit of connectivity. The shift puts people at the center of personal

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[65] Malcom R. Parks, "Social Network Sites as Virtual Communities," in *A Networked Self: Identity, Community and Culture on Social Network Sites*, ed. Zizi Papacharissi (New York: Routledge, 2011), 107.

[66] Ibid.

networks that can supply them with support, sociability, information, and a sense of belonging."[67]

Thus in the network, it is the individual that finds themselves in the position of power of membership and participation. As we have noted, networked individualism means that each individual is responsible for his or her own network. This is especially true because their participation in groups is not restricted on their physical location and thus is not forced by proximity. This has implications for the networks or communities that the individual participates in, especially in that they can become involved in multiple communities. Yet their involvement in multiple communities also limits their commitment to any one community.[68] The ramifications of which can be difficult to both the individual and the community itself. Yet as evidenced by the abundance of communities online, on social media platforms, or as psychological identity groups, it also means that the individual has more opportunities for community than ever.

Indeed, this dualism represents an aspect of the Digital Age which is still to be determined. On the one hand, observers like Turkle and Deresiewicz decry the deformation of the traditional community as a space of belonging and friendship. Deresiewicz's grief is eloquently given:

> As the traditional face-to-face community disappeared, we held on to what
> we had lost--the closeness, the rootedness--by clinging to the word, no
> matter how much we had to water down its meaning. Now we speak of the

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[67] Harrison Rainie and Barry Wellman, *Networked*, 124.

[68] Ibid.,124.

Jewish "community" and the medical "community" and the "community"

of readers, even though none of them actually is one. What we have,

instead of community, is, if we're lucky, a "sense" of community--the

feeling without the structure; a private emotion, not a collective

experience.[69]

In his writing, the difficulty of the term community as traditionally associated with a

physical group is demonstrably clear, as are the attributes of relationship and identity.

On the other hand, observers like Rainie, Wellman and Langlois see the new

community paradigm with its emphasis on autonomy in personal interaction as a positive.

For them, there is a quality of liberation to a group where people have more opportunities

to connect and can be more selective about the people with whom they form

community.[70] In this perspective, the traditional formulation of community that is based

primarily in embodied location is not idealized. Instead, the focus becomes on the

embedded potential of experimentation and newness of digital community creation.[71]

Plainly, community becomes richer because of voluntary participation rather than

mandatory proximity.

Regardless of the potential positive or negative possibilities that new forms of

community take in the Digital Age, consensus remains on the socializing role

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[69] William Deresiewicz, "Faux Friendship." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, B6-B10.

(December 11 2009), accessed March 23, 2017.

[70] Harrison Rainie and Barry Wellman, *Networked,*125.

[71] Langlois, *Meaning in the Age of Social Media*, 173.

communities play in the development of identity. Moreover, that these groups take on different meaning by inhabiting digital and mental space as constructs of affinity and care which do not require physical space or synchronization to exist and which rely heavily on the individual's participation. This also changes the conceptualization that communities in and of themselves have any permanency. Instead, these groups are relegated to nodes of convenience within the network that grow or fade according to individual actors— creating a need for the community to vie for attention within the network. Thus, community (singular) has all but disappeared as an isolated entity within the concentric circles of socializing spheres. In its place are communities (plural) which move dynamically in and out of focus for the individual and can be made up of any affiliation within the greater world without the requirement of physical proximity or synchronized time.

Relationships with the Nonhuman

Another element in the individual's network in the Digital Age is in relationships with technology that is not human but designed to mimic human presence. Human beings are creatures of relationship, with everything. This applies not only to the social world of other humans, but to the world of nonhumans and the imaginary. While anthropomorphizing and relating to nonhuman things and imaginary characters has always been part of the human experience, the Digital Age brings about this connection to an exaggerated scale. For the purpose of illustration, we will focus on two ways that nonhuman others have become a presence: robotics and artificial intelligence, and in the production of media and levels of fiction.

Relationship Robots

Personal robots and artificial intelligence have emerged recently as a wide spread option for everyday use. It is anticipated that in the market for personal robots will reach dramatic heights by the year 2022.[72] Even now, personal assistance artificial intelligence like Amazon's Alexa, Apple's Siri, and Microsoft's Cortana are widely popular and their infusion into devices like smartphones and household listening devices is becoming the norm. These type of humanized machines are representative of the type of relationship the Digital Age is working to produce. Turkle explains the dynamic, "We have built machines that speak, and, in speaking to them, we cannot help but attribute human nature to objects that have none."[73] In the case of artificial intelligence, this also includes the active programming of human attributes by design.

