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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Religious “Interpersonal Network Proximity” and the Case for Recognition

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the secular societal transition away from traditional, tight-knit forms of community to a more networked model. This social shift is interesting to consider in tandem with theories of secularization that emphasize the rise of an individualized social imaginary. Within a networked society, individuals remain inherently communicative and thus retain the ability to cultivate social capital in new and interesting ways. This has implications for religion as religious communities can also be seen as increasingly networked. Such developments might have the potential to challenge more traditional forms of religious authority. In light of these ideas, a consideration of philosophical understandings of *recognition* can prove helpful when determining how marginalized religious individuals might create new networked communities through which contemporary modes of recognition could be generated. Through this process, social media resources may serve to increase networking capabilities and thus the potential to cultivate a form of social capital that is ethically grounded in a mode of recognition for which justice is the ultimate goal.

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Dedication

For my dad who always makes me think and my mom who always makes me smile.

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Introduction

Social media is playing a surprising role in regards to what could be termed as the reenchantment of the world. Indeed there remains little question that those theories of disenchantment and secularization, which suggest that religion will inevitably fade out as science and reason progress, have proved false. What has in fact taken place is an explosion in diverse religious practices, all of which exist simultaneously and often alongside one another, in a world that is becoming increasingly globalized.¹ Furthermore, secular technologies, such as the Internet – and particularly social media – allow for continuous and instantaneous communication to take place on a global scale. Such new technologies have the potential to positively affect the agency of religious networks with respect to social capital building. I will suggest that these new forms of social media might provide marginal religious groups with a new voice – acting something like a megaphone – that they would not have had access to either within (or outside of) their religious communities before the development of online social media resources. Furthermore, I am interested in how religion is affected by the contemporary western transition to a society characterized by various forms of networking. With this in mind, I aim to understand the implications of this societal transition in regards to the manner in which marginalized religious individuals generate recognition via new forms of networking.

I should note, at the outset, that the secular trends I am tracing are a western brand and thus can be applied only in a western context. Moreover, I do not assume that the trends I am observing might be applied universally even within the west. What I do suggest, however, is that there appears to be an observable trend, within secular western society, towards networked forms of community as opposed to more traditional institutional organizations. I believe this

¹ Charles Taylor refers to this explosion of diverse religious practices as “the Nova Effect.” See Charles Taylor,

development can be applied to religious groups and, moreover, that social media is playing an important role in regards to the way philosophical understandings of recognition might be generated within a networked society. Furthermore, given the nature of the medium I am using to observe these trends (here I refer to the fact that social media resources have the ability to transcend traditional social and geographic barriers), it is interesting to consider whether there is the potential for people outside of a western context to thus be impacted

In Chapter 1, I will provide the philosophical foundation for my research as it pertains to the rise of a secularized and individualized social imaginary. For this I will draw upon the work of Charles Taylor who has developed a complex tracing of these issues in his voluminous work, *A Secular Age*. In consideration of Taylor's work, I will attempt to draw out those aspects that serve as the most pivotal for my research – i.e., those which concern the rise of individualism. Taylor's alternative understanding of individualism, as something that remains dialogical and inherently communicative, has implications for the ideas I will discuss in the second chapter. These ideas concern the transition, within contemporary western society, away from tight-knit institutions towards networked individualism. Throughout the progression of this initial chapter, I will trace Taylor's thought up to the point at which he begins to discuss recognition – as it is with recognition, that I find his explanation to be insufficient.

There is little question that contemporary western society has become characterized by forms of individualism. In regards to this increasing individualization, the west has often been charged with apathy and narcissism. Moreover, the observable decline in participation in traditional forms of institutionalized organizations (i.e., religious institutions) has led some to believe that people within secular society are becoming increasingly alienated and thus unable to develop social capital. In Chapter 2, I will discuss the secular societal transition away from

tight-knit, traditional forms of community towards a networked model. I will suggest that through these new forms of “networked individualism,”² contemporary individuals retain the ability to cultivate social capital in new and interesting ways – including through the effective use of online resources such as social media. Furthermore, I shall suggest that this transition towards a networked model has implications for contemporary religion.

This understanding is compatible with Taylor’s alternative version of individualism insofar as it takes into account the idea that an increasingly individualized society will continue engaging in dialogue and community – albeit in innovative and diverse ways. I shall argue that the Internet, and particularly social media, serves as a vehicle through which networked individuals have the potential to cultivate social capital in contemporary society. I will introduce a template developed by sociologists, Annabel Quan-Haase and Barry Wellman, which aims to understand how online resources influence the development of social capital. This template has been adopted, modified, and applied specifically to religious groups by Pauline Hope Cheong and Jessie Poon.

In the last portion of the second chapter I will address my concerns with Taylor’s understanding of recognition. In an attempt to solve some of the problems that arise with Taylor’s view, I will consult the work of Paul Ricoeur who has provided a more nuanced definition of recognition. This development will serve as the fundamental view of recognition that I shall apply to my research. At this point I shall also engage in an experiment through which I will introduce a new term that indicates Ricoeur’s influence. It is my hope that this

The term “networked individualism” was first coined by sociologist, Barry Wellman, and concerns the secular societal transition towards new networked forms of community. For a discussion of this development, and its social implications, see Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman, *Networked: The New Social Operating System*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012).

experiment might serve to bridge the philosophical ideas of Ricoeur with social scientific research surrounding “networked individualism” and social capital.

Chapter 3 will begin to consider in what manner members of online religious networks might generate recognition and cultivate social capital through the use of social media. I will aim to further understand what the implications of these ideas are with respect to authority. It has been shown that social media can be used to both challenge and affirm traditional forms of religious authority. Cheong, for instance, has shown how megachurch pastors in America utilize social media tools in order to extend their evangelical reach and build social capital. I will also consider the work of Ananda Mitra, who has attempted to understand how online tools might provide marginalized individuals and groups with the means to develop a collective voice that might be understood as a form of online community. Mitra further suggests that this activity has implications for acknowledgement. In this chapter I will also attempt to qualify how I understand social capital with specific respect to Ricoeur’s understanding of justice. This ethically grounded form of social capital is what I will suggest might be cultivated by marginalized individuals through the participation in networked activity.

In Chapter 4 I will discuss specific examples of how marginalized religious individuals appear to be utilizing social media to generate a contemporary mode of recognition through forms of online networked communities. I will suggest that, through this activity, gay Christians and Muslim feminists are becoming increasingly visible. This, moreover, has positive implications pertaining to their ability to cultivate a form of social capital that could appeal to a Ricoeurian ethic of justice. Indeed, it is in this final chapter that the ideas surrounding “networked individualism,” recognition, social capital, and authority begin to intersect in light of my proposed new term. Through the application of this new term to the observations discussed

in relation to gay Christians and Muslim feminists, it becomes possible to envision these networks receiving institutional recognition at Ricoeur's level of plurality of persons. It is at this level, according to Ricoeur, that justice is possible.

Chapter 1: Tracing Charles Taylor's Alternative Version of Individualism

The key to my research project on contemporary network communities is Charles Taylor's alternative understanding of individualism as one that rests upon notions of self-authenticity and recognition. In order to come to a proper understanding of this idea, and how it relates to contemporary religion in secular western society, it will be helpful to trace Taylor's alternative version of individualism to its religious roots. This complex tracing is the primary focus of the present chapter. I will further aim to briefly suggest how Taylor's ideas concerning authenticity and recognition become pertinent to the way that religious networks might cultivate social capital³ in a society that is moving away from tight-knit institutions towards networked communicative forms.

In regards to the contextualization of my research, I believe it is necessary to understand how religious practice and community have changed with the rise of secularism. Some of the most relevant work to draw upon in this regard is, in my opinion, that of Charles Taylor. Indeed, Taylor offers a vastly complex and multifaceted explanation of the rise of western secularism. For my purposes, however, it is necessary to hone in on one particular thread of his argument (although I may need to draw upon other lines of his thought throughout this process). The strand of Taylor's thought upon which I shall focus particularly is his explanation of the rise of individualism, as it relates to the emergence of secularism, and how modern individualism has come to permeate our present social imaginary. This form of contemporary individualism has come to be understood by western society as a given – something that moderns just take for

³ Social capital refers to the idea that there is value gained through membership and participation in communities. This "capital," cultivated through various forms of communication and social activity, can, like more tangible forms of capital (i.e., economic capital) also be used to achieve desired goals. I will provide an in-depth discussion of social capital in the following chapter.

granted as a sort of inevitable and widely accepted ideal.⁴ It has also, as I aim to suggest, served to promote a distinct view of the way religion functions in secular society. As I will discuss at greater length in the following chapters, it was proposed that, with the rise of secularism and individualism, religion would decline and, eventually, fade away entirely.⁵ Some studies today seem to suggest that this is indeed the case, as one can observe a decline in traditional forms of religious affiliation in the western world.⁶ As I will argue, however, it appears to me that these trends are not indicative of a decline in religion but rather in a movement away from traditional forms of religious community towards new forms of, what some social scientists are calling, “networked individualism.” I will explore this in more depth later, but for now shall return to the rise of individualism as Taylor describes it.

It is impossible to trace Taylor’s ideas regarding modern individualism without referring simultaneously to his discussions of the rise of western secularism. I will thus consult – as daunting as it may be – Taylor’s most voluminous and renowned work, *A Secular Age*. Within this massive volume Taylor asks the fundamental question that will become indispensable in order to come to a useful understanding of secularism: “Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”⁷ Although I would hesitate to accept Taylor’s theory of secularism wholesale, what I find particularly convincing, in regards to his theory, is how he has traced the rise of modern individualism and effectively applied his findings to secular society today. In addition to this, I think that, for the purpose of understanding Taylor’s ideas concerning

⁴ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, (London : Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

⁵ For instance, see Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, (New York: Doubleday, 1969). Berger has since renounced this early position.

⁶ Luis Lugo, Cary Funk, and Greg Smith, “‘Nones’ on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation,” *The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*, (Washington: Pew Research Center, 2012). <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.

⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25.

individualism specifically, it will also be helpful to refer to two of his smaller works *The Malaise of Modernity* and *Modern Social Imaginaries*. It will, of course, be impossible to provide an in-depth account of Taylor's explanation in its entirety, but I will attempt to shed light on those aspects of his thought that are especially pertinent for the purposes of my research.

Perhaps what is important to understand first and foremost, specifically in regards to Taylor's thought, is his emphasis on the notion that human beings cannot be understood – nor can they understand themselves – apart from the social reality (what Taylor refers to as the social imaginary) in which they are found.⁸ For Taylor the social imaginary serves as a more nuanced version of a social context or structure. The social imaginary refers to “the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.”⁹ He is essentially proposing that no human activity or belief system can be understood apart from the context in which it arises – it is always influenced by social factors. Human beings are shaped by their social imaginary while at the same time human thought and activity have the potential to transform the dominant social imaginary over time. The relationship is, in this sense, mutual. Therefore, in order to answer the question proposed on the previous page, and determine its relation to the rise of individualism, one must understand the social imaginary of both 1500 and 2000 and, moreover, how they came to be so drastically different. I will begin with the earlier time frame.

According to Taylor, there were three major and extremely pervasive features of the pre-Reformation world that made the notion of unbelief quite nearly impossible to fathom. Indeed,

⁸ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23-30.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

these notions were deeply woven into the fabric of the social imaginary of this period; an imaginary which (as I mentioned) was very different from the one that Taylor would argue dominates our society today. These differences can be summarized in the following observations as described by Taylor. 1.) At that time, the entire natural world was understood to be intimately intertwined with the divine. That is, God was seen to be the creator and maintainer of the natural order – every storm, drought, flood, and fertile year a sign of his providence. 2.) Kingdoms and empires were all seen to be grounded in the divine and, moreover, ritual and worship were key activities for all associations found within the society. 3.) Prior to the sixteenth century, people lived in an enchanted world – a world where “beyond all the inevitable ambivalences, the Christian god was the ultimate guarantee that good would triumph or at least hold the plentiful forces of darkness at bay.”¹⁰ Taylor refers to these three features as “the bulwarks of belief.”¹¹

Taylor explicitly notes that one must resist the temptation to explain the rise of secularism as a mere “subtraction” of these elements – for this would be to deny the full historical story, which is crucial if one is to properly grasp the unfolding of secularism.¹² One might argue that, for Taylor, the climax of this journey was the Reformation – that by the time the Reformation was at its peak during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the rise of individualism and secularism became virtually inevitable. There are, however, a number of crucial pre-Reformation elements that must also be noted. For instance, Taylor refers to Karl Jaspers’ hypothesis regarding the extraordinary phenomenon that was the birth of the Axial Age, which took place around 500 BCE. This phenomenon concerns the simultaneous rise of religious

¹⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 26.

¹¹ See *ibid.*, 25-89.

¹² *Ibid.*, 157.

traditions such as Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and prophetic Judaism.¹³

All of these traditions resembled each other insofar as they exhibited a new level of human consciousness that had previously been absent from religious practice and understanding.¹⁴

According to Jaspers, these traditions arose in China, India, and the west without any knowledge of one another.

What is new about this age, in all three areas of the world, is that man becomes conscious of Being as a whole, of himself and his limitations. He experiences terror of the world and his own powerlessness. He asks radical questions. Face to face with the void he strives for liberation and redemption. By consciously recognising his limits he sets himself the highest goals. He experiences absoluteness in the depths of selfhood and in the lucidity of transcendence.¹⁵

For Taylor, this phenomenon would serve to begin the long transition to a social imaginary that would be characterized by modern individualism.¹⁶ But this vast time-frame and its development needs to be qualified. Although the introduction of the Axial traditions did, for the first time, introduce a form of human awareness that had hitherto been unavailable within the social imaginary of the time, the majority of people remained firmly in the old mould. This was characterized by what Taylor refers to as forms of *embeddedness*. Although it is not necessary to outline each form, it is worth noting the one that is most striking. That is, until the Axial Age, human beings were embedded in regards to how they understood the notion of human flourishing and, therefore, the way they understood the function of the divine and spirituality. This is to say that, according to Taylor, within these early forms of religion, the notion of human good did not go beyond everyday flourishing, which concerns things like crop productivity, good health, and longevity. Furthermore, these traditions were community-based and highly interdependent. This

¹³ Jaspers would further note that this era also marked the beginning of Greek philosophy.

¹⁴ Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1953), 1-21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 155.

notion can be observed in many ways, including the manner in which these groups accessed and related to the divine.¹⁷

The Axial Age, which Jaspers postulates as beginning between approximately 500 BCE and 200 CE, introduced a process of societal *disembedding* that Taylor argues would contribute to the radical shift in imaginaries that would ultimately take place between 1500 and 2000 BCE. At the outset, however, they served as little more than a faint whisper of the revolutionary shift that would take place in millennia to come. Indeed, the form of religious individualism that the Axial traditions brought about was unprecedented. Nevertheless, it initially served only to change a minority of religious elites who remained marginal to the larger population which “was still a matrix of embeddedness.” According to Taylor, “what had yet to happen was for this matrix to be itself transformed, to be made over according to some of the principles of Axial spirituality, so that the ‘world’ itself would come to be seen as constituted by individuals.”¹⁸ It is at this juncture that Taylor hones in on the trajectory of Christianity and how its Protestant expression, specifically, contributed to the form of modern individualism that now dominates the modern western imaginary. This will be discussed at greater length as this chapter progresses.