In a step further, robots are being designed not only for the purpose of assistance, but also for active companionship – intimate relationship – with people. Turkle relates an example of how these caring robots are being used as supplemental to human interaction in elder care where families and nursing staff cannot always be with their loved one. In these cases, the robot (in the shape of a pet or other small creature) is intended to ward

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[72] Darcie Thompson-Fields, "Personal Robot Market Expected to be Worth \$34 Billion by 2022," *Access AI,* (March 21, 2017)*,* http://www.access-ai.com/news/1722/personal-robot-market-expected-worth-34-billion-2022/

[73] Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation,* 16.

off loneliness.[74] This is only one example of many different robots that are being

constructed for the sole purpose of human relationship; spanning the gamut from robots

as cultural teachers[75] to robots as sexual partners.[76] In this way, the digital age brings a

new kind of relationship into the individual's social sphere. Not simply with projected

anthropomorphized nonhuman objects, but with objects intentionally designed with

human attributes for the purpose of relationship.

Relationship with Levels of Fiction

Another layer of relationship is where the external Other takes the form of worlds

within media with which people are spending more and more time. Storytelling

production technology for television, movies, and games (including the potential of

augmented or virtual reality) actively strives to blur the line between the real and unreal –

the actual and the imaginary. Moreover, with the advent of reality television

programming, fiction is not always purely as fictional but can be understood as

potentially giving viewers *levels* of fiction from the purely imaginary to the slightly

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[74] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why we Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 2013), 109.

[75] Agence France Presse, "Calligraphy Robot Teaches Japan's Schoolchildren the Art of 'Shodo' Writing," *The Huffington Post*, (August 1, 2013), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/01/calligraphy-robot-japan_n_3686261.html

[76] David Moye, "Engineer Creates Sex Robot that Needs to be Romanced First," *The Huffington Post* (March 17, 2017), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/ai-sex-doll-human-touch-sergi-santos_us_58cc0db7e4b00705db4f1d3a

scripted. Thus, the Digital Age presents the individual with relationships in fiction not only with Others in the form characters, but also with an Other in the form of whole worlds that intentionally blur levels of fiction.

In the process of identity, the myriad of Others presented through levels of fiction adds another set of potential archetypes from which to appropriate or differentiate. This is true not only on a psychological level but on a biological one as well. Neuroscientific research, for example, is demonstrating that the brain interprets experiences which are fictional with the same reaction as when that experience is *lived* by the individual, "The brain, it seems, does not make much of a distinction between reading about an experience and encountering it in real life; in each case, the same neurological regions are stimulated."[77] This understanding also helps to explain Game Transference Phenomenon – the experience an individual may have where game content or interface elements may appear to them in a sensory way to exist in their everyday lives.[78]

It may be that a type of transference phenomenon from levels of fiction is a more common experience than is being researched. For adults, it can be as harmless as the

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[77] Annie Murphy Paul, "Your Brain on Fiction," *The New York Times,* (March 17, 2012), http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/18/opinion/sunday/the-neuroscience-of-your-brain-on-fiction.html

[78] Keith Stuart, "Game Transfer Phenomena' and the Problem of Perception," The Guardian, (September 22, 2011), https://www.theguardian.com/technology/gamesblog/2011/sep/22/game-transfer-phenomena

changing of mannerisms from watching a favorite show, or inserting quotes from movies in ways that are relevant to everyday life. The most demonstrable evidence of a type of media transference can be most visibly observed in children after they watch a movie or television show. Children often mimic the words or behaviors they observed. A recent study of children interacting with robots concluded that developing the right *attitude* for the robot was necessary so that a child interacting with it is not put off by it or end up mimicking an unintended mannerism.[79]

While more research is necessary on the socializing effects of these nonhuman others, the Digital Age adds this complicated layer to the development of relationships and identity. Just by sheer amount of interaction with devices and with levels of fiction consumed by the individual, it is evident that the nonhuman is another element in the network of identity. In an age where, "In one weekend of television viewing, one can see more drama, human tragedy, comedy, feats of spectacular achievement, and sexual escapades than most of our ancestors would have seen in a year or even in their lifetimes,"[80] we would be a remiss to dismiss this as anything but another active agent in the formation of identity and the development of relationships.

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[79] Timothy Revell, "Kids Can Pick Up Attitude from Robots they Play and Learn with," *New Scientist* (February 21, 2017), https://www.newscientist.com/article/2121801-kids-can-pick-up-attitude-from-robots-they-play-and-learn-with/

[80] Kelton Cobb, *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005), 46.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have reviewed how the societal structure has brought about a networked individualism, and the implications thereof. We reviewed how the network has resulted in the socialization of continuous identity development for people in reformulated spheres of influence. For the individual this shift brings a set of complicated elements into the development of the self. The physical and social spaces exist together, requiring the individual to negotiate expression of the self and creation of identity on multiple planes and to a plurality of audiences. Moreover, the timeless quality of the digital space forces the individual to think through multiple audiences in the present and in the future as well – evident especially in emphasis on reputation as the traditional boundary between professional and private life fades. The Digital Age expands the possibilities of relationship between the individual and communities, which are no longer restricted to physical proximity and puts them in the central role of responsibility for those relationships.

As an added complexity, the individual creating identity also enters into a changed sociality that includes relationships with the nonhuman – adding a new set of socializing agents. These nonhumans are actively designed to mimic relationship and advances in technology allow them to become a seamless part of everyday experience. Moreover, media present the individual with relationships to levels of fiction that can influence as a social sphere of identity archetypes and relationships. Thus, the individual is at the center not of several socializing nodes within their networked world that operate not as concentric circles but as active spheres of influence which ebb in and out of the core individual's focus.

At the core of all these shifts and complexities remains the individual person who is continuously constructing identity amongst these spheres. Thus, the individual's epistemology is being shaped not only by the macro social changes but also in the derivative implications explored in this chapter that leaves the individual creating continuous identity among multiple communities. Set among these many spheres of influence and identity is the one that is the primary concern of this thesis: the Christian identity. This identity is also socialized overtly through Christian education and inherently through interaction with what we understand as community. In the following chapter, we will explore the implications of these macro and micro scale changes for an amended approach to Christian education that takes into consideration these changes.

CHAPTER 3:

TRANSFORMED EPISTEMOLOGY MEANS AMENDING PEDAGOGY

The rapid changes reviewed emerged into the public causing individuals to have

to negotiate a new way of living against an old way of understanding. The new way of

living is a product of a new societal structure that practically socializes an inherent logic

that deprioritizes physical location, removes the necessity of synchronized time, and

changes the construction of culture (chapter 1). Compounded on this societal change, the

individual's role in this society is intensified as they must continuously create identity

amongst a host of human and nonhuman socializing agents (chapter 2) within an added

over-layer of sociality. These changes have been analyzed to demonstrate the profundity

of the impact that the Digital Age has had on individual existence and thus on a

transformation to their epistemology. In so doing, the hope is to aid Christian educators in

responding to Palmer's call to first transform our understanding of epistemology in order

to amend our pedagogy.[81] In this chapter, we will examine how these micro and macro

changes affect epistemology and its implications for pedagogy in Christian education.

First and foremost, the following chapter has as an assumption the protestant goal

of Christian education which already presupposes the 'priesthood of all believers.' As

Paul Tillich asserted, "Most of us are students of theology, whether we teach or learn,

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[81] Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, xvii.

whether we be missionaries or educators, ministers or social workers, administrators or political leaders . . . Whatever else we may be, we are first all theologians."[82] This also suggests that individual theology is at the core of all the things people do. It is both an ontological and epistemological aspect of their everyday life – whether it is declared or not; or whether it matches their conscious perception of their theology or not. This is important because in the discussion of teaching the way to *become* Christian – or the Christian identity – a large part of the complexity of the Digital Age lies in the disparity between traditional Modern approaches to pedagogy and the socialized subconscious realities of Digital Age reality.

The Hyper-Social Epistemology

Beyond the inclusion of new technology in churches, and beyond participating in social media through Facebook or Twitter, the task of Christian education in the Digital Age will require wrestling with the underlying logic of network society and its implications, the new over-layer of existence which represents new permutations of external Other, and the dynamic spheres of socialization of which bring about the reality of ever-available multiple communities. Within the networked society, people make meaning within the logic of participating within the network. People are reckoning with questions of identity across multiple audiences that both define and distinguish them across many cultures that span between historical truths to various levels of fiction. These realities, along with the liminal space between the Modern traditional and the Digital represents a change to the way people understand knowing in their world.

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[82] Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Penguin Books, 1949), 119.

People in the Digital Age are making meaning with, through and within technology in the vast network of people, ideas, and information that the technology has helped bring about. This lived experience is changing the way that people approach the process of knowing itself. Because the socialized logic of the network is not temporally or physically anchored, the developing epistemology is not as firmly rooted in traditional historical sources of authority or in traditional cultural constructs as before. Rather their understanding of knowing is increasingly reliant on the new sociality itself – which is a growing aspect of their lived experience. In this way, what we have is a *hyper-social epistemology* that relies on the network sociality and is thus untethered from traditional time and place.

To explain: a social epistemology is one that emphasizes that the doxastic mechanisms of people are "thoroughly social—socially transmitted, socially reinforced and monitored, socially shared."[83] This means that their understanding of knowing is based within their social sphere—or socially constructed. Yet, as we have analyzed, individual's social spheres have dramatically expanded, creating an environment in which their social epistemology is in overdrive by the sheer expanse of the sociality of the Digital Age. Moreover, the focus on continuous identity creation means that the individually is constantly seeking this transmission and reification within the landscape of multiple audiences and communities. Thus, traditional constructs of knowledge are challenged, especially if they base their claims in tradition that affirms cultural authority

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[83] Frederick F. Schmitt, *Socializing Epistemology: the Social Dimensions of Knowledge* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1994), 31.

rooted in place and time. Instead, the hyper-social epistemology looks to reify knowledge within the network, seeking social consensus over singular cultural authority. Finally, because the network society incubates culture that is a reproduction of culture and removed from place and time, the only place this hyper-social epistemology can be shared and reinforced is within the network sociality itself, further untethering from traditional moorings that hail their authority from history and location.