In outlining the development of the Axial traditions, Jaspers notes that it was only during the Axial Period (500-200 BCE) that these early religious traditions bore a distinct resemblance to one another. He is quite careful, however, not to suggest that the trajectory of, say, Confucianism was the same as that of Judaism, for example.¹⁹ In regards to secularism (at least, the form of western secularism with which I am concerned) Christianity will serve, for Taylor, as

¹⁷ In these early religious forms religion was largely social: “that the primary agency of important religious action...was the social group as a whole, or some more specialized agency recognized as acting for the group. In early religion, we primarily relate to God as a society.” *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁹ Jaspers, 12.

the fundamental trajectory. Yet Christianity arose as a post-Axial tradition, with its earliest forms taking shape only in the middle of the first century CE.²⁰ As far as Taylor is concerned, what is most important to note is Christianity's retention, from the Axial legacy, of a human consciousness outside of the embedded socio-religious matrix – this was, essentially, an early form of individualism. In other words, Christianity exhibited a focus on human action and spiritual development that went beyond the ordinary (or natural) forms of flourishing that characterized the social and religious consciousness of the time.

According to Taylor, hand in hand with this shift came a transition in the relationship between the divine and humanity. No longer was the divine's action within the human realm solely concerned with the production of crops, the protection from disaster, and the preservation of health. Rather, with Christianity, what is considered to be a "superior" (or salvational) relational aspect between the human and divine developed.²¹ Taylor proposes that this can be seen as early as the New Testament when followers of Christ are called to reject their ordinary lives, vocations, and relationships in order to follow Christ – a calling which would in many ways appear to be the opposite of ordinary earthly flourishing. Taylor states:

We see this seriously reflected in the way certain Protestant churches operated, where one was not simply a member by virtue of birth but had to join by answering a personal call. This in turn helped to give force to a conception of society as founded on covenant, and hence as ultimately constituted by the decision of free individuals... This is a relatively obvious filiation. But my thesis is that the effect of the Christian, or Christian-Stoic attempt to make society in bringing about the modern "individual in the world" was much more pervasive and multitracked. It helped to nudge first the moral, then the social imaginary in the direction of modern individualism.²²

It is this notion of modern individualism, for Taylor, that one can observe in the emergence of a new understanding of moral order that is founded upon human rights and freedoms. This further,

²⁰ It is important to note that, at this early stage, Christianity was still very much a sect of Judaism.

²¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 152.

²² *Ibid.*, 155.

however, did not take place until the development of natural law theory, which was being solidified in the seventeenth century, with scholars like Hugo Grotius and John Locke.²³ To this I will return shortly.

There is no question that trying to convey a well nuanced understanding of the rise of modern individualism and secularism is an overwhelmingly complex task – one where total justice cannot be done in even the most immense of volumes, and most certainly not in an introductory chapter of a thesis dissertation. Nevertheless, I think it is necessary to try. Moreover, I think it is at this juncture that real sense might begin to be made out of this journey I am attempting to trace, courtesy of Taylor. It is in an article published in 2011 that Taylor states, “one of the main vectors during the last six or seven centuries in this civilization has been a steadily increasing emphasis on a religion of personal commitment and devotion, as opposed to forms centered on collective ritual.”²⁴ What one can glean from this, according to Taylor, is that the western movement towards secularization is very closely attached to a Christian drive towards personal commitment and inward devotion (i.e., a more individualized version of Christianity). Taylor suggests that this religious phenomenon can be observed as early as the thirteenth century. For instance, in 1215, the Lateran Council made it a requirement for all faithful to take part in confession to a priest and receive communion once a year.²⁵ This Christocentric understanding of the Christian religion, with its emphasis on personal piety and virtue, culminated in Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. Traditional forms of Roman Catholic authority were condemned as both corrupt and venal. Instead a salvation that was based

²³ Ibid., 159. The notion of natural law, however, dates back much further to Aristotle. Nevertheless, it was not until the eighteenth century that it began to be socially and politically established.

²⁴ Taylor, “Western Secularity,” *Rehabilitating Secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 37

²⁵ Ibid., 37. Here one should note that, although this practice exhibited a movement towards individual commitment, it was still within the confines of the “enchanted” Catholic tradition whose practices would largely be dismissed as bearing magical elements by the Protestant reform traditions.

on individual faith was exhorted. From this point onwards, a steady disenchantment began to take place as the rituals and “magical elements”²⁶ of the Catholic tradition are sloughed off during the rise of new Protestant forms.

Taylor is not the only individual to shed light on the beginnings of this intimate relationship between secularism and Christianity. Indeed, philosophers have been aware of this connection for centuries. For instance, Bryan Turner, in his work *Religion and Modern Society*, notes how philosophers such as Kant (1724-1804) recognized the Protestant emphasis on moral action and human autonomy. Ironically, however, this observation implies that the Christian call to personal freedom has become, in a sense, religiously self-defeating. This is because the maturity this freedom elicits would ensure the emancipation of these individuals from institutionalized religion, as they would no longer require its support.²⁷ Therefore, “the paradoxical consequence, which has been observed by many philosophers after Kant, is that the very success of Christianity in creating human independence is the secularisation of society.”²⁸ Turner goes on to draw upon sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920). It was Weber who distinguished between those Christian sects that seek to challenge worldly traditions in their quest for salvation and personal enlightenment (such as Calvinism) and the religion of the masses who seek comfort in religion and, moreover, who require the work of saints and holy men to satisfy their religious needs.²⁹ Weber also notes the revolutionary impact that traditions such as Calvinism have had in regards to the shaping of the western (and now globalized world)

²⁶ These magical elements included praying to saints and icons, most of the sacraments and, perhaps most particularly, the buying of indulgences.

²⁷ What will become more apparent, in the chapters which follow, is that the emancipation from institutionalized religion (something that has often been predicted as inevitable, with the rise of secularism) is not the same as a large scale falling away from religious belief.

²⁸ Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Modern Society: Citizenship, Secularisation and the State*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, See also Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, (London: Methuen, 1966).

– namely, the rise of capitalism.³⁰ Turner states, “the implication of this tradition is paradoxical. First, Christianity...is the only true religion...and secondly Christianity gives rise to a process of secularization that spells out its own self-overcoming.”³¹ For Weber it was the influence of the Protestant ethic that served to nudge European society towards the form of Capitalism recognizable today.

However, I think it is clear that there was also much more involved in this process. For instance, Taylor states:

In short, something like what has been called the “protestant work ethic”, in an atmosphere comparable to the “inner worldly asceticism” of which Max Weber talked, was to be created, but very much through the active, re-constructive efforts of political authority. It may indeed, be argued that this ethic of active state intervention, in the period of absolute governments, did as much to introduce a rationalized, disciplined, and professionalized mode of life as the Calvinist ethic of the calling. Neo-Stoicism very much strengthened by Calvinism, worked in some places from above by means of state bureaucracies, to bring about the changes that Calvinism and Pietism wrought in other places from below, through dedicated, self-denying entrepreneurs and voluntary associations.³²

Therefore, it would seem that, although Protestantism surely had a hand in producing a social imaginary characterized by a particular mode of production (capitalism) and a particular modern moral order (which rests upon notions of individualism) it did not do so single-handedly. Rather, the changes in thought and practice, that contributed to this new Protestant work ethic, were made possible by larger political structures. This is relevant for Taylor’s ideas concerning social imaginaries insofar as it identifies a mutual relationship between large-scale, pervasive changes in ideas and practices and those overarching structures that allow for such changes to occur.³³

³⁰ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, (New York, Routledge, 2001).

³¹ Turner, 5.

³² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 119.

³³ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23-30.

An additional impact of the Reformation on Protestant Christianity was an increasing insistence that any remnants of ritual that had any resemblance to magic be outlawed (indeed, even the sacraments were dismissed). Taylor would argue that this rejection of the enchanted (exhorted most relentlessly by Calvinism) led to a steady disenchantment of both the Christian religion itself and the social imaginary that it had so greatly impacted.³⁴ As far as secularism is concerned, the most significant implication of the denial of Catholic sacramental forms is the way it would pave a path for humanism. Taylor notes that although this denial breaks down elements of the sacred/profane distinction insofar as it “sanctifies” ordinary life, it also radically narrows the channel to the divine “because this sanctification depends entirely now on our inner transformation.”³⁵ In other words, salvation depends solely on the faith of the believer and his or her relationship to God. This emphasis on individual agency will become more emphasized throughout (and after) the Enlightenment, to which I will return later.

It is perhaps worth mentioning here that I am aware it would be extremely erroneous to assume that this particular western secular trend of disenchantment can be applied wholesale to the social and religious progression of societies across the world. Indeed, new forms of charismatic Pentecostalism are spreading rapidly in Latin America and Africa; there has been an unprecedented surge in fundamentalist forms of religion such as Christianity and Islam; youth cultures are engaging in various hybrid forms of religiosity that very often utilize internet technologies; and new forms of spirituality with no traditional affiliation or institutionalization are emerging all over the western world.³⁶ This is not to mention the various ways secularism has become manifest in other parts of the world that do not follow the traditional western model

³⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 77-89.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁶ Turner, 11.

and are only beginning to come into view on the scholarly horizon.³⁷ I do think, however, it is fair to say that the western version of secularism, as shaped and influenced by Christianity, has served to dramatically alter the social imaginary in the west. Furthermore, as the world becomes increasingly globalized, it becomes more and more difficult to find examples of parts of the world that this form of secularism has not touched in some way. I would argue that social media serves as an example of this insofar as it is not only a product of the revolutionary advances in technology that have arisen alongside the growth of secularism, but it also serves as an illustration of the sort of “networked individualism” I will continue to discuss as this paper progresses. Individuals use these online resources to simultaneously define themselves as authentic individuals as well as to participate socially and civically with other individuals in their networks.

It is my hope that, at this point, the process of secularization I am attempting to convey is becoming (at least somewhat) clear. If not, I think the additional argument, concerning the rise of a secular modern moral order and immanent frame, might help to clarify this discussion. According to Taylor, in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, there arose a passionately renewed emphasis on civility and order as proper modes of governance of society. These ideas were co-mingled with a distinct Enlightenment hostility towards a form of religion (specifically, “magical” Catholicism) that resulted from the bitter wars which took place between Catholics and Protestants during the Reformation. As a result of these wars, Enlightenment thinkers considered political intolerance to be a defining feature of religion. Consequently, they believed that there was an inherent tendency towards incivility within religion. Interestingly, according to

³⁷ The religious and political situation in India is but one example of this. For a brief but informative overview, see Rajeev Bhargava, “Rehabilitating Secularism,” *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 92-113.

Taylor, what was taking place within the realms of politics, in regards to the proliferation of civility, was occurring simultaneously within religious circles:

The good order of civility, and the good order of piety, didn't remain in separate uncommunicating compartments. They to some extent merged, and inflected each other. The drive to piety, to bring all real Christians (which were, of course, a minority, the saved, and didn't include the foreknown to damnation, even if they were nominally members of the Church) up to the fully Godly life, inflects the agenda of social reform, and gives it a universalist-philanthropic thrust. And the demands of civility, which entailed some reordering of society, in turn give a new social dimension to the pious, ordered life.³⁸

This notion of worldly and social civility, in cooperation with the purging of religious institutions of their so-called "magical" elements, contributed to a fundamental distinction between the immanent and the transcendent that is characteristic of the secular world today.

In keeping with Taylor, the Enlightenment image that was developing, and that would come to dominate the imaginary, is one of an immanent, disciplined society, made up of rational *individuals*. These individuals are, according to Taylor, "buffered" selves (as distinct from embedded ones) in the sense that they are out of contact with anything that resembles a spirit world. If such a world does exist, it has no immediate effect on the immanent or "real" world in which society functions.³⁹ This marking of a division between the immanent and transcendent, between the natural and the supernatural, was a crucial step on the path towards secularization with which I am concerned.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the emphasis on civil order and society, as well as the Enlightenment antagonism towards institutionalized and politicized religion, made a serious

³⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 105.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁴⁰ According to Taylor, it is this distinction that eventually transitions to public and private and, finally, to the familiar modern dichotomy between secular and religious. See Taylor, "Western Secularity," 35.

impression on those Deist thinkers who would play a crucial role in the establishment of the immanent frame which characterizes the present social imaginary.⁴¹

According to Taylor, “the Deist template has helped to define ‘good,’ or ‘acceptable,’ religion for much of the western discussion of the last few centuries.”⁴² For Taylor, Deism, in its English Protestant incarnation, serves as a crucial element in regards to the intellectual development of *exclusive humanism* as a viable option for large groups of people, beginning with the elites, and pervading the wider general consciousness. By exclusive humanism, Taylor is referring to the unprecedented worldview (which is a widely accepted one in this day and age) that accepts “no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing.”⁴³ For Taylor, the movement towards Deism was an acceptable one as the social situation had already paved the way for this trend. That is to say, the focus on order and civility, as well as a growing distinction between immanent and transcendent, made this move available as these notions were slowly shifting the imaginary of the social elites.⁴⁴ Ultimately, the universe itself was no longer enchanted but was rather “unresponsive, or indifferent, like a machine, even if we held that it was a machine designed for our benefit.”⁴⁵

⁴¹ Deism arose out of the Enlightenment as a more rational, and thus more acceptable, brand of religion than those of Catholicism and Protestantism, which generated the violent Reformation wars. It sought to overcome the divisiveness of these earlier Christianities by ridding religion of its emotional and irrational elements and thus reducing it to its rational components. Deism affirmed the existence of a God, but likened the deity to a sort of clockmaker, who created the world (as a clockmaker manufactures a timepiece) and then left it to run on its own, with no additional divine guidance or influence. See John L. Esposito, Darrell J. Fasching, and Todd Lewis, *Religions of the West Today*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 192.

⁴² Taylor, “Western Secularity,” 35.

⁴³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 18. There is a temptation here to relate this form of humanism to the pre-Axial forms of religion I discussed above which also did not recognize any greater objectives beyond human flourishing. There is, perhaps, a similarity here but the overwhelming difference is that with exclusive humanism there is no recognition of anything beyond the self that would help to achieve this earthly flourishing, whereas the early religions were deeply intertwined with notions of divinity.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 280.

In Taylor's view, there are a number of Deist elements that were formative in the exclusive humanism recognizable in the contemporary social imaginary. However, what is most important to grasp is that it is with Deism that the idea of a vocation for humanity that goes beyond human flourishing dissipates.⁴⁶ With Deism God is no longer considered to be active or concerned with human activity – he created the world, but only for the purpose that humans recognize and participate in its natural order. This natural order, as conceived by natural law theorists such as John Locke, is one designed for the mutual benefit of all its participants – all of whom are considered as inherently equal. The sense of God's immediate providence (as present in the earlier forms of post-Reformation practice that sought to order society) fades away and what is left is an impersonal and immanent framework. Taylor refers to this as the “anthropocentric turn.”⁴⁷ At this juncture, a sense begins to develop that God is no longer required to sustain the natural order of things. For some believers God merely fades to the margins of their worldview while others “aggressively deny him.”⁴⁸ This impersonal understanding of society would come to inform the rise of modern science throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Part of this transition is influenced by the notion of the “buffered identity,” which I mentioned earlier. This form of identity arose during the Reformation and began to take a firm hold of the European worldview as Enlightenment and post-Reformation religious ideas of order and civility spread. Characteristic of this buffered identity was the notion that the mind and the world were two very separate entities. Phenomena and ideas that had at one time – in the enchanted world – been attributed to outer forces and entities were now described as being

⁴⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 242.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 375.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

within the mind, distinct and untouched by the world. Religion also made this shift and became increasingly disembodied – a process Taylor refers to as *excarvation*:

We have moved from an era in which religious life was more “embodied,” where the presence of the sacred could be enacted in ritual, or seen, felt touched, walked towards (in pilgrimage); into one which is more ‘in the mind’, where the link with God passes more through our endorsing contested interpretations – for instance, of our political identity as religiously defined, or of God as the authority and moral source underpinning our ethical life.⁴⁹

In this further development, according to Taylor, buffered individuals began to find their place in a society that was becoming increasingly characterized by discipline and self-control (particularly as these characteristics pertain to sex and anger).⁵⁰ This society was one made up of individuals and was not grounded cosmically, but rather in the *modern moral order*, at the center of which was a concern for human good and flourishing. In regards to this modern moral order, it becomes necessary to return to the emergence of those natural law theories, which I touched upon very briefly earlier in this chapter. Taylor has noted that it was in the seventeenth century that ideas concerning natural rights began to permeate the realms of Enlightenment philosophy. It is important to keep in mind that this is all taking place in the wake of the religious wars of the Protestant Reformation, and thus there was an intentional movement away from the perception of society as based upon religious hierarchy and order.⁵¹

What is most important to consider, in terms of the following discussion, is how the emergence of this particular modern moral order relates to a form of mutual recognition I will discuss shortly. This notion of recognition is in many ways linked to the development of ideas such as individualism and human rights, which are largely taken for granted in the west today.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 554.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 540. Here Taylor is drawing upon the work of both Norbert Elias and Michel Foucault. See Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Random House, 1995).

⁵¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 159.

Taylor provides an overview of this development. He has noted that, beginning in the seventeenth century, philosophers – most importantly Locke – sought to define the world in terms outside of the traditional religious orders that they blamed for much of the social and religious upheaval during the Reformation. The image that is emerging is one of society as being composed of individuals who are “rational, sociable agents...meant to collaborate in peace to their mutual benefit.”⁵² For Taylor, this new version of natural law differs most significantly from earlier understandings of moral order insofar as it has abandoned all notions of hierarchy – particularly those that might be divinely sanctioned.⁵³ In regards to this idea, Taylor has stated the following:

We can say that the order of mutual benefit holds (1) between individuals (or at least moral agents who are independent of larger hierarchal orders); the benefits (2) crucially include life and the means to life, however securing these relates to the practice of virtue; it is meant (3) to secure freedom, and easily finds expression in terms of rights...(4) these rights, this freedom, this mutual benefit is to be secured to all participants equally...These are the crucial features, the constants that recur in the modern idea of moral order, through its varying “redactions.”⁵⁴

Interestingly, in its conception, natural law theory maintained a religious – albeit, Deist – component. This was that God made us rational and social creatures who must respect and preserve one another’s wellbeing, not in hopes of heavenly reward, but solely for the purpose of achieving ordinary goals that concern family, wellbeing, freedom, and equality.⁵⁵

What appears to be emerging, then, in regards to Taylor’s tracing of the development of individualism and modernity, is that individualism has not been the result of a mere subtraction of earlier (and more “primitive”) social forms. Rather, individualism and the modern moral order have been the outcome of a series of complex social and historical events, occurring

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 165.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 170.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 166.

largely in the last 500 years, but with intimations taking place much earlier. It is indeed tempting to assume that the above notions are the logical remains once religion has been discarded. But, in reality, humans have lived for the majority of their history within modes of hierarchy. In fact, for Taylor, “what is rather surprising is that it was possible to win through to modern individualism; not just on the level of theory, but also transforming and penetrating the social imaginary.”⁵⁶ In this sense, Taylor has noted that ideas such as “buffer, discipline, and individuality not only interlock and mutually reinforce, but their coming can be seen as largely driven by the process of Reform.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, this more modern conception of order is located quite deeply in notions of secular (as opposed to higher, divine, or cosmic) time. Time in the present age is considered as a valuable commodity – one that we need to invest wisely. These aspects all work together to develop what Taylor refers to as *the immanent frame*, which is characteristic of the secular society of which I am speaking. It would thus appear that what remains to be explained is the idea that this immanent frame has come to be understood as the “real world,” as opposed to the former religious one. As Taylor observes: “This frame constitutes a ‘natural’ order, to be contrasted to a ‘supernatural’ one, an ‘immanent’ world, over against a possible ‘transcendent’ one.”⁵⁸

It is at this juncture that Taylor draws attention to the great irony in that the initial move to discern between the natural and supernatural was one made during the late Middle Ages (c. 1200 CE), with the emphasis on individual piety, and then solidified by Reformers in order to clearly assert the autonomy and superiority of the latter.⁵⁹ It is through the various movements I have detailed above, however, that this distinction becomes a defining feature of the present

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 541.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 542.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 542.

modern social imaginary – an imaginary in which the natural, as opposed to the supernatural, is most highly revered. For Taylor, there remains one crucial element which, in many ways, serves as the icing on the cake (or the last nail in the coffin) in terms of how the immanent/transcendent distinction has come to characterize the contemporary secular imaginary. This involves, for Taylor, a dramatic change in the way human beings came to understand themselves as buffered, disciplined individuals, who are the constituents of a larger society designed for human good and mutual benefit. This worldview or social imaginary then merges with the rise of modern science to a further radical transformation of western modernity.⁶⁰ Indeed, such a phenomenon serves to solidify the notion that the immanent world is one that can thrive on its own, without any reference to the transcendent. This immanent, or natural world, is in fact the true, real, and moral world where any inclination towards a transcendent (or religious) element or being is considered as childish and irrational.⁶¹

If one accepts Taylor’s portrayal of this new social imaginary, which I largely do, it would appear that the social stage was, in many ways, already set for modern science to rise in the late nineteenth century as providing a worldview that would challenge religion. The immanent/transcendent distinction was already a part of the social imaginary and religious forms had, since the Enlightenment, been under serious threat. Therefore, it is of little surprise that Darwin’s theory of Evolution was often said to have “refuted the Bible.” The manner in which modern science came to influence the immanent frame, which characterizes secular society, is complex and it did not create this situation single-handedly. Rather, as Taylor has noted, the evolution of the immanent frame was a product of various and complex circumstances, all of

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ This is not to say that the introduction of the immanent frame necessitates a sloughing off of the transcendent. The immanent frame is characteristic of the secular imaginary, and is a reality for both religious and non-religious individuals. However, those who would like to leave it open to the transcendent may do so. Ibid., 543-544.

which contributed to the formation of a secular social imaginary that is characterized by exclusive humanism:

Science, modern individualism, instrumental reason, secular time, all seem further proofs of the truth of immanence. For instance, natural science is not just one road to the truth, but becomes the paradigm of all roads. Secular time, seen as homogenous and empty, is not just the dominant domain of present day action, but is time itself. Our stance entrenches us in a picture, which we eventually become unable to challenge.⁶²

In other words, specifically in Taylor's view, this shift towards exclusive humanism is often considered to be the end of a long process of advancement, during which the secular world has come of age, leaving behind the embarrassing and childish errors of its past. The defining feature of this self-sufficient immanent order is that it *can be* envisioned without any reference to the divine. It is not, however, closed off to the possibility of a transcendent in every case. The immanent frame is, according to Taylor, "something which permits closure [to the transcendent], without demanding it."

I don't think there is any question that the rise of secularism is infinitely more complex than what I have laid out here. I think that the journey I have traced (courtesy of Taylor), however, provides a tangible map that one might use when attempting to answer the ever-baffling question of secularism. Furthermore, Taylor would suggest that, regardless of how precisely society has arrived at this place, the revolutionary transition to exclusive humanism as a viable worldview serves as a reference point for trajectories that would follow.

One on hand, unbelief and exclusive humanism defined itself in relation to earlier modes of belief...and this definition remains inseparable from unbelief today. On the other hand, later-arising forms of unbelief, as well as all attempts to redefine and rediscover belief, define themselves in relation to this first path-breaking humanism of freedom, discipline, and order.⁶³

⁶² Ibid., 566.

⁶³ Ibid., 269.

Lastly, I think it is extremely important to emphasize the error in the over-simplified and widely accepted assumption that science and reason are considered to be the trailblazers of “secularism”. This is, as Taylor has shown, a misunderstanding – religious reform also played a key role regarding this shift of social imaginaries. Nevertheless, as a result of the various historical circumstances I have described above (as well as a great deal of historical realities that I have not mentioned) religion has become more and more an individualized and private matter, that is no longer taken as a given, as it was for many centuries. Rather, we live in an age where all beliefs exist in what Taylor refers to as *perpetual contention*, and this is, without question, a revolutionary development. It is also, on Taylor’s reading, a development that has been made possible by the transition to a social imaginary characterized by individualism, self-authenticity, mutual benefit and responsibility, as well as human rights.

What is most important to take from this tracing of the development of disembedding Taylor has examined, is the way it has served to promote the shift towards a modern moral order that gives ultimate primacy to the notion of the individual. Furthermore, Taylor’s thesis will also attempt to link this particular form of individual, whose existence is central to the modern moral order, to earlier forms of spirituality and, most importantly, to a series of social and religious reforms in the past five-hundred years.⁶⁴ Such a move indicates that Taylor is not totally on the side of individualism and secularism, as they are commonly understood, and that these ideas need to be modified. This is surely an overwhelming task, which I believe Taylor has tackled quite impressively. However, as I will discuss shortly, the form of individualism that Taylor depicts is one that remains very much engaged with society at large – there is, after all, no such thing as an individual in a vacuum. In other words, Taylor does not necessarily equate

⁶⁴ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 64.

individualism with selfishness and self-preoccupation as is often the case today. Rather, for Taylor, “individualism, as it emerges from the process of Reform, is first of all that of responsibility.”⁶⁵ I shall develop this notion more fully in the discussion that follows.

What I shall attempt to demonstrate is the way that Taylor’s alternative interpretation of individualism might be effectively applied to religious practice and identity in a secular world. Such a shift in the understanding of religion allows that traditional religious institutions, which have enjoyed a monopoly in terms of authority for many centuries, are no longer the only places where contemporary individuals are religiously active. In other words, I am arguing, similarly to Taylor, that a qualified individualism can permit faith seekers to define themselves and their religious identities outside of traditional religious structures. This is evident in the religious networks that now exist alongside traditional faith communities. In this context, social media serves as an important vehicle in regards to the participants’ involvement in social capital building potential. Furthermore, I will suggest that this sort of activity can have the ability to challenge existing authority structures so that certain religious networks might promote a process of *recognition*.⁶⁶

At the risk of leaving some gaps in the explanation I have provided thus far, I think it is necessary to now discuss the way that the present social imaginary functions—and how this will become pertinent to the overarching theme of my thesis. Up to this point, I have been

⁶⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 541.

⁶⁶ The notion of recognition is critical in regards to the argument I will be constructing which concerns the manner in which marginalized religious individuals are engaging in new forms of networked community. Taylor’s explanation of recognition is, however, insufficient and will not be applied to the religious networks with which I am concerned. I will, rather, be utilizing Paul Ricoeur’s development of recognition, which I will discuss shortly. I am, nevertheless, still utilizing Taylor’s alternative interpretation of individualism which I consider to be especially helpful when understanding the contemporary imaginary as one that is moving towards forms of networked community. Therefore, it remains necessary to understand how Taylor’s view of individualism rests upon the notion of recognition.

discussing, using Taylor's *Modern Social Imaginaries* and *A Secular Age*, how modern western society has come to be characterized by an individualized concept of moral order and how this is related to the rise of secularism, which Taylor has traced. In order to solidify a more practical understanding of this present context, I think it is necessary at this juncture to consult a piece of Taylor's earlier work, the *Malaise of Modernity*. In this work, which existed initially as a part of a radio lecture series on the CBC, Taylor introduces three *malaises of modernity* which often seem to appear in regards to the conversation surrounding modern secular society.

These malaises are concerned with the perceived notion that modern, particularly western, individuals are often viewed as self-absorbed, apathetic, selfish and indulgent people who are largely unconcerned with social issues outside of their limited and privileged purviews. Although Taylor concedes that these malaises are present in the west today, he will, however, argue that they serve as corrupt expressions of individualism in a society that he believes is actually designed for mutual benefit and recognition. This is where he introduces his own unique understanding of individualism, despite the existence of corrupt forms or malaises. The first, and perhaps most important, of these malaises is that of the contemporary understanding of *individualism*, itself. Indeed, the days in which people considered themselves to be part of a larger, overarching order are essentially gone – particularly in a western secular context. People now function as individuals with rights in a society that serves to promote human rights, freedom, and democracy. Some would argue that this understanding of the modern individual has in some ways served to narrow the lives of people in this day and age.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ In regards to this notion, Taylor refers to Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), who first suggested that democratic equality creates self-absorbed individuals, who are less concerned with the rest of society. See Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la Démocratie en Amérique* vol. 2 (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1981), 385. According to Taylor, such ideas are resurfacing again today in regards to recent theories denouncing the modern existence of a “me generation.” See Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, (Concord, ON.: Anansi, 1991), 4.

The second malaise Taylor describes is that of *instrumental reasoning*. In regards to this term, Taylor is referring to the sort of means/ends reasoning that has become foundational to the manner in which individuals function in secular society. For instance, realities that may have required little thought, even just a century ago – i.e., where one might work, whom one might marry, where one might live, whether or not to have children – are now determined by modes of calculated productivity, forms of geographic mobility, and a vast choice of options. Taylor draws awareness to the way this sort of reasoning might become debased. For instance, a cost-benefit driven society might consider certain structures, creatures, and environments solely as raw materials existing primarily as objects of exploitation for economic growth, as opposed to having inherent value of their own.⁶⁸

The third and final malaise Taylor has illustrated is that of *political worry*. Here Taylor is referring to a common accusation of contemporary individual society – that those institutional and societal systems, which appear to function solely on the basis of instrumental reason, i.e., the capitalist market, make it practically impossible for individuals to act outside of or against these (seemingly) invisible structures.⁶⁹ In this sense, moral deliberation and civic participation can become stifled and, as a result, apathy develops.⁷⁰ Taylor refers to these structures as “invisible hand”⁷¹ mechanisms and understands that, to a certain degree, secular society functions on the

⁶⁸ Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 5.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 8. Here Taylor is referring to a sort of Weberian “iron cage” assumption, which suggests that individuals will become increasingly hemmed in by rationalized societies that are designed primarily for efficiency and control. Today, some would argue that Weber’s predictions have come to fruition as they view western societies as crippled by instrumental forces (i.e., the market and the state).

⁷⁰ Taylor expands this idea by use of Toqueville’s theory of soft despotism by which a government reigns not by tyranny but rather by perpetuating a mild democratic façade, to avert the citizens’ view from the immense overarching power. For Toqueville, the only solution to this is “a vigorous political culture in which participation is valued, at several levels of government and in voluntary associations as well. But the atomism of the self-absorbed individual militates against this.” Ibid., 9.