Amending Pedagogy

If people's epistemology has changed based on their ways of living, but the way we approach Christian education are not, the result will be confusion at best or at worst irrelevance. It may be that the consequences of this incongruity are already here. Christian authors and church leaders alike decry the apparent decline in church membership and participation,[84] and they are actively seeking to understand why it is happening. Yet most churches operate with a pedagogy that reflects traditional ideas of epistemology, making pedagogical assumptions that no longer apply (assumptions like: singular authority, place-based tradition, synchronized gathering, etc.). Herein lies the difficulty of the sudden digital emergence and the liminality between eras. Many approaches to the way of doing church and teaching Christian identity have existed for a long time. For so long in fact, that aspects of them may too have become absorbed by the

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[84] There are many contemporary authors that have written on the decline of church membership and the rise of the "nones." Among them are various writers at www.theatlantic.com, and authors like Kenda Creasy Dean, Christian Smith, and Adam Hamilton.

simulacra of culture and levels of fiction. It may be that Christian educators are doing

what colleges are doing as William Bowen commented while contemplating what the

Digital Age will mean for higher education: still metaphorically applying leeches to cure

illness because it was always done that way.[85]

This is not to suggest that traditional practice or methods are wrong and should

discontinue. On the contrary, it may be that some are more important now than ever!

Instead, it is that these strategies must be crafted within a pedagogy that understands the

hyper-social epistemology. This epistemology is not necessarily foreign to us, since we

ourselves live within the digital age. However, it is one that may be difficult because it

will mean examining the reality that is happening within us —realty that, as Palmer

asserts, "is 'in here' as well and therefore between us; we and the rest of the world . . .

So the transformation must begin in the transformed heart of the teacher."[86] In other

words, the task is self-reflective since it is a reality that Christian educators must confront

in themselves to apply outward. The implications of this will be difficult because there

may be some discarding of strategies or axioms of the Modern Era that no longer apply.

Yet this time will also be one of great possibility; as Tillich reminds us, when the

foundations of the old way crumble, the cynicism embedded in those foundations also

crumbles,[87] giving way to new opportunity.

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[85] William G. Bowen, Kelly A. Lack, and Kevin M. Guthrie, *Higher Education in the Digital Age* (New York: Ithaka, 2013), 43.

[86] Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 107.

[87] Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations,*10.

Negotiating the (Not-So) Tragic Gap

Because the Digital Age is so new, individuals find themselves in a crisis of eras: with one foot in the expectations of the traditional (very) recent past, and another in the realities of the digital present. Thus, the Christian identity itself may now be in an exaggerated position of what Palmer calls "standing in the tragic gap" meaning, "living between reality and possibility, between what is and what could and should be".[88] This liminal time may be eroding the reliance on traditional epistemological anchors but also presenting an opportunity to find new, less culturally dependent ways to teach historical truths. In other words, the hyper-social aspect of the new epistemology makes it so that, pedagogically, educators cannot *rely* on the declaration of authoritative truth based on traditional precedent alone (like existing in a textbook). Instead, the hyper-social epistemology looks to the new sociality itself for re-affirmation of truth, such that the concept of singular authority is no longer applicable. Thus, the Christian educator must also find ways to socially reinforce these truths through more active sharing and reinforcement within the new sociality.

This transference of authority from singular to social does not outright deny the existence of sources authority but rather requires consistent confirmation within the sociality – a sort of multiple audience model of affirmation. Because from society, to

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[88] Parker J. Palmer, *The Promise of Paradox: a Celebration of Contradictions in the Christian Life* (San Francisco, CA: Josssey-Bass, 2008), xxx.

individual identity we *process* our world differently,[89] and this processing means a change to what we think are epistemological anchors. This is not to say that the new sociality was not without perils of its own. Here Castells warns:

> The inclusion of most cultural systems within the integrated communication system based in digitized electronic production, distribution, and exchange of signals has major consequences for social forms and processes. On the one hand, it weakens considerably the symbolic power of traditional senders external to the system, transmitting through historically encoded social habits: religion, morality, authority, traditional values, political ideology. Not that they disappear, but that they are weakened unless they recode themselves in the new system, where their power becomes multiplied by the electronic materialization of spiritually transmitted habits: electronic preachers and interactive fundamentalist networks are a more efficient, more penetrating form of indoctrination in our societies than face-to-face transmission of distant, charismatic authority.[90]

In other words, while people's epistemology reinforces meaning through a multivariate digital presence, the multivariate presence itself can become nullifying. Thus, the Christian educator must not only seek to socially reinforce teaching but their pedagogy

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[89] Brad J. Kallenberg, *God and Gadgets: Following Jesus in a Technological World* (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 116.

[90] Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 406.

must be ready to accept the skepticism that comes with the firm lack of singular authority.

In a book addressing the current transitional time, Phyllis Tickle asserts that "the Church has always been sucked along in the same ideational currents as has the culture in general."[91] If this is true, then this transitional time will prove one of increased hardship for educators who are navigating the gap between eras. The constructs of the traditional era will dictate an epistemological defensive approach based on singular historically based authority, yet the hyper-social epistemology will grow increasingly skeptical if this authority is not reinforced or shared within the network. If Christian educators do not thoughtfully create the opportunity of authority within the network, they may end up sucked into ideational abyss of a network sociality that denies authority altogether. In this way, the tragic gap of eras is one marked by a polarity between epistemological pulls—a space of extreme paradox between knowing of one age and knowing of another.

A Pedagogy of Extreme Paradoxes

Fortunately, as Palmer teaches us in *The Promise of Paradox,* the Christian identity is already one that wrestles with the paradox of salvation in Christ.[92] So the task is less theological (though still a subject for another study) and more about amending pedagogy to engage with an epistemology in paradox. The simulacra of culture within the timeless and location-less environment of the digital age widens the poles of paradox by

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[91] Phyllis Tickle and Danielle Shroyer, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 151.

[92] Palmer, *The Promise of Paradox, 23.*

weakening the authoritative presence of historical narrative and by making the eternal

collide with the present in the instant availability of information and people. In order to

address this polarity, an amended pedagogy must attend to heightened skepticism with

patient deliberation that spans time, creates spaces for anchoring teaching within the new

sociality, and rethinks meaningful synchronization of experience.

Place-less culture creates a polarity between the real and the unreal. In the Digital

Age, historical culture must be mediated and expressed through media in order to exist

within it. Through this same media, historical beliefs become transformed *because* of

their expression in the system.[93] This cycle produces the paradox of historical culture as

real and as a level of fiction. As an example, in the 2004 film *The Passion of the Christ*,

the story of Jesus's crucifixion is told using the cinematographic tools of filmmaking.

The film remains was widely viewed and is still the highest earning box office rated R

movie of all time. The film is also watched regularly by Christians and churches and at

times lauded as an educational tool.[94] Yet the movie depicts a graphic story based mostly

on the feverish dreams of a 19th century Augustinian nun.[95] The movie was a box office

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[93] Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society,* 357.

[94] Rick Joyner, "Rick Joyner: Every Christian Should See The Passion of the Christ," CBN http://www1.cbn.com/biblestudy/rick-joyner%3A-every-christian-should-see-the-passion-of-the-christ (accessed May 11, 2017).

[95] James Crossan, "Hymn to a Savage God: Mel Gibsen Uses a 'Hidden Script' Based on Visions of a German Nun in Making His Film," *Beliefnet*, (April 1, 2004)., http://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/christianity/2004/03/hymn-to-a-savage-god.aspx

hit, and continues to be watched in churches looking to remember the suffering of Jesus on the cross. The movie begs the question: Did it really happen that way? This is one of many examples of the paradox obscuring reality and levels of fiction that an amended pedagogy must address.

The shift from the requirement of synchronized existence, and the timelessness of the internet, creates a paradox between the past, the present and the future; between the present and the eternal. Indeed time has always been a mystery and a tragedy of theological contemplation,[96] which is now further polarized. The new paradox of time is not in its mystery but in the presence of time*s* all at once. A person in the act of archiving their own continuous identity by posting an image on Instagram makes an expression of the present, which will be consistently present in the future, and create a record of their past all at the same time within the digital sociality. This paradox amplifies the "infinite significance of every moment of time"[97] making time both more and less significant— more in the potential of the decision, less in the repetitiveness of this digital reality. The hyper-social epistemology approaches knowledge within this timeless sociality. An amended pedagogy must likewise reflect that teaching does not happen in one instance but also across the de-synchronized over-layer. This does not mean that synchronized time (think classroom) is irrelevant, but that it is only a fraction on the continuum of the teaching relationship. In this way, thoughtfulness of the digital relationship becomes an important aspect of an amended pedagogy.

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[96] Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations,* 36.

[97] Ibid., 37.

Continuing in relationship, one of the most significant paradoxes of relationship in the Digital Age is the isolating connectedness.[98] The disembodied digital network makes connectedness more possible across all distance. Yet, as reviewed, the logic of networked individualism and the management of continuous identity also isolates the individual and makes it difficult for people to seek deeper expressions of relationship. In addition, within the over-layer, nonhuman connections and levels of fiction creates even further polarity in this paradox of relationship. As Turkle phrases it, "In our new culture of connection, we are lonely but afraid of intimacy."[99] Moreover, within this paradox is the need to maintain multiple relationships within the network, leaving individual relationships with less attention.[100] Thus even while thoughtfully conceiving of teaching relationship; an amended pedagogy must consider the paradox of the isolated connectedness of the networked individual, adding in the polarity of eagerness and resistance to the relationship itself.

Christian Identity and Church Community

As we examined in chapter 1, the digital age shifts the structure of society to the logic of a network, deforming and weakening traditional entities that base their authority on location and synchronization. As a result, institutions and communities must contend with the reality of networked individualism, and renegotiate their own construction in a

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[98] What Sherry Turkle's book *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* is entirely about.