⁷¹ Ibid., 97.

basis of such instrumental forms. He would not, however, agree that individuals are crippled by them. I shall return to this idea shortly.

Moreover, what Taylor would suggest, is that these malaises, although reasonably worrying, are not inevitable or even pervasive. It is our responsibility, then, as modern individuals, to uphold those forms of individuality and modernity that are based upon mutual concern rather than letting certain social structures slide towards certain debased forms to which they are susceptible. I will spend the remainder of this chapter discussing Taylor's own defense of modernity, and his specific understanding of individualism, as they pertain to each of these three forms of malaise, and evaluate them in relation to the sort of "networked individualism" upon which the fundamental arguments of my thesis rest.

Taylor's discussion begins with – and focuses primarily upon – the notion of individualism. From this description he is able to draw upon more cursory assumptions regarding the remaining two forms of malaise, which I will touch upon later. It is no secret that contemporary individualism has often been accused of promoting a certain form of self-indulgent narcissism that prevents the modern generation from engaging meaningfully with other individuals or society at large. Taylor identifies this degraded sort of individualism as involving "a centring on the self and a concomitant shutting out, or even unawareness, of the greater issues or concerns that transcend the self, be they religious, political, historical. As a consequence, life is narrowed or flattened."⁷² Conservative political thinker, Allan Bloom,⁷³ has taken this notion even further and criticized present-day youth, specifically, as being guilty of accepting a form of moral relativism that allows every individual to pursue his or her own self-fulfillment without

⁷² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷³ I should note that Allan Bloom was a political philosopher who was notorious for his right-wing thinking.

moral criticism from the greater society. In other words, “everybody has his or her own ‘values,’ and about these it is impossible to argue.”⁷⁴ From this understanding, therefore, this relativism involves a moral position that is grounded upon a misguided notion of mutual respect.⁷⁵ That is, we must respect, and therefore not challenge, the right of every person to choose his or her path to self-fulfillment.

Taylor, however, would disagree with Bloom’s disdainful condemnation of present-day western culture. He suggests that the “relativism widely espoused today is a profound mistake, even in some respects self-stultifying.”⁷⁶ Taylor will argue, in contrast, that although this understanding of individualism as necessitating relativism might be present in secular society, it need not be the inevitable expression of contemporary individualism. In Taylor’s view, it would appear that Bloom “doesn’t seem to recognize that there is a powerful moral ideal at work here, however debased and travestied its expression might be.”⁷⁷ For Taylor, there is a moral foundation to the modern idea of self-fulfillment, which concerns being true to oneself. If it so happens that there are those who choose to live according to principles of narcissism and relativism, they are, in Taylor’s view, doing so outside of a morally grounded ethic of individualism. This implies that, for Taylor, there are definite morally acceptable modes of expressing individualism.

What Taylor is suggesting then is that not all individuals today are merely discarding traditional forms of moralism for self-indulgence, but rather that they are developing a mode of individualism that has a new – but, nonetheless, critical – moral foundation. What then are the moral impulses behind this alternative understanding of individualism, as Taylor understands it?

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

Taylor provides three assumptions that might serve as a platform from which one might begin to answer this question. Firstly, self-fulfillment is an idea that has a firm moral grounding. Secondly, reason has a distinct role to play in regards to the development of this moral ideal. Lastly, individuals today are not so imprisoned by forms of instrumental reason – be they social, technological, economic, or political – that they are incapable of acting outside of these restrictions.

Instead of selfish individualism, then, Taylor describes his own position on self-fulfillment in relation to what he terms an “ethic of self-authenticity.” What often comes as a surprise, to many contemporary people, is that this ethic of self-authenticity – of being true to, and fulfilling oneself – is in fact quite a new idea. For Taylor, as I have discussed previously, it is in the seventeenth century that ideas concerning individual human rights, founded upon a Lockean version of natural law and mutual benefit, begin to pervade the social consciousness. This allows a shift to an imaginary which promotes self-authenticity and fulfillment. Such an understanding, on Taylor’s part, also provides the grounds of establishing the basis for mutual recognition.⁷⁸

It was in the seventeenth century, Taylor affirms, that Enlightenment philosophers and political thinkers, such as Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, began to realize that morality need not be something dictated solely by the Christian model of reward and punishment but can rather be something that each person might feel “within oneself”.⁷⁹ To understand this idea, however, as evidence that everyone has his or her own individual freedom to determine what is right and wrong, without self-reflexive or mutual criticism, is to grossly misunderstand the ethic. Indeed,

⁷⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 129.

⁷⁹ Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 25-29.

thinkers such as Locke and Rousseau also put forth contractual versions of society based upon notions of mutual service and respect that would later come to inform ideas of popular sovereignty.⁸⁰ For Taylor, therefore, a critical element in this argument is the understanding that one can only be an individual, and cultivate his or her self-authenticity, in relation to greater society – i.e., we are always in conversation with one another and thus susceptible to criticism. Taylor’s understanding of individualism thus does not assume a stark separation between the individual and society. Instead, it promotes a necessary interaction between the individual and society at large.⁸¹ Each person is now seen not only as having the right to self-fulfillment and freedom but also as having a contractual obligation to ensure the rights of other individuals are preserved and promoted within the society that he or she lives.⁸² In this sense, individuals, within contemporary society, remain in a dialogical relationship that is ultimately founded upon a contract ensuring the defence of each member’s rights.

According to Taylor, the observations above are intrinsically related to, what he terms, the *need for recognition*. This need for recognition begins to play a fundamental role in Taylor’s moral ethic of an alternative individualism and his model of self-authenticity. This is to say, if a social imaginary is one that fosters self-authenticity, a key feature of this form of society must be the recognition of a person’s rights by the greater social, religious, and political systems. I will develop this notion of recognition in the following chapter. In Taylor’s view, there is no such thing as an individual in a vacuum. Rather, people are individuals who constantly seek and *struggle* to make themselves known and to have their rights and freedoms protected in a society

⁸⁰ Ibid., 45.

⁸¹ I should make it clear that I am taking for granted the fact that this only applies to those individuals within a democratic society.

⁸² Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 55.

that considers these values as foundational to its democratic system of government.⁸³ It is this concept of struggle that will serve as fundamental to the departure I will take from Taylor's view of recognition. The struggle of which Taylor speaks is connected to his idea of recognition as being based on a demand/obligation model, which I alluded to earlier in terms of the contractual foundation of Taylor's individualism. At the moment, however, I will continue with Taylor's thought as I do maintain, as he does, that the need for recognition is critical to his alternative understanding of individualism. Unfortunately, Taylor's own formation of recognition is insufficient when it comes to fulfilling the demands of his well-constructed view of individualism and does, in the end, actually undermine it. I will return to this in the following chapter.

From Taylor's perspective, it would thus appear that there is an identifiable form of community – albeit, a distinct form – built into his reading of an alternative individualism. In order to illustrate such a concept of recognition, as intrinsic to the social imaginary of a society, Taylor calls upon the example of multiculturalism. In this vein, he further postulates that, in a culture of authenticity, equal recognition is built into the moral underpinnings of society. He thus provides guidelines as to what he envisions as the ideal function of mutual recognition in a society:

On the social level, the crucial principle is that of fairness, which demands equal chances for everyone to develop their own identity, which include – as we can now understand more clearly – the universal recognition of difference, in whatever modes this is relevant to identity, be it gender, racial, cultural, or to do with sexual orientation.⁸⁴

⁸³ Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 78.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

As I will discuss throughout the remainder of this thesis, I think this idea is extremely pertinent in connection with the online religious networks which I am analyzing – i.e. those of gay Christians and Muslim feminists.

It is with the idea of recognition that one can begin to understand how the second and third forms of malaise, i.e. instrumental reason and political worry, function as erroneous interpretations of Taylor's alternative view of individualism as a dialogical process which fosters self-authenticity. As I mentioned earlier, Taylor has drawn attention to the fact that, in many ways, modern secular society is dictated by instrumental forces (ie: the market, technology, etc.).⁸⁵ What he would also suggest, however, is that these forms of "invisible hand" structures can, in fact, be influenced by the formation of a democratic will.⁸⁶ It is not pertinent, for my purposes here, to understand precisely the manner in which large-scale democratic action might change entire socio-political-economic-religious systems. It does, nonetheless, remain important to understand that there is the potential for social change within these seemingly a-personal automatic processes by means of collective action that can occur in a democracy. It is here that I think social media begins to play a rather significant role insofar as individuals and networks might utilize such tools in order to define themselves and, moreover, to allow for recognition.

Therefore, what I aim to suggest, is that with the rise of online social media resources, religious networks have the potential to affect the direction of the religious dialogue in the modern democratic world. With this potential comes the ability to challenge existing forms of authority insofar as they might deny recognition to certain networked individuals and communities. This presumes a society founded upon Taylor's own definition of what an

⁸⁵ See *ibid.*, 93-108.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

alternative reading of individualism and an ethic of authenticity can produce. Religious leaders and organizations as well as marginalized groups that are engaged with these online resources are utilizing them to create social capital. This has the potential to be translated into new attitudes and practices that can effect social change. It has been shown that many different religious groups are presently engaging with social media tools in order to cultivate social capital.⁸⁷ So far, much of this research surrounds the activity of widely followed mainstream religious groups (like, for instance, Evangelical pastors in America with large followings). It is my suggestion that social media is also effectively allowing for groups that are marginal within their own traditions, and thus in need of recognition, to engage in public social and political conversation and elicit social capital resources (e.g. Muslim feminists and gay Christians). In this way, they can also be viewed as providing each other with a mode of reciprocal affirmation that could, in time, provide a form of recognition.

Before I develop these ideas in more depth, however, it is crucial to understand how religious groups have revolutionized the ways by which they relate to each other in the secular world – a world characterized by various expressions of individualism. It had been predicted that, given this atmosphere, a sense of community would be lost and social cohesion would no longer exist. In addition, the Internet had often been (prematurely) charged as being one of leading vehicles encouraging such social alienation in the technological era. This, however, has proven not to be the case. In the next chapter, I will explore how the notion of a religious community has changed with the rise of secularism, but not necessarily in a negative way. I will also evaluate, in light of Taylor’s qualified understanding of individualism, how such new

⁸⁷ See Pauline Hope Cheong, “Twitter of Faith,” in *Digital Religion, Social Media, and Culture*, ed. Pauline Hope Cheong, Peter Fischer Nelson, Stefan Gelfgren and Charles Ess, (New York: Peter Lang, 2012).

communities often manifest in social networks that utilize online resources to strengthen their bonds, provide affirmation, and create social capital.

Chapter 2: Bridging Ideas of Social Capital, “Networked Individualism”, and Recognition

Over the past fifty years, scholars have become increasingly interested in how community has changed in a society that is progressively becoming more individualized, technological, globalized, and secularized.⁸⁸ There have been those who have suggested that, in a post-industrial society, community will inevitably decline as individuals begin to work longer hours and become increasingly dispersed via various forms of urban sprawl and increased travel.⁸⁹ More recently, it has also been predicted that the Internet will become a leading source of alienation, as people will no longer engage civically or in face-to-face communication.⁹⁰ Essentially, these suggestions serve as a continuation of the theory that with the rise of an industrial society will inevitably come the loss of community as it had been known prior to the industrial age.⁹¹ According to Anabel Quan-Haase and Barry Wellman, this has proven not to be the case:

By examining people’s social relationships, independent of narrowly defined boundaries based on location, researchers have discovered that many people live in long-distance communities... Thus, the evidence suggests that industrialization did not destroy community, but instead helped transform its composition, practices, attitudes, and communication practices.⁹²

Therefore, according to Quan-Haase and Wellman, community has not disappeared with the rise of an industrial society but is rather shifting away from traditional forms of community towards new and interesting communicative networks.

⁸⁸ Barry Wellman et al, “The Social Affordances of the Internet for Networked Individualism,” *Journal of Computer Mediated Technology*, 8 no 3, (2003), 0-0, doi: 10.1111/j.1083-6101.2003.tb00216.x.

⁸⁹ Anabel Quan-Haase and Barry Wellman, “How Does the Internet Affect Social Capital?” in *Social Capital and Information Technology*, ed. Marleen Huysman and Volker Wulf, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), 114

⁹⁰ Rainie and Wellman, 8.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 115.

The focus of this chapter will be on the secular societal transition that concerns the shift from traditional, tight-knit, and locally based communities to more widespread networks made up of looser social ties. Regarding this transition, Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman have developed the term “networked individualism”. I will discuss this term and how I find it to be compatible with contemporary religious trends, in the secular world, as well as with Taylor’s alternative understanding of individualism. I aim to understand how the Internet, specifically, affects social capital building in a secular and networked society that is becoming overwhelmingly present online. I will, furthermore, depart from Taylor’s understanding of recognition, which I find insufficient vis-à-vis the demands of his alternative individualism. In an attempt to fill the void Taylor has left, regarding recognition, I will draw upon the work of Paul Ricoeur who has provided a more nuanced theory of recognition. It is my hope that a discussion of ideas concerning social capital and “networked individualism,” in light of Ricoeur’s philosophy of recognition, will lead to a revised terminology that might prove helpful in regards to bridging the sociological and philosophical foundations of my research. In so doing, I hope to come to a fuller understanding of the manner in which members of marginalized religious networks navigate issues of authority, social capital, and recognition. In preparation for this discussion, it may be useful to come to a working understanding of some of the terms I will be referring to. I shall begin with *social capital*.

In a 2004 publication titled, *Social Capital and Information Technology*, Marleen Huysman and Volker Wulf suggest that social capital “is about the value derived from being a member of a society or community.”⁹³ This simple description serves as what is, in my opinion,

⁹³ Marleen Husyman and Volker Wulf, “Social Capital and Information Technology: Current Debates and Research,” in *Social Capital and Information Technology*, ed. Marleen Huysman and Volker Wulf (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), 1.

a very helpful understanding of the term. According to Huysman and Wulf, the concept of social capital has gained prominence in scholarly circles within the past two decades – although the first intimations of this discussion can be traced all the way back to the Marxist or communitarian traditions.⁹⁴ Furthermore, scholars such as Alejandro Portes have noted that the idea of achieving social benefit from being involved in a group or community is an idea as old as Sociology itself. Indeed, according to Portes, this notion dates back to “Durkheim’s emphasis on group life as an antidote to anomie and self-destruction and to Marx’s distinction between an atomized class-in-itself and a mobilized and effective class-for-itself.”⁹⁵ However, it is in more recent years that social capital has become more clearly defined and has exploded in scholarly popularity as well as in mainstream usage.⁹⁶

Portes refers to two notable functions of social capital that have served to propel the term towards the status it now enjoys. Firstly, he notes that social capital primarily emphasizes the most attractive features of sociability. Secondly, “it places those positive consequences in the framework of a broader discussion of capital and calls attention to how such nonmonetary forms can be important sources of power and influence, like the size of one’s stock holdings or bank

⁹⁴ Ibid., 1-3. The Marxist understanding of social capital is promoted by Pierre Bourdieu who argues that social capital is a distinct form of capital and, moreover, that it must be studied in tandem with other forms of economic and cultural capital. His understanding of social capital stems from a Marxist conflict perspective and assumes that “whereas the upper classes take their high level of social capital for granted, lower classes usually are aware of their scarce resources in terms of social capital – for example, the lack of collective bargaining power or access to career jobs.” Alternatively, the communitarian perspective considers social capital to be community centered. Communitarians, such as Robert Putnam argue that it is the community, rather than the individual or wider organization that “structures action and provides the key frame of reference.” Within this communitarian view social responsibility is paramount. See also Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J.G. Richardson, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241-260; Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

⁹⁵ Alejandro Portes, “Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24 (1998): 1-24, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/223472>.