[99] Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation,* 357.

[100] Ibid., 160.

shifted landscape. This same change expresses itself in the way we understand ourselves to be together in the church. The church, after all is the extension and environment of the Christian educator. As Tillich says, "Theology does not exist outside the community of those who affirm that Jesus is the Christ, outside of the Church, the assembly of God."[101] Without the social reinforcement of the church as one of the various communities within which the individual operates, an amended pedagogy would not truly understand the hyper-social epistemology.

For the church, this will mean a reinterpretation of what it means to be one of the communities of the Christian individual rather than *the* community. In fact, this may require an even deeper examination by the church of what it means to be community in general. From the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (NRSV), and from the many words of instruction and encouragement in the epistles on the way of being church, the *togetherness* that is the church remains important. Thus the reinterpretation required in the amended pedagogy of the Digital Age is not in the concept of gathering but in what constitutes gathering itself. Just as the Christian educator must consider the digital relationship individually, so a consideration of the group relationship that is the church must be part of an amended pedagogy.

This new communal modality will present a challenge for a church that views community through a traditional lens involving only embodiment and synchronized time. As evidenced by the many publications and articles, and research on church

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[101] Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations,* 120.

attendance,[102] there is a real concern equating physical presence with spiritual desire. However, these concerns can appear to be more on preserving a model of church than on teaching Christian identity. Similar research reveals that people consider themselves spiritual but not religious,[103] which could also reflect a dissolution with a traditional community structure that does not apply to their lived reality. Without a church community that actively shares, reinforces, and encourages the amended pedagogy, then it will lack the comprehensiveness required by the hyper-social epistemology of the individual.

Additionally, without the support of the church as a social reinforcement to an amended pedagogy, the church itself runs the risk of countering the Christian educator. Churches that do not understand the transformed epistemology may unwittingly promote what Smith and Denton call a "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism,"[104] an individualistic replacement to faith rooted in theologically shallow simulacra of faith. This approach can deny the theological socialization of the network society and incubate Christians who

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[102] Michael Lipka, "What Surveys Say about Worship Attendance – and Why Some Stay Home," *Pew Research Center* (September 13. 2103)., http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/09/13/what-surveys-say-about-worship-attendance-and-why-some-stay-home/

[103] "Religion and the Unaffiliated," *Pew Research Center* (October 9, 2012), http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise-religion/

[104] Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 166-171.

attempt to follow the culture of the community without being able to adapt it to their reality within the network. This can produce what Kelton Cobb calls "Religion$_3$," which elevates the ideas and values of the church as they are considered part of dominant culture–a culture that at one point was part of its own history but is no longer religious in nature.[105] In other words, producing Christians who are cultural ambassadors for a way of church rather than faithful disciples.

Thus for pedagogy to truly be comprehensive it must extend beyond the educator to a new examination of community. The pedagogical consideration of the network must recognize that people are forming real communities all around, just not in the same way as before. Moreover, within these communities people are actively seeking the reinforcement of their continuous identity. Thus, an amended pedagogy for the Digital Age will require a whole church approach to re-thinking the historical and cultural spaces of social reification of the Christian identity. As Tillich professed, "Religion is the substance of culture and culture is the form of religion."[106] Thus, it will also require the network church community to envision and teach interpretation of culture in a way that speaks to the hyper-social epistemology.

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[105] Kelton Cobb, *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2005), 128.

[106] Paul Tillich, "Aspects of a Religious Analysis of Culture," in *The Essential Tillich*, ed. F. Forrester Church (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 103.

Rethinking the Christian Identity

The networked Christian is of course very concerned with the continuous creation of their own Christian identity. As a consideration of pedagogy in this new hyper-social epistemology, it may also be important to revisit what it means to be Christian. As an example, from the time of the Great Reformation, one focus on Christian identity was intentional on individualizing the missional aspect of "priesthood."[107] The Digital Age multiplies this reality exponentially. The individual, facing a multitude of Others (human and nonhuman alike), and realities (including levels of fiction), is also in constant assessment of belief and decree. They are as constant theologians in a heightened arena of the many iterations of Buber's I-Thou, I-You, I-It, and Them-Us – exploring the presence of God in the presence others,[108] albeit also in a different spaces.

As reviewed in chapter 2, the individual can no longer be understood as defined by any single community. Rather, they exist in a space between several communities and cultures that present themselves as dynamic spheres of influence. Specifically stated, there can be no reasonable expectation that identity can remain confined to a singular church community, place-based neighborhood, or even larger faith expression. Instead, the individual must make meaning among the hyper-social space of multiple communit**ies**. Unfortunately, this also likely means that the individual can lose

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[107] Andreas Buss, "The Evolution of Western Individualism," *Religion* 30, no 1 (2000): 1-25, DOI: 10.1006/reli.1999.0227, 13.

[108]Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, transl. Walter Kaufmann (1970), Kindle version loc 340.

confidence that anything beyond the self can be trusted.[109] Again, we see the paradox of

isolated connectedness, or more plainly: loneliness.