⁹⁶ For a useful overview of the history of the term, social capital see *ibid.*, 3-6.

account.”⁹⁷ This awareness of the way social capital plays a role in a society that has often been viewed as driven solely by economic forces is of utmost significance for the purpose of this study.⁹⁸ There is, of course, little question that economic forms of capital play an indispensable role in regards to achieving desired social benefits. However, scholars now recognize that to overlook the function of social capital is to grossly underestimate the power of group cohesion and community trust when it comes to achieving social goals. For instance, Huysman and Wulf refer to the work of Mark Granovetter who has criticized institutionalized economists that adhere to a more analytical framework of understanding social activity and productivity.⁹⁹

Although Granovetter does not refer explicitly to the term social capital, he does engage with the notion of *social embeddedness* and discusses how social connections play a role in all varieties of transactions.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, according to Huysman and Wulf, Granovetter shows how “personal relations and networks of such relations generate trust and discourage malfeasance, undermine formal organizational structures, and shape interorganizational transactions. As such, the embeddedness of social action offers a valid alternative explanation for institutionalization in economic life.”¹⁰¹ In other words, social capital has the potential to positively affect or work against more traditional forms of economic capital. I think that this notion becomes increasingly apparent when considered in connection with the introduction of the Internet and online networks – particularly social media resources. This is because social networks are now able to broaden their social capital building horizons and transmit information within and outside of

⁹⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁹⁸ It is interesting to consider how the notion of social capital might be considered vis-à-vis Taylor’s view that group action and democratic empowerment might serve to effect change in the face of more economically driven “invisible hand structures.”

⁹⁹ Huysman and Wulf, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Mark Granovetter, “Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 91 no. 3 (1985): 481-510, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2780199>.

¹⁰¹ Huysman and Wulf, 4.

their networks immediately and globally across time and space barriers.¹⁰² Furthermore, scholars such as Anabel Quan-Haase and Barry Wellman have noted how the cost of being online is relatively low and that it has become widely available to the majority of North American individuals.¹⁰³

Most importantly, this has contributed to the current social shift away from tight-knit groups towards modern networks. For further insight concerning this fundamental societal transition, it is helpful to refer to the work of Rainie and Wellman who published *Networked: The New Social Operating System*, in 2012. As I mentioned previously, it has been suggested that new forms of technology, particularly the Internet, serve to reduce group cohesion, community ties, and, ultimately, social capital. Rainie and Wellman argue, however, that the developed world¹⁰⁴ has not deserted community but is rather making its way towards a new *networked operating system*, which functions on the basis of “networked individualism.”

The evidence suggests that those with such fears have been looking at the new world through a cloudy lens. Our research supports the notion that small, densely knit groups like families, villages, and small organizations have receded in recent generations. A different social order has emerged around social networks that are more diverse and less overlapping than those previous groups. The *networked operating system* gives people new ways to solve problems and meet social needs. It offers more freedom to individuals than people experienced in the past because now they have more room to maneuver and more capacity to act on their own.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² In this sense, therefore, all those who effectively utilize social media resources can cultivate social capital. In the following chapter, however, I will discuss how I understand social capital with specific respect to the process of recognition that occurs within marginalized religious networks.

¹⁰³ Anabel Quan-Haase and Barry Wellman, “How Does The Internet Affect Social Capital?” in *Social Capital and Information Technology*, ed. Marleen Huysman and Volker Wulf (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), 123. It is also important to note, however, that there are always going to be those without access (this is particularly obvious when non-western countries are considered). Huysman and Wulf make note of this darker side of information technology and suggest that more research needs to be done on this “digital divide.” See Huysman and Wulf, 12.

¹⁰⁴ Although Rainie and Wellman focus primarily on North America, they have noted that, “their conclusions generally hold for the entire developed world” and, moreover, that “these insights also have implications for the developing world, where Internet and mobile phone use is mushrooming.” See Rainie and Wellman, 11.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

The introduction of the Internet did, initially, provoke scholarship that expressed fear regarding the potential for online media to replace face-to-face communication and negatively impact the social and psychological function of individuals in the technological age. These predictions, however, have largely proven to be false. Rather, individuals utilize online resources in order to expand their social networks and create more meaningful relationships both with those nearby and those from whom they are separated by distance.

On the negative side, perhaps the most influential work regarding the decline of social capital in the technological age is that of Robert Putnam, who wrote the popular book, *Bowling Alone*. Putnam's research suggests that, since the 1960's, social capital in America has been declining steadily. This, he would argue, can be observed in connection with reduced civic involvement and membership in voluntary organizations.¹⁰⁶ As a result of this significant decline, Putnam concludes that social capital in America is plummeting as well. Putnam places the blame for this decline on a number of societal characteristics including the rise of two-income families, suburbanization and increased commuting times, as well as the long-term generational shift from an aging civically-involved generation to a younger, more apathetic population.¹⁰⁷ Interestingly, what Putnam cites as a leading culprit in this social capital draught is the introduction of electronic technologies and mass media.¹⁰⁸ In regards to Putnam's theory, it is important to note his own adherence to a communitarian understanding of social capital. In other words, Putnam views social capital as belonging to communities and nations rather than to individuals. This is no doubt an intriguing way of viewing social capital but one must be careful, as Portes has noted, not to promote a certain circularity that can be difficult to avoid:

¹⁰⁶ Portes, 18.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 283.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

As a property of communities and nations rather than individuals, social capital is simultaneously a cause and an effect. It leads to positive outcomes, such as economic development and less crime, and its existence is inferred from the same outcomes. Cities that are well governed and moving ahead economically do so because they have high social capital; poorer cities lack in this civic virtue.¹⁰⁹

In other words, from a communitarian perspective, those forms of evidence that would suggest high levels of social capital within a society are the same forms that serve to create social capital.

In this sense, therefore, it can become difficult to effectively determine the sources of social capital gains.

There have been certain studies that mirror many of Putnam's fears, singling out the Internet, specifically, as the new leading offender in regards to communal losses. For instance, Quan-Haase and Wellman draw attention to an early Internet study, conducted by Robert Kraut et al., which has suggested that new Internet users engage less socially and experience increased feelings of depression the more time they spend online.¹¹⁰ Certain later studies, however, have shown the opposite – suggesting that the Internet allows users to engage with other individuals with shared interests easily and more frequently than ever before.¹¹¹ As evidence of this, Quan-Haase and Wellman argue that:

¹⁰⁹ Portes, 19.

¹¹⁰ Robert Kraut et al. "Internet Paradox: A Social Technology That Reduces Social Involvement and Psychological Well-being?" *American Psychologist*, 53 no 1 (1998): 1017-1031, <https://www.cs.cmu.edu/~kiesler/publications/1998pdfs/1998Kraut-InternetParadox.pdf>. Interestingly, this particular study was revisited, a few years later, and the results indicated that the negative impacts of using the Internet had largely disappeared and that the later sample "generally experienced positive effects of using the Internet on communication, social involvement, and well-being." See Robert Kraut et. al. "Internet Paradox Revisited," *Journal of Social Issues*, 58 no. 1 (2002): 49-74, doi: 10.1111/1540-4560.00248.

¹¹¹ For instance, Quan-Haase and Wellman refer to a 2002 Pew Forum, which reports that 84 percent of American internet users have been part of online communities. See Quan-Haase and Wellman, 117. A more recent PEW forum study, conducted in 2013, suggests that over 73 percent of online adults are part of social networking sites, specifically. Facebook is the most popular of these sites, but results also show that 42 percent of Americans use multiple networking sites, including Twitter and Instagram. See Maeve Duggan and Aaron Smith, "Social Media Update 2013," *Pew Research Centre* (January, 2014). <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Social-Media-Update.aspx>

Such high levels of participation in online communities suggest that the Internet has become an alternative route to being involved in groups and pursuing interests. Therefore, Putnam's observed decline in organizational participation may not reflect actual disengagement from community but community becoming embedded in digital networks rather than in traditional, geographically bounded groups: in short, a movement of community participation from public spaces to cyberspace.¹¹²

It thus appears that, although the Internet might have the potential to negatively impact social capital, this is most certainly not always (or even often) the case.

In an attempt to make sense of some of these contradictory findings concerning the Internet and social capital, Quan-Haase and Wellman developed a three-fold template, which serves as a useful point of reference. Both of these scholars hesitate to agree with those like Putnam (who would suggest that the internet decreases social capital and community). On the other hand, Quan-Haase and Wellman also deny that the Internet has sparked a digital revolution that has dramatically transformed social capital building agency among social networks.¹¹³ In my opinion, their model provides a balanced assessment of the function of the Internet in terms of community engagement and social capital building today. According to Quan-Haase and Wellman, the Internet has the potential to affect social capital in three ways.

The first is that the Internet can transform social capital. Although Quan-Haase and Wellman deny that the Internet has served to radically transform societal functioning across the board, they do suggest that, for certain groups, the Internet serves as a transformative tool in regards to social capital building agency. Indeed, the Internet does allow those individuals who are separated by distance and time-lag to engage with one another and participate in shared interests and goals. Email and social networking sites are especially useful in this respect, as the

¹¹² Quan-Haase and Wellman, 118-19.

¹¹³ Ibid., 117.

cost does not increase with increased distance.¹¹⁴ Quan-Haase and Wellman refer to a 2002 PEW study of online communities, which reported that 84 percent of American Internet users have participated in online communities.¹¹⁵

The positive relationship of the amount of time spent on the Internet with feelings of community online indicates that online participation may intensify reciprocity and trust (Quaan-Haase and Wellman 2002). Similarly, the PEW study examining online communities shows that half of those who belong to online communities say that the internet provides them with an alternative means to connect with people who share their interests (Horrigan 2002).¹¹⁶

It would therefore appear that, for some, the Internet serves as both an alternative sphere of communication and an aid in establishing relationships.¹¹⁷

Secondly, the Internet can diminish social capital. As I mentioned previously, there have also been studies that suggest the Internet can have a negative impact in terms of social capital building and community engagement. The study I referred to earlier, conducted by Kraut et al., has shown that offline social engagement was adversely affected by increased time spent online. A later study, however, also showed that as users gained more experience, “the Internet was associated with an increased number of weak online ties and a decreased number of stronger offline ties.”¹¹⁸ Thus it would appear that an important question to be raised is whether the Internet does adversely impact local communities. In other words, does the increased connectivity across time and space barriers, forged by online resources, negatively affect ties between individuals that are closer to home? Although there are suggestions that support this notion, Quan-Haase and Wellman maintain that, “such suppositions are more deductive than

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 119.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 118.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 119.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 120. See also Kraut et al., *Internet Paradox Revisted*, 69.

supported by evidence.”¹¹⁹ Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that the weak ties fostered by online communication are not inherently less valuable, in regards to social capital building, than are those close knit local ties that might be impacted by internet usage: “Weak ties have their own value, in providing new information and access to disparate networks.”¹²⁰ Therefore, according to Quan-Haase and Wellman, it is an oversimplification to suggest that the transition to social networking from previous forms of community necessitates a significant loss in social capital.

The third possibility is that the Internet supplements social capital. In this regard, Quan-Haase and Wellman have demonstrated that the Internet is most likely to supplement existing social capital potential rather than radically transform or diminish it. The Internet has no doubt become a vital means of communication between individuals in the secular world. Studies have shown, however, that this explosion of Internet usage has not adversely affected other communicative forms such as telephone contact and face-to-face communication. Rather, it serves as a support for these existing contact systems.¹²¹ Furthermore, it is important to note that not all areas of the world follow a uniform model in regards to Internet use. For example, Quan-Haase and Wellman refer to a 2002 study conducted by the University of Catalonia, which shows that Catalan networks remain more local than do North American networks. The Internet is still used, but it is reserved primarily for interactions with those whom the Catalan people are separated from by distance. Within the local community, face-to-face and telephone communication remain dominant. On the other hand (and on the other side of the globe), people

¹¹⁹ Quan-Haase and Wellman, 121.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 122.

in Hong Kong use the Internet more than those in North America for the purpose of socializing.¹²²

In short, the Internet has joined the telephone and face-to-face contact as a main means of communication – one that can be more convenient and affordable. Although face-to-face and telephone contact continue, they are complemented by the internet's ease in connecting geographically dispersed people, institutions, and organizations bonded by shared interests.¹²³

Although the model of Internet use varies, depending on one's geographical location, it remains that online communication serves as a supplementary social capital building tool for those individuals that have access to it.

Interestingly, Quan-Haase and Wellman also refer to the function of the Internet in connection with civic participation and political activity. From their observations, it would seem this element of Internet social capital building potential also falls within the supplementary category of their threefold model as, they would suggest, the Internet has not radically altered citizen participation in politics and other organizations: "The hope that the Internet would be especially useful in encouraging many people to join political discussions has not yet been realized."¹²⁴ They maintain, however, that it undoubtedly has become an indispensable tool for such groups.¹²⁵

I would argue that since the explosion of social media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, Internet usage has in fact increased political participation and the reach of those political activists who use it. Indeed, one must look only so far back as the 2011 Arab Spring for an example of the potential of such tools. Despite the end result (or lack thereof) of this event,

¹²² Ibid., 112-123. See also Manuel Castells et al., "The Network Society in Catalonia: An Empirical Analysis," (Barcelona: FUOC, 2002), <http://www.uoc.edu/in3/pic>; Patrick Chau et al., "Cultural Differences in the Online Behaviors of Consumers," *Communication of the ACM* 45 no 10 (2002): 138-143, doi:10.1145/570907.570911

¹²³ Ibid., 123.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 124.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

social media tools (particularly Twitter and Facebook) allowed for the Egyptian protestors' message to be proclaimed globally and updated instantly. This resulted in attention not only from the global masses, but also from political leaders across the world. Furthermore, an article in *The New York Times*, written by Claire Caine Miller, declared that Barack Obama's use of the Internet (specifically Web 2.0¹²⁶ tools) revolutionized politics in the same manner as Kennedy's use of the television.¹²⁷ In this sense, therefore, the use of social media tools may indeed be unprecedented when it comes to political activity. This discussion aligns nicely with the one concerning the potential for the Internet (particularly social media tools) to challenge those existing authority structures that might serve to deny recognition to religious networks such as gay Christians and Muslim feminists. I will return to this conversation in the following chapters.

These observations do indeed have implications for religious groups, which also appear to be shifting towards a social networked operating system.¹²⁸ For instance, Putnam's observations suggesting a decline in American participation in institutionalized organizational membership appears to be reflected in the recent decline in membership in traditional forms of religious institutions and religious affiliation.¹²⁹ For instance, a 2012 PEW Research on Religious Life Forum has shown that the percentage of people in America with church affiliation is declining more rapidly than ever before. Today, one in every five American adults is

¹²⁶ Web 2.0 refers specifically to those online social media resources that allow for user participation. Users are no longer restricted to passively observing the media and data presented on a website or page but are rather active creators and collaborators. Examples of Web 2.0 mediums are the social media tools I have been discussing thus far (ie : Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, blog sites, etc).

¹²⁷ Claire Caine Miller, "How Obama's Internet Campaign Changed Politics," *The New York Times*, (November 7, 2008), http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/07/how-obamas-internet-campaign-changed-politics/?php=true&_type=blogs&r=0.

¹²⁸ Heidi A. Campbell, "Community," in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 57-71.

¹²⁹ Rainie and Wellman, 29.

religiously unaffiliated. This number increases staggeringly to one third of all American adults under thirty who do not affiliate themselves with a particular religion.

Some have considered this drop in percentage to indicate that, as secularists had predicted, religion will inevitably recede into extinction as the secular world advances. If, however, one delves just a little bit deeper into the statistics, one will find that the situation is not quite so simple. For example, the same PEW research forum also shows that, although American adults are less inclined to attend church regularly, become a member of a religious institution, or affiliate themselves with any one particular religion, the majority are not losing their religious faith.

Many of the country's 46 million unaffiliated adults are religious or spiritual in some way. Two-thirds of them say they believe in God (68%). More than half say they often feel a deep connection with nature and the earth (58%), while more than a third classify themselves as "spiritual" but not "religious" (37%), and one-in-five (21%) say they pray every day. In addition, most unaffiliated Americans think that churches and other religious institutions benefit society by strengthening community bonds and aiding the poor.¹³⁰

So, where are all of these people? I think that a rather enlightening suggestion is one that aligns neatly with the theory of "networked individualism" as proposed by Rainie and Wellman. In this view, religion is, like the rest of the secular world, moving away from tight-knit, institutionalized forms of community towards social networks.

I should perhaps attempt to clarify, before moving on, my understanding of what could be classified as a traditional form of religious community. I think a fairly simple way to define such a group would be in terms of the traditional organized institutions that would be represented on a survey such as the one above. For instance, a religious individual who is part of a more traditional religious group might identify with one particular church, temple, mosque or

¹³⁰ Lugo, Funk, and Smith, 9.

synagogue. These religious institutions generally would have a designated leader who would hold an authoritative position. I would argue, however, that the trend towards new forms of networking that appears to be taking place in secular society should not be understood as something that will completely wipe out these more traditional forms of community – but rather as a dramatic change in how contemporary religious individuals understand them. In other words, as networked individuals, believers may remain connected to certain organized forms of religious community. They may no longer, however, consider these communities (and the religious leaders, texts, and practices associated with them) as ultimate sources of authority. A particular church or mosque, pastor or imam, scripture or ritual, thus becomes a part of the larger fluid religious network a contemporary religious individual is active within.

This sort of networked model is conducive to Taylor’s model of individualism that rests upon self-authenticity. I would further relate this trend to Taylor’s alternative individualism insofar as it allows for a mode of individualized self-authenticity that remains inherently communicative. In this way, therefore, social networks, especially when understood in relation to “networked individualism,” provide the means to cultivate social capital and generate contemporary modes of recognition. I think this becomes particularly evident when religious networks utilize social media resources.

Heidi Campbell has noted that, despite statistics concerning the decline in traditional religious institutions, religious groups continue to grow. However, these groups are manifesting themselves in the form of networked communities as opposed to the more traditional, close-knit religious institutions that were previously the norm.¹³¹ Such networked communities are made up of religious individuals whose relationships – both within and outside of their religious traditions

¹³¹ Campbell, “Community,” 57-71.

– are numerous and fluid. In other words these modern or “networked” individuals are often part of a number of groups between which they move to and from rather seamlessly by use of various technologies – including social media.

Rainie and Wellman have stated that, “the hallmark of “networked individualism” is that people function more as connected individuals and less as embedded group members.”¹³²

Interestingly, when it comes to religious communities online, it has also been predicted that the Internet might eventually replace traditional forms of religious institution and ritual.¹³³ This also has thus far not been the case – rather, online and offline resources have, in many cases, developed a sort of complementary relationship.¹³⁴ Campbell provides a great deal of insight into how religious groups understand and negotiate their relationships to media resources. She observes that social media resources do not replace the existing offline communities (nor are they likely to attract followers from outside the religion). Rather, online groups serve to extend the practices, beliefs, and goals of offline communities through various networking systems.¹³⁵ Furthermore, the Internet has the unique potential of bringing existing believers into contact with one another across time and space barriers that would be difficult – if not impossible – to overcome otherwise. This is particularly evident, as I will discuss later on, within the various online groups of Muslim feminists and Gay Christians I have encountered.

It would thus appear that the three-fold template created by Quan-Haase and Wellman, regarding the relationship between social capital building and the Internet, might specifically be

¹³² Rainie and Wellman, 12.

¹³³ Pauline Hope Cheong and Charles Ess, “Introduction: Religion 2.0? Relational and Hybridizing Pathways in Religion, Social Media, and Culture,” in *Digital Religion, Social Media and Culture*, ed. Pauline Hope Cheong, Peter Fischer Nelson, Stefan Gelfgren and Charles Ess, (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 2.

¹³⁴ Heidi A. Campbell, “How Religious Communities Negotiate New Media Religiously, in *Digital Religion, Social Media, and Culture*, ed. Pauline Hope Cheong, Peter Fischer Nelson, Stefan Gelfgren and Charles Ess, (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 84-85.

¹³⁵ Campbell, “Community,” 64.

applied to online religious networks. Scholars, such as Pauline Hope Cheong and Jessie Poon, have done just this. They have effectively applied a slightly revised version of Quan-Haase and Wellman's model to religious groups. Cheong and Poon suggest that the Internet can be *complementary, transformative, or perverse* in relation to the formation of social capital within religious organizations.¹³⁶ They note that both the complementary and transformative categories of their model elicit positive social capital building agency while the perverse model exhibits negative social capital building effects. Furthermore, Cheong and Poon suggest that the social capital building relationship between the Internet and religious organizations most often occupies one of first two categories and, therefore, is most often positive.

Cheong and Poon's observations have shown instances of contemporary media, rooted in existing traditions, which seek to reinforce rather than replace what already exists. The reinforcing influence of online resources can be most clearly seen in terms of the complementary category, which was most common among the Christian organizations Cheong and Poon encountered. They found that most of the pastors they interviewed used the Internet to supplement their existing means of communication with colleagues, church members, and missionaries abroad. They note that, "what seems to be apparent in the complementary relationship model is the role of the Internet in strengthening bonding social capital through increased connections to religious organizational activities."¹³⁷ In this vein, Cheong and Poon also mention that, in some cases, the Internet served to increase civic participation outside of the

¹³⁶ Pauline Hope Cheong and Jessie Poon, "WWW.FAITH.ORG: (Re)structuring Communication and the Social Capital of Religious Organizations," *Information, Communication, and Society*, 11 no. 1 (2008): 89-110, doi: 10.1080/13691180701858992

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

church as one member noted that an email regarding a ‘Promise Keepers’ conference persuaded him to gather a group of members to attend the event.¹³⁸

Despite such observations, Cheong and Poon also observed that there are those who remain fearful that the Internet might negatively impact social capital and traditional community:

Under the perverse relationship model, the Internet is seen to have a negative impact by substituting real time, physical relations with more virtual engagements. Hence religious leaders expressed concern that certain members may not recognize the limitations of electronic communication.¹³⁹

Those religious leaders who expressed such fears emphasized the impersonal nature of the relationship – arguing that it is useful for information gathering and scheduling purposes but not for cultivating personal relationships.¹⁴⁰ The majority of these internet-wary leaders maintained that that face-to-face contact is the only form of true community. Cheong and Poon quote one pastor who stated the following:

It is all very well to keep all of the information available but the real support comes by showing up. Some old guy sitting by himself banging away on the Internet, he would do far more good if he would show up and have a cup of coffee with somebody. Human contact is still essential.¹⁴¹

Additional fears expressed by these leaders included the potential for their members to become susceptible to online temptations if they spend too much time on the Internet – i.e., distractions such as pornography and online gambling). Others also observed danger insofar as online religious interpretation might lead to misinterpretation and heresy. Yet despite such potential for online resources to negatively impact the social capital building agency of religious groups, it remains, according to Cheong and Poon’s study, that most often the Internet has a positive

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 102.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Cheong and Poon, 102-103.

impact on community cohesion and networking abilities. Indeed, this positive potential has proven to be transformative for some religious communities and organizations.

I have saved the transformative category for last, as I believe it to be most significant in terms of how the Internet and social media play a role in the social capital building agency of marginalized religious groups such as gay Christians and Muslim feminists. Furthermore, Cheong and Poon have noted the potential, within this model, for traditional authoritative structures to be challenged: “The second model is transformative in that the impact of the Internet is likely to result in the reconstitution of prevailing religious authoritative norms possibly bringing about organizational changes.”¹⁴² Cheong and Poon observed striking changes in social interactions amongst a number of religious organizations – particularly amongst those Buddhist organizations they made contact with. Indeed, Cheong and Poon state that, among some Buddhists, the availability of online resources has led to the rise of “E-Buddhism”. Buddhist priests occupying this transformative category say that their whole method of outreach and leadership has changed and exists primarily online. Moreover, these leaders see great value in using the Internet to extend their religious community as it allows students to access communication tools from great distances. One Buddhist priest has mentioned that his community includes members from other countries that he has never even met. He refers to them as “e-members.” For Cheong and Poon, “these examples illustrate how Buddhist temples are increasingly embedded in digital networks and how Internet use helps to broaden the organizations’ membership networks by bridging social capital across ethnic lines, in this case by enrolling members from foreign countries.”¹⁴³ Again, in this sense, the Internet serves to

¹⁴² Cheong and Poon, 93.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 100.

dramatically alter the means by which these particular Buddhist practitioners engage with other members within their religious network.

The element of this transformative aspect that is of utmost concern, for my purposes, however, is the mention Cheong and Poon make regarding the potential for the Internet to challenge existing authority structures:

The traditional monopoly of religious knowledge may be eroding, resulting in flatter hierarchies where participants challenge religious interpretations while socially reconstructing the norms of religious authority. One pastor likened the Internet to the printing press, which was perceived to be “anti-authoritarian” because it weakened the authoritative role of religious leaders.¹⁴⁴

Indeed, it becomes critical, for the purpose of my research, to consider how social media tools might serve to challenge existing religious norms and structures when utilized by religious networks such as gay Christians and Muslim feminists, who remain marginal to their respective traditions. I shall argue that, through this process marginalized religious individuals may be able to create a space for mutual support and affirmation, which can be considered as possible forms of new networked communities. These, in turn, could lead to new modes of recognition.

It becomes pertinent, at this juncture, that I come to a fuller understanding of recognition that I can utilize throughout the remainder of my thesis. Taylor’s work has provided a great deal of insight in relation to how the contemporary western social imaginary has come to be characterized by ideas of individualism that are largely taken for granted. Furthermore, his alternative understanding of individualism is critical in regards to the way I understand society is moving towards a system of “networked individualism”, as described by Rainie and Wellman. Indeed, Taylor’s alternative individualism understands that an individual can only be thus in relation to a larger society. In this sense, it remains communicative. In contemporary western

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

society, this dialogical aspect of individualism can, I would argue, exist with various forms of networking – including those which take place online. Moreover, Taylor suggests that the authenticity, which is characteristic of his alternative individualism, demands recognition. I would further suggest that one might observe the potential for recognition in the movement of contemporary society towards “networked individualism.” Through this transition, connected individuals retain the ability to acquire social capital via various forms of networking – i.e., through social media interactions – as opposed to by means of traditional forms of tight-knit communities and organizations. At the same time they may acquire modes of self-fulfillment and authenticity, as Taylor understands it.

Taylor falls short, however, with regard to the way he understands the concept of recognition. I do, like Taylor, maintain that recognition is inherent to his alternative version of individualism. Moreover, I shall argue that through the development of online networks – whereby contemporary individuals engage in new forms of community – recognition might be possible for individuals who have largely been denied it by established forms of authority. With reference to gay Christians and Muslim feminists, I will discuss these forms of authority as constituting the traditional institutions of their faiths. Despite Taylor’s very important development of a qualified mode of individualism, however, his construction of recognition ultimately fails. Before I proceed, therefore, I will attempt to refine his version of recognition so that a more helpful understanding might be applied throughout the remainder of this paper. It is in regards to Taylor’s deficiency, that I think Paul Ricoeur’s model of recognition might serve as an effective supplement. Darryl Ferguson has sorted out many of these issues in his Master’s Dissertation, “Beyond the Struggle: Paul Ricoeur’s Revision of Recognition.”

Ferguson has observed two fundamental problems with Taylor's model of recognition. The first issue is that Taylor, while recognizing the value of other individuals in regards to the development of authenticity, has failed to adequately describe how one might move beyond his notion of self-authenticity to those forms of recognition that are impersonal and exist at a larger social level. As a result, Ferguson has stated, "a disconnection becomes apparent between self-recognition and other-recognition, authenticity and political recognition that Taylor does not resolve."¹⁴⁵ This disconnection, therefore, leads to a second problem. That is, Taylor's model of recognition remains trapped within the dominant view of recognition, which inherently views it as a continual struggle. Ferguson has argued that, "in calling for recognition at the institutional and social level, Taylor elevates obligation to others over the dignity in others...this means that all Taylor can do is demand that others be recognized."¹⁴⁶ Recognition, from Taylor's view, remains ensnared in a perpetual Hegelian struggle by which individuals demand recognition from others who are thus obligated to provide it. Taylor's ideas concerning the individual as one who develops his or her identity in conversation with greater society, therefore, do not appear to fit with his problematic construction of recognition.

While I maintain that Taylor is correct insofar as he views recognition as inherent to his qualified model of individualism, his own version of recognition, however, undermines his ideas concerning individualism. This is because it thwarts his convincing argument that contemporary society, with its emphasis on authenticity, is not, as it has been charged, one that assumes a variety of moral relativism. Indeed, if, as Taylor appears to suggest, individuals are *obligated* to recognize the authenticity of others, the moral value that he has suggested is inherent to the

¹⁴⁵ Darryl Ferguson, "Beyond the Struggle: Paul Ricoeur's Revision of Recognition," (MA diss., University of Calgary, 2010), 64.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

notion of authenticity actually dissipates.¹⁴⁷ There is, for Taylor, no underlying mechanism by which one transcends self-recognition and authenticity to recognition at the societal and institutional level. As a result, the process of recognition falls into a series of demands and obligatory responses, as opposed to the dialogical model that Taylor appears to be aiming for. It does seem, therefore, that Taylor's faulty version of recognition fundamentally sabotages his very helpful construction of the individual as one who is in conversation with greater society and whose right to develop authenticity is inextricably linked to that right for other people and the recognition thereof.