Trust–or better yet faith—is among the first things that a person seeks

developmentally, according to Erikson's stages of development[110]. Coincidentally, in the

infancy of the digital era trust may be one of the first things the individual must now gain

(regain?) within the network society to deliver any messages about God. Turkle speaks to

the difficulty for individuals to form bonds of trust when they feel they cannot join the

community; when they feel communities are enclosed.[111] Maintaining a Christian identity

(any singular identity really) will require much more effort and intentionality. This is

especially the case when this identity must compete among the influences of the

nonhuman as well as the human. The nonhuman presence not only competes, but also

may even cheapen the notion of relationship to "a baseline of 'interacting with

something."[112] Within these complexities, an amended pedagogy may need to consider

what it means to create Christian identity in a way that reflects the changes of the digital

sociality.

<div align="center">**Teaching Amongst Levels of Fiction**</div>

The prominent role of various types of media is a space of exploration for

pedagogical expression. Mythology and mysticism, both realms of spiritual, are brought

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[109] Palmer, *The Promise of Paradox,* 71.

[110] Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 247.

[111] Palmer, *The Promise of Paradox*, 59.

[112] Turkle, *Alone Together,* 55.

to life more realistically than ever by advances in video technology and storytelling. In the spirit of paradox, their realism in media can also both elevate and reduce their mystery in life. Still, as Cobb states, "We are living in an era in which most Americans alive today, at least most who have been born since 1945, have received the bulk of our mythological worlds from people who want to sell us something."[113] Mediated mythology can be a gift and a detriment to Christian educators. For many preachers it provides fodder for telling the God story, or for creating parables,[114] however the environments and characters of these stories factor in as levels of fiction in the hyper-social space within which individuals are forming identity. In other words, the hyper-social epistemology may cause individuals to adopt this mediated mythology and mysticism into their identity.

This type of influence on the individual, and on communities that form and distribute within the network must be treated thoughtfully as part of the hyper-social space of the individual's epistemology. In movies, videos, video games and television, people enter into relationship with characters and worlds with which they interact. In order to ensure this level of interaction, storytellers intentionally create complicated worlds infused with complex legends, myths, conflicts and sagas. Often within these worlds "the Christian tradition is downplayed in favour [sic] of primarily polytheistic and animistic forms of religion . . . various gods and deities – both good and bad – are

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[113] Kelton Cobb, *Theology and Popular Culture,* 161.

[114] See the many ways that the Star Wars saga has been used in sermons – one example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwOwjLNXplo.

prominent" and specifically in regards to video games, "players are encouraged – or even obliged if they want to proceed in the game – to perform various 'quests' to collect spiritual objects, like 'totems' or weapons imbued with [magic]."[115] These intentional stories or environments are tailored to the hyper-social epistemology by creating multi-modal network spaces beyond the original media outlet itself – in the form of websites, merchandise, etc. They socially share, reinforce and otherwise reify the cultural spaces they create.

This is not to say that media is intentionally attempting to exclude the Christian identity from its storytelling. Instead, the emphasis is on the level of *intentionality* that goes into the creation of media within levels of fiction. The media stories within the levels of fiction are resolved to do what it takes to retain the focus of the individual and infuse its own narrative identity. As Palmer noted, fiction is capable of entering into relationship with us and even in telling us things about ourselves that we may not have known.[116] Media may be both beneficial and detrimental to the teaching of Christian identity but the sheer prominence and intentionality within them must be considered as they form part of the over-layer of sociality of the Digital. Thus, an amended pedagogy will also need to constantly consider the way that these cultural elements interplay with the teaching of Christian identity.

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[115] Stef Aupers, "'Better Than the Real World': On the Reality and Meaning of Online Computer Games." *Fabula: Zeitschrift Für Erzählforschung/Journal Of Folktale Studies/Revue D'etudes Sur Le Conte Populaire* 48, no. 3-4 (2007): 250-269, 10.

[116] Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 60.

Conclusion

The digital age complicates the already complicated task of teaching Christian identity. By amplifying the paradoxes of the modern era, ushering a new form of society, and forcing a continuous process of identity formation among human and nonhuman Others, the traditional ways of knowing have been transformed. In this transformation, the social over-layer is intensified creating a hyper-social epistemology detached from traditional anchors of authority. This way of being obligates individuals into a state of intense self-reliance—a paradox itself in the communal nature of human relationship. Moreover, the network society's culture spreads the message "trust your feelings, have faith in yourself, follow your bliss, do your own thing, listen to your inner child, do what feels right, be true to yourself"[117] as messages of salvation and spiritual strength. In order to address these realities and speak to a transformed epistemology, Christian educators must amend their pedagogy.