In order to refine Taylor's deficient construction of recognition, Ferguson has shown Ricoeur's ideas to be especially helpful. I will argue that the discussion regarding gay Christian and Muslim feminist networks might benefit from this more nuanced model of recognition. Furthermore, I will aim to build a bridge between the sociological ideas I have been discussing – namely, those concerning social capital and the transition from tight-knit communities to networks – and Ricoeur's philosophy of recognition. It is my hope that this experiment will prove helpful when considering how marginalized religious individuals effectively utilize social media tools for the purpose of, in the language of Ricoeur, allowing for interpersonal affirmation en route to reciprocal recognition. Through this process of creating online networked communities, marginalized individuals might hope to eventually encounter institutional justice. Ferguson has shown how justice, for Ricoeur, “is aimed at addressing the inequality identified in the acknowledgement of misrecognition of another, which might be the conscious refusal of recognition.”¹⁴⁸ Such misrecognition, I would argue, is evident in regards to the relationship

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 85.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 59.

between the marginalized religious individuals I am studying and the traditional authoritative institutions of their respective faiths.

Fundamental to Ricoeur's construction of recognition is his teleological definition of ethics that is "living well with and for others in just institutions."¹⁴⁹ This notion, I would argue, appears to resemble Taylor's ideas concerning authenticity and, going back even earlier, those of human flourishing. With specific respect to recognition, however, Ricoeur's three-tier model is able to transcend Taylor's problematic interpretation – which remains trapped in notions of a dialectic struggle. He does this by developing a construction of recognition that exists on three levels: the personal, the interpersonal, and the plurality of persons.¹⁵⁰ In doing so, Ricoeur provides a mechanism for moving from self, to friendship and proximate affirmation, to recognition at the institutional level. This frees the concept of recognition from the demand/obligation struggle that Taylor's construction appears to require. I find this three-fold model to be especially favourable when considered in relation to sociological research concerning the societal transition to "networked individualism."

Ricoeur's explanation of recognition rests on ideas of self-responsibility and then responsibility to others. His first category of recognition is that which is personal – i.e., that which pertains to the self. It concerns the movement into self-reflexivity and self-estimation. This awareness of the self initiates a movement towards self-recognition and, therefore, self-responsibility. Most critically, perhaps, is the development of what Ricoeur refers to as *self-esteem*. Self-esteem is introduced at the level of self-recognition, but "assumes its complete sense only at the end of the itinerary of meaning traced out by the three components of the

¹⁴⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 330.

¹⁵⁰ Ferguson, 52-62.

ethical aim.”¹⁵¹ Ricoeur’s idea of self-esteem is closely linked to those of self-awareness and reflexivity – i.e., self-estimation. It is additionally concerned, moreover, with one’s awareness that he or she has the ability to act in a way that has significant implications for the greater world. Self-esteem, therefore, is what allows an individual to move into a mode of recognition at the interpersonal level:

I cannot myself have self-esteem unless I esteem others *as myself*. ‘As myself’ means that you too are capable of starting something in the world, of acting for a reason, of hierarchizing your priorities, of evaluating the ends of your actions, and, having done this, of holding yourself in esteem as I hold myself in esteem.¹⁵²

In this sense, then, self-esteem becomes the means by which one moves between recognition at the level of self and at the interpersonal level. Through this process, one can observe how Ricoeur’s spheres of recognition are not static – they are fluid and interdependent. This fluidity is what allows Ricoeur’s model of recognition to overcome the perpetual struggle of a Hegelian nature inherent to that of Taylor.¹⁵³

The second, interpersonal sphere of reciprocal recognition is arguably the most critical aspect of Ricoeur’s development of recognition – and it is certainly pertinent to my research. Fundamental to this level of recognition is Ricoeur’s concept of *solicitude*. Solicitude, for Ricoeur, exists in relation to one’s neighbours, communities, and friendships. In other words, solicitude occurs within relationships at the proximate level. It is this stage that proves crucial in Ricoeur’s endeavour to provide a mechanism by which recognition might exist at the third, impersonal level of plurality of persons who may not be known (i.e., institutions). Ferguson has stated that, “through the recognition of each other in friendship, and through the move of solicitude that recognizes others and expresses concern for their well-being, Ricoeur is thus able

¹⁵¹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 172.

¹⁵² Ibid., 193. As cited in Ferguson, 50-51.

¹⁵³ Ferguson, 61-62.

to establish the transformation of self-recognition into other-recognition.”¹⁵⁴ Indeed, Ricoeur has created a model that allows for proximate recognition of another person which escapes the trap of struggle that traditional understandings of recognition have been so prone to fall into. This second stage of recognition is what is lacking in Taylor and, because of this, Taylor’s model cannot escape a demand/obligation model that serves to undermine his alternative mode of individualism that rests upon authenticity. Yet, there is still a third stage in Ricoeur’s depiction of recognition.

It is here that Ricoeur proposes recognition at the level of institutions – which he associates with justice and equality of all persons. This stage, however, cannot occur without the prior stage of solicitude at the interpersonal level:

The corollary of reciprocity, namely equality, places friendship on the path to justice, where the life together shared by a few people gives way to the distribution of sharing in a plurality on the scale of history, politics, and community.¹⁵⁵

Morny Joy has also described the necessity of solicitude, as it concerns justice, in her article, “Paul Ricoeur, Solicitude, Love, and the Gift.” She notes the way that, for Ricoeur, an understanding of another person’s integrity that occurs in the development of friendship is what provides the ethical framework for recognition at the level of institutions:

He is acutely conscious that this sphere of justice must operate in such a way that it will accord people publically an integrity similar to that bestowed in friendship. In contrast, however, this will now occur by means of institutional recognition. As citizens, people must deem others worthy of the same rights as they demand for themselves.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 86.

¹⁵⁵ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 188. As cited in Morny Joy, “Paul Ricoeur, Solicitude, Love, and the Gift,” *Phenomenology and Religion: New Frontiers*, ed. Jonna Bornemark and Hans Ruin, *Södertörn Philosophical Studies* 8, (Södertörn, Sweden: Södertörn University Press, 2010): 91.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

For Ricoeur, therefore, it is through this third sphere of recognition – that which exists with respect to the plurality of persons, of *unknown others* – that institutional justice can confer recognition on all equally.

I would like to suggest that an experiment, which considers Ricoeur’s interpretation of recognition in relation to sociological considerations regarding “networked individualism,” might prove helpful when attempting to discern how religious networks could utilize social media tools to generate a contemporary mode of recognition, build social capital, and achieve justice. It would appear, in my evaluation, that marginalized groups, like gay Christians and Muslim feminists, are being denied recognition – and, therefore, justice – at the institutional levels of their faiths. At the same time, I would also argue that these networks are in fact generating a mode of *proximate recognition* (that which occurs at Ricoeur’s interpersonal level of solicitude and reciprocal affirmation) via online social networking. It is through this interpersonal sphere of recognition, which concerns solicitude for the proximate other, that Ricoeur has successfully provided the theoretical transition between self-recognition and responsibility to recognition at the institutional level. I am suggesting that this second sphere of Ricoeur’s model might, in a society characterized by forms of “networked individualism,” be extended to a mode of recognition of the other *within one’s proximate network*.

Proximity, within a contemporary networked model, then becomes less about intimate forms of friendship and more about connectivity based on loose ties and shared interests/goals. This modified understanding of recognition, as it pertains to the networking activity of marginalized individuals, is what I suggest could provide these people with the potential to cultivate social capital and challenge authority. This is where I think Ricoeur’s philosophy of recognition begins to intersect with the sociological ideas I have been discussing. I shall argue

that religious individuals – and most importantly those that are marginalized – have the ability to generate reciprocal affirmation and acknowledgement, that could lead to a new expression of interpersonal recognition, through what I term as religious “interpersonal network proximity.” This, in turn, would allow for the cultivation of social capital, which might eventually serve to challenge those authoritative structures that have denied recognition to certain marginalized individuals and groups. Through this process, therefore, the ultimate goal – that is, recognition at the institutional level (i.e., justice and equality) – might eventually be achieved.

An important consideration pertaining to recognition through “interpersonal network proximity,” is that this sort of networked solicitude, particularly when it takes place via online social media outlets, becomes much more *visible* to greater society. Therefore, the potential for recognition to take place at the institutional level might become more likely insofar as these forms of networked recognition serve to increase social capital building potential via visibility. In this sense, therefore, Ricoeur’s interpersonal phase of recognition could be broadened to increase its range beyond that which understands proximity as indicating only close personal relationships. I think this understanding of proximate recognition is compatible with the societal transition towards new forms of networking, including those that occur online. Indeed, it appears that those who are forming new networked communities, which effectively utilize various forms of social media, do have an ability to cultivate social capital in new and interesting ways through “interpersonal network proximity.”

It would thus appear that, through the concept of “interpersonal network proximity,” sociological ideas concerning “networked individualism” and Ricoeur’s philosophy of recognition might be bridged. In addition, I have argued that this new appreciation of recognition, at the level of “interpersonal network proximity,” will have implications for social

capital building. Finally, there are the further considerations that could apply at the institutional level of justice as recognition. In the next chapter I will discuss existing research concerning the potential for the Internet, and particularly social media, to increase the agency of religious individuals and organizations as it relates to social capital building. I will, moreover, begin to explain how viewing this research through the lens of religious “interpersonal network proximity” might prove helpful when considering how members of marginalized networks generate new understandings of recognition and challenge existing forms of authority.

Chapter 3: The Implications of Social Media With Respect to Authority

In the last chapter, I discussed the various ways by which the Internet has the potential to affect the agency of religious networks in connection with social capital building. As noted by Wellman, Quan-Haase, Cheong, and Poon, although there is the potential for the Internet to negatively impact social capital building practices, it appeared that it is most commonly an asset in this regard. What is of particular interest, for the purposes of my research, is the emphasis Cheong places on the implications social media sites, such as Twitter, might have on the way social capital is cultivated in a networked society. She notes that the practice of microblogging¹⁵⁷ may allow us to glean insight into how social capital is built within religious communities and their expanding online networks.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, the Internet has been shown to possess the ability to both affirm and challenge existing authority structures as well as provide individuals with the opportunity to engage in conversation and relay information immediately across time and space barriers.

In this chapter, I shall provide examples of how social media tools, specifically, have proven effective in regards to positive social capital building within more mainstream religious networks. According to Cheong, these online resources have the potential to increase social capital for the purpose of effecting real social change. I will argue that, in terms of the mainstream religious leaders Cheong has studied, social capital building serves to reinforce, rather than challenge, religious authority. Therefore, I would place these groups within the complementary model of Cheong and Poon's threefold template as they appear to be using the

¹⁵⁷ Microblogging is the term used for blog posts on Twitter where the length of postings cannot exceed 140 characters. Pictures, images, and news articles are often linked to in shortened URL formats such as "bitly" and "tiny url."

¹⁵⁸ Cheong, "Twitter of Faith," 191-206.

Internet to supplement their existing offline social capital building practices. Furthermore, I will utilize existing research concerning the way that the Internet can provide marginalized groups with a voice that might challenge dominant forms of authority. Such research, I shall argue, is compatible with Ricoeur's development of a gradated model of recognition and, more specifically, with the way I have bridged his philosophy with social networking research through the concept of "interpersonal network proximity." This framework, I will argue, can be applied to the marginalized religious networks my research is focused upon.

There is little question that social networking platforms can serve to increase the social capital building agency of religious networks. Another interesting question, in regards to this notion, is how these social capital building platforms might affirm and/or challenge authority structures. Research has shown that the Internet, and particularly social media, has the potential to both affirm and challenge existing forms of religious authority.¹⁵⁹ Heidi Campbell conducted a study surrounding the activity of Christian bloggers. Such blogging platforms, according to Campbell, provide the scholar with an inside look into the beliefs and attitudes of the average believer where previously no such easy and widespread access existed.

Blogs allow individuals the opportunity to self-publish narratives on a variety of subjects and passions using text, images and even video to help express their thoughts. Because blogs are often equivalent to individuals making their personal diaries public online they provide a rich source of content for studying many questions related to personal beliefs and identity.¹⁶⁰

Campbell was specifically concerned with the attitude of these religious individuals towards existing forms of religious authority. Campbell broke down these forms of authority into four

¹⁵⁹ Heidi A. Campbell, "Religious Authority and the Blogosphere," *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 15 (2010): 252.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 253.

separate categories: religious hierarchy (roles), religious structures, religious ideology (theological ideas), and religious texts.¹⁶¹

Interestingly, Campbell's findings suggested that the Christian blogs she observed were much more likely to affirm than challenge religious forms of authority. In regards to the breakdown of affirmation into Campbell's four categories of authority, Campbell found that religious roles – for instance, religious leaders – were most commonly affirmed by Christian bloggers (54% of affirmative mentions), followed by religious texts (29%), theological ideas (13%), and religious structures (3.8%). In terms of challenges to authority, however, bloggers were also most critical of religious leaders (54.9% of challenging mentions), followed by theological ideas (22%), religious structures (12.8%) and religious texts (11%).¹⁶² An important point to keep in mind, in regards to Campbell's study, is the fact that the majority of her sample blog population also served in official positions within Christian churches and organizations offline.¹⁶³ Whether or not this fact impacted the larger percentage of authoritative affirmation is difficult to say, but important to note, nonetheless. Although Campbell's study provides interesting insights as to the activity of contemporary religious individuals online, I find it to be lacking somewhat insofar as it does not appear to consider how online bloggers interact and network with one another through these online mediums.

Campbell has observed that this particular study exhibits both continuity as well as discord with a 2008 study conducted by Cheong, Alexander Halavais, and Kyounghee Kwon regarding the same subject matter (Christian blogs).¹⁶⁴ Both studies showed that Christian blogs

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 254

¹⁶² Ibid., 269.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 271.

¹⁶⁴ Pauline Hope Cheong, Alexander Halavais, and Kyounghee Kwon, "The Chronicles of Me: Understanding Blogging as a Religious Practice," *Journal of Media and Religion*, 7 (2008): 107-131.

are inevitably shaped by the spirituality and faith practices of the religious bloggers.

Furthermore, both studies also showed that Christian bloggers write about various religious topics (i.e., spiritual journeys, religious missions, and apologetics) and use blog spaces for the purpose of chronicling their spiritual lives and daily religious practices.¹⁶⁵ Unlike Campbell, however, Cheong, Halavais, and Kwon found that the most common subject content of Christian blogs were educational posts that served to “inform and provide authoritative insight.”¹⁶⁶ In this sense, therefore, these religious individuals appear to be engaging in alternative, non-traditional forms of religious dialogue and experience from which they claim their own authority.

It thus might be argued that certain religious bloggers are cultivating forms of authenticity, in accordance with Taylor, through these online blog sites. Blog sites thus become an outlet via which believers can engage with religious ideas and practices, as well as construct their own religious identities, outside of the traditional boundaries of religious institutions. This sort of activity becomes increasingly pertinent to my research when considered in light of how online users engage with one another – thus increasing their networking capabilities. Cheong, Halavais, and Kwon, unlike Campbell, have considered the networking potential of the blogosphere as they encountered religious users who appeared to value the connectivity potential inherent to online blog sites. They have noted that a “key expressed by religious bloggers related to the interaction with other believers. Given the interactive capacity of the Internet, several bloggers said their blogs were an avenue for connecting to others and for ‘God to work’ as ‘the body of Christ is not limited to being inside a church.’”¹⁶⁷ It thus becomes interesting to

¹⁶⁵ Campbell, “Religious Authority and the Blogosphere,” 272.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Cheong, Halavais, and Kwon, 124.

consider how these online bloggers might utilize blogging resources to generate networked forms of reciprocal solicitude and affirmation.