A Digital Age pedagogy, must comprehend the symbiotic relationship between the network society and identity. Christian educators must see the development of Christian identity as one in extreme paradox. Moreover, the church itself—as one of the many communities of social reinforcement—exists in the paradox of togetherness with God and relationship, and the isolation of networked individuals within who are in continuous identity construction within the new sociality. It is a difficult but not impossible task. If as Palmer stated, "the hope of every authentic religious leader is to break people's addiction to dead forms of faith and lead them to dependence on the living

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[117] Cobb, *Theology and Popular Culture,* 252.

God,"[118] then this liminal space between eras will be a very revealing one. Better yet, because of the infancy of the digital age Christian educators may find themselves in a unique space to lead in the comprehension of the new epistemology and its implications beyond education. The first step in that direction is to move beyond the interface to the space in which Christianity itself thrives: the mystery of *being* – now in the digital age.

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[118] Palmer, *The Promise of Paradox,* 12.

CONCLUSION

The sudden emergence of the Digital Age has caused dramatic shifts in the way society organizes itself, on the way people form identity and relationships, and ultimately on people's way of knowing. These changes have brought about a hyper-social epistemology, which seeks constant reinforcement within the new network sociality. Because this epistemology depends heavily on the network, it de-prioritizes traditional epistemological anchors that are based in historical culture. These changes are important for Christian educators to understand in order to begin amending their pedagogy for a new age.

When the exploration and research began towards this thesis three years ago, the public political world had not yet become as troubling as it now appears to be (with alternative facts, and fake news). In a way, the 2016 election process served to confirm the presence of a hyper-social epistemology. The prioritized role that social media played in both the spreading and receiving of political messaging, and in facilitating communities around political ideology was put on full display. A shocking reality to many, even apparently to Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, who recently posted a manifesto of his own (on Facebook of course) discussing his vision for the centralized

role of his platform in the network society.[119] This public discussion on veracity and authority has quite visibly demonstrated the deformation of traditional anchors of truth in society and the way people rely epistemologically on social reinforcement. However, as I hope I have articulated, this example does not encompass the full depth of the impact of the new age.

The intent of this project was to demonstrate – through an analysis of technology, society, and identity – the dramatic changes to being individually and being in relationship that have occurred as a result of the digital age and its implications for the teaching of Christian identity and community. The hyper-social epistemology, the networked society, and the myriad of human, nonhuman, real and fictional relationships have implications not only to education about theology, but also to the study of theology itself. By demonstrating these changes and exploring some implications for pedagogy, I hope to also catalyze more exploration and study to an age that is still dawning, and not yet fully understood by any academic discipline.

There are, of course, many other social realities at play which factor into the meaning making—too many that can be mentioned in one thesis, and not all of them a direct result of the Digital Age. Among them one that was highly considered to mention but taken out for sake of focus, is the extended human lifespan and the disruption of lifecycle expectations. Because people are living longer, multiple generations compete

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[119] Mark Zuckerberg, "Building Global Community" *Facebook*, (February 16, 2017), https://www.facebook.com/notes/mark-zuckerberg/building-global-community/10154544292806634

for economics and power, sharing social space, and are attempting to impose worldviews on each other in a struggle for cultural authority. As an added layer, the network society and its resulting economic and political shifts have dramatically changed the expectations on stages of the human lifecycle. These two factors alone are worthy to explore as centers of meaning making – and aggravators in the groups relied upon for knowledge by a hyper-social epistemology.

Likewise, it seems appropriate to mention that these changes are affecting all living generations at the same time – though perhaps not in the same way. While younger generations may have more of a grasp of the interface of the technology, having grown up with it, this does not in and of itself suggest they have any more insight into its implications. In agreement with Turkle, this is to assert that this is not a simple case of digital natives vs digital immigrants. [120] Rather, the network society, the detachment from place, the desynchronization of time, the intensification of identity, and the cultural implications discussed affect all directly or indirectly, regardless of participation. In this way, we are all facing a new dawn together and the epistemological transformation is shared across generations.

Additionally, while all generations are facing this together, it may be that children stand the most to benefit from deeper exploration on the subject. Children in the Digital Age are growing up with parents, teachers, and other caretaking adults who are all affected by the things explored here but have lived through its emergence. It is probable that these changes may have an impact on parenting – especially that parents engulfed in

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[120] Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversations*, 31.

their own pursuit of network identity may unwittingly affecting their children's developmental needs. Furthermore, as the accessibility and ease of the network extend, children are themselves introduced into the network at an earlier and earlier age. There are many questions to ponder here, including what it will mean developmentally for children entering the digital space and socializing early into a hyper-social epistemology.

To conclude, it is my sincere thought that the Digital Age with its many difficulties may be a time of, as Phyllis Tickle called (perhaps prematurely), "The Great Emergence" of a renewed Christian Identity. An identity that may cast off layers of culture and ideology, which may have been detracting from its true form. Christian educators are already interdisciplinary thinkers used to dealing with the mystery of the social, difficult, mystical world of people and meaning. In the dawn of new being, these educators will have new opportunities to pioneer in the complexities of human existence, to break free of some of the dead forms of faith, and introduce a whole new phase in relationship with God and each other.

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