This sort of activity may not always pose an explicit challenge to traditional authoritative structures. It does, however, appear to pose an implicit challenge insofar as networked believers are turning to new and interesting places with respect to contemporary, non-traditional varieties of religious authority. In this sense, religious authority is no longer solely associated with traditional religious leaders and institutions – it can also be shaped through the interactive practices of religious networked individuals.

We find some evidence of discourse in this sample that would tend to indicate work in building alternative frameworks for interpretation. Results from our analyses suggest that some bloggers are articulating critical discourse of the institutionalized character of the church, and debate over traditional norms and practices. Religious bloggers are also operating outside the realm of the conventional nuclear church as they connect and link to the mainstream news sites, other nonreligious blogs, and online collaborative knowledge networks like Wikipedia.¹⁶⁸

Indeed, according to Cheong, Halavais, and Kwon, Christian blogs may align with the notion of an “emergent church.” They note that George Barna has associated the emergent church with a post-modernized form of theology that does not rely on any singular religious narrative or discourse for authority, but rather draws upon a variety of sources and applies these to every day practice and belief.¹⁶⁹ What is particularly critical to note here, is that this revolutionary style of theology is, according to Barna, strongly appealing to a *networked generation*.¹⁷⁰ In other words, this sort of religious practice, whereby religious individuals are active authorities and producers of religious dialogue, appears to be indicative of the “networked individualism” discussed in the previous chapters.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 125.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. See also George Barna, *Revolution*, (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 2005).

According to the studies discussed above, online resources, such as blog spaces, have the potential to both reinforce as well as challenge traditional religious authority structures, depending on the context. What is interesting to consider, in terms of how social media might serve to challenge or affirm existing modes of authority, is that, in both cases, religious networks have the ability to utilize these resources for the purpose of building social capital within their extending networks. I think it is thus helpful to consider these ideas in light of the notion of religious “interpersonal network proximity.” As these networked individuals engage with one another, within their proximate networks, social capital is cultivated. Through forms of reciprocal affirmation and solicitude, therefore, a contemporary mode of recognition, at the level of “interpersonal network proximity,” could be generated. This will have particular implications for marginalized religious groups as it provides a new framework for understanding Ricoeur’s notion of the proximate other, through which recognition at the institutional level (i.e., justice) might eventually be achieved. I shall discuss these ideas at greater length shortly.

According to Cheong, social media sites, such as Twitter, might serve as a mobilization platform: “Given the burgeoning and increasingly diverse use base, one likely vision for Twitter is to be a micro-sharing and mobilization platform for religious communities.”¹⁷¹ In a recent publication, *Twitter of Faith*, Cheong hones in on Twitter, specifically, as an effective means for social capital building within religious organizations. There is no question that, within the past few years, Twitter has gained a great deal of attention in regards to the role it has played as a social tool for civilians as well as more prominent social figures such as religious and political leaders. The site has quickly become one of the most heavily visited sites across the globe.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Cheong, “Twitter of Faith,” 193.

¹⁷² According to the web-tracking site, alexa.com, Twitter is ranked as the ninth most popular site in America and eleventh, globally.

With over 240 million users and 500 million tweets sent per day, Twitter undoubtedly has secured its place in the global spotlight – at least for the time being.¹⁷³

Interestingly, Cheong refers to a PEW study, which has shown that Twitter is most popular among young adult and urban users as well as with *minorities*.¹⁷⁴ The significance of this piece of data is especially interesting when considered in light of the marginalized religious groups I will be looking at, Muslim feminists and gay Christians. What is of interest, at the moment, is how mainstream religious groups have taken up Twitter for the purpose of social capital building activities such as evangelizing, community building, ritual practice, and networking. In regards to this argument, Cheong discusses the effectiveness of religious memes. Cheong defines the term ‘meme’, which she has borrowed from the realms of evolutionary biology, as “an idea, catchphrase, instruction, behaviour, or story, for which cultural dissemination generates virus-like imitation and reproductions.”¹⁷⁵ Cheong notes how the Twitter hashtag¹⁷⁶ and retweet¹⁷⁷ functions serve to quicken the potential for religious memes to go viral. In ways such as these, online users become active cultural agents. Indeed, this goes for religious leaders and lay followers alike. I will begin with examples of the former and, in this vein, I will note how social media can act as a social capital building tool that serves to reinforce traditional authoritative forms.

¹⁷³ “Facts About Twitter,” accessed May 3, 2014, <https://about.twitter.com/company>.

¹⁷⁴ Cheong, “Twitter of Faith,” 191.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 194. See also Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁷⁶ “The # symbol, called a hashtag, is used to mark keywords or topics in a Tweet. It was created organically by Twitter users as a way to categorize messages.” “Twitter Help Center,” accessed April 30, 2014, <https://support.twitter.com/articles/49309>

¹⁷⁷ “A Retweet is a re-posting of someone else's Tweet. Twitter's Retweet feature helps you and others quickly share that Tweet with all of your followers.” “Twitter Help Center,” accessed April 30, 2013, <https://support.twitter.com/articles/77606>

Cheong discusses how religious leaders have appropriated social media tools in order to augment their existing authority. For instance, Cheong has followed a number of evangelical megachurch pastors in the United States (whom she refers to as “holy mavericks”) that effectively use social media resources to reach out to their existing communities as well as (they would hope) extend their evangelical reach. One example of such a leader is Rick Warren, who is the founder of one of the largest churches in the United States as well as a best-selling author, whose books have sold millions of copies. In addition to this success, Warren also has an active Facebook page as well as a Twitter handle with over a million followers. Furthermore, his local church community consists of over twenty thousand members. Cheong has noted that the engagement of these massive religious institutions with cutting edge technologies like social media serves to further subvert secularization theories which often associate the rise of technology with the impending decline of antiquated religious belief. She also refers to the ability of such massive organizations to affect social change.

In deepening the explanatory power of religion for social change, there is merit in investigating mediated religious authority, particularly the enthusiastic embrace of corporate communication by some as a panacea for the declining influence of traditional authority in the public sphere. Contrary to the predictions of secularization in modernity, the meteoric growth of “mega” churches in the last decade has attracted attention to pastors of these “high growth organizations” of which many have become arenas for collective mobilization and ambitious civic projects.¹⁷⁸

Twenty thousand local church members is no doubt an impressive congregation. The potential for social capital building, however, grows exponentially when one considers the million plus Twitter followers whom Warren has immediate access to at his fingertips.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Pauline Hope Cheong, “Religious Leaders, Mediated Authority, and Social Change,” *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 39 no. 4, (2011): 453, doi: 10.1080/00909882.2011.577085

¹⁷⁹ In this respect, therefore, it is interesting to consider how mainstream religious authorities might utilize social media tools in order to challenge existing secular authorities that may wish to deny them recognition within the public sphere. This discussion, however, extends beyond the reach of this particular study.

At the time Cheong was writing her article, *Twitter of Faith*, Pastor Rick Warren had over 310,000 Twitter followers. Now, only three years later, he has over 1.3 million. I think this fact is indicative of a number of things, primarily, the rapid rate at which social media tools are gaining influence in a modern and technological society. In her article, Cheong quotes three tweets, made by Rick Warren – each of which was retweeted by his followers more than a hundred times. I have included these tweets below:

RT @RickWarren: Have you ever noticed that everyone who favours abortion is alive? (4:06pm, Dec 6th, 2010)

RT @RickWarren: If people have to earn your love, then you don't really love them. (11:15pm, Mar 19th, 2011)

RT @RickWarren: If you prayed instead of worrying, you'd have a lot less to worry about. (4:14pm, Mar 24th, 2011)¹⁸⁰

I have also included three additional tweets, which Warren has posted more recently. The following examples were retweeted over two thousand times:

RT@RickWarren: Living by faith isn't living with certainty. It's trusting God in spite of unanswered questions and unresolved doubts. (8:25pm, Jan 1st, 2014)

RT @RickWarren: Worry is the warning light that shows I have stopped looking to God to meet my needs. (5:07pm, Mar 2nd, 2014)

RT @RickWarren: In worship, seek God, not an experience. (5:29am Mar 3rd, 2014)

According to Cheong, this sort of microblogging activity has the potential to effect social change through the cultivation of social capital. In cases such as Rick Warren, however, the social capital gained serves to reinforce traditional forms of religious authority. Therefore, I would argue that the above example might be placed within the complementary category of Cheong's social capital building template as Warren is using social media resources to augment his

¹⁸⁰ Cheong, "Twitter of Faith," 200.

existing social capital building practices. In this sense, social media serves as a supplementary tool for the purpose of reinforcing Warren's religious authority.

It becomes important, at this juncture, to qualify the way by which I understand social capital with respect to Ricoeur's model of recognition, for which the ultimate goal is justice and equality. This understanding of social capital is in fact quite different from that of scholars such as Cheong – who would categorize it as a neutral social tool that can be cultivated by anyone through the effective use of resources such as social media. Evangelical religious leaders like Rick Warren, by this understanding, are able to utilize social media to cultivate social capital that reaffirms their existing beliefs and authority. What I have in mind, with regard to the cultivation of social capital for marginalized religious populations, involves more than this as I am linking it with notions of recognition. Indeed, insofar as I am associating social capital with Ricoeur's development of recognition – for which the end goal is equality and justice – it no longer remains a neutral resource, but rather takes on ethical implications. Through this process, such networks can generate reciprocal affirmation and acknowledgement that could lead to contemporary forms of interpersonal recognition and perhaps, eventually, recognition at the institutional level. Social capital, in this sense, becomes a tool for justice.

There is no question that megachurch leaders and communities benefit from social media as a neutral social capital building resource that serves to increase their existing authority. As mentioned previously, however, the growth of megachurches in America serves as a rather baffling phenomenon considered vis-à-vis the research, which shows that church affiliation is, in fact, declining. It is, of course, important to reiterate the fact that this decline in traditional affiliation is not indicative of a decline in religiosity (an argument often put forth by secularists). Rather, as I have been arguing, many religious individuals are moving towards a networked

religious system and away from more tight-knit institutionalized forms. This trend is particularly interesting to consider in light of the suggestion that marginalized religious individuals might utilize social media tools to cultivate a form of social capital that appeals to a Ricoeurian mode of reciprocal recognition. I have attempted to broaden this sphere of recognition so as to make it more compatible with the societal movement towards networked forms of community. By means of this contemporary understanding, it would seem that online religious networks might generate affirmation and solicitude that could lead to a mode of interpersonal recognition through religious “interpersonal network proximity.” This, I would suggest, has implications for authority.

It is no doubt crucial, for the purposes of my research, to consider the ways by which social media and the Internet challenge traditional forms of authority. Rainie and Wellman refer to this notion explicitly: “The role of experts and information gatekeepers can be radically altered as empowered amateurs and dissidents find new ways to raise their voices and challenge authority.”¹⁸¹ Cheong also notes how social media outlets allow everyday individuals to define themselves and their beliefs outside of traditional religious institutions.

The (re) circulation of faith tweets may be conceived of as viral media codes, with the ability to influence a society’s agenda with real effects. In this way, microblogging represents a specious portal for thinking about religion, media, and culture. Faith memes introduce religious believers into an emerging form of participatory culture where they are appraised as fellow participants in mediated content creation and are called upon to propagate their beliefs to their networks online... Faith tweets and retweets by religious producers facilitate the potential agency and channels of everyday lay persons in communicating about religion to new and imagined audiences, and to quick spread faith narratives online.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Rainie and Wellman, 14.

¹⁸² Cheong, “Twitter of Faith,” 195.

In this sense, therefore, traditional religious hierarchies, characterized by vertical authority structures can become more horizontal as networked individuals engage and participate in religious dialogue online.

Thus far, I have provided specific examples of how the Internet – and particularly social media – has the ability to cultivate social capital resources and influence authority structures. In the cases put forth by Cheong, where megachurch pastors have utilized social media forms to create social capital, religious authority is definitely reinforced, rather than challenged. While these examples would fit within Cheong and Poon’s complementary category in regards to social capital building and religious networks, the pertinent question, in terms of my research, is the way in which an understanding of social capital that is associated with Ricoeurian recognition might be applied to marginalized religious networks for transformative purposes. Such networks are often being denied recognition at the institutional levels of their faiths – i.e., at the level of plurality of persons – and thus are unable to experience justice. Before developing this idea further in the final chapter, I think that a consideration of an article by Ananda Mitra might serve as helpful when considering the implications of the Internet on *marginalized groups*, specifically.

Mitra’s article, “Marginalized Voices in Cyberspace,” examines, from a postcolonial perspective, the way in which the Internet might provide marginalized individuals with a *voice*.¹⁸³ In order to develop this idea, Mitra has followed the activity of Indians online whose activity serves to challenge dominant western ideologies.¹⁸⁴ Mitra has noted that diasporic Indians, and Indians generally, serve as a useful example as “the authoritative discourse, for

¹⁸³ For a detailed discussion concerning the notion of *voice* and the Internet, see Ananda Mitra and Eric Watts, “Theorizing Cyberspace: The Idea of Voice Applied to the Internet Discourse,” *New Media and Society*, 4 no 479, (2002): 479-498, doi: 10.1177/146144402321466778.

¹⁸⁴ Mitra discusses how her ideas apply to diasporic Indians as well as Indians generally. However, it is difficult, as it often is when considering online discourse, to determine where the various members of online networks are actually physically located.

instance western film, has created a monolithic and stereotypical image of the Indian.”¹⁸⁵ On a side note, I would argue that this is certainly also the case in terms of Muslim women. Mitra’s examples are focused on the online response of Indians following the 1998 nuclear testing activity in India and Pakistan. These events received a great deal of global criticism. However, comments such as the following were shared by Indians, providing an alternative discourse to the more mainstream criticisms:

The consensus is that Indians are jubilant with the prospect of India having nuclear might. The westerners are approaching this with caution since India now possess a dangerous weapon. Let me ask the question to the westerners first...are you afraid because India has a big toy and might not use it appropriately. Or is it that only the western countries have the right to own nuclear power. Question for India...so you have Nuclear capabilities, what now? (Ray, 1998)¹⁸⁶

India should have nukes. Everyone else does. Take a look at the people who propose peace and non-violence – they are armed to the teeth and the main exploiters of the third world. Need more reasons? (Anonymous, 1999)¹⁸⁷

Mitra suggests that, in this case, the Internet allowed Indians to engage with the discussion surrounding the nuclear activity of their country.

Although the above analogy, regarding nuclear weapon development, cannot be applied to Ricoeur’s ideas regarding just institutions, it does shed some light on how online resources might provide the marginalized with a new voice.¹⁸⁸ Indeed, prior to the conception of online resources, Mitra has noted that the marginalized voice of the Indian would have largely been lost within the mainstream western discussion.¹⁸⁹ Mitra further notes how the Internet has implications for diasporic Indians, specifically, as it allows them to cultivate a sense of community and commonality with those whom they are separated from by geographic

¹⁸⁵ Ananda Mitra, “Marginal Voices in Cyberspace,” *New Media and Society*, 3 no 29 (2001): 33, doi: 10.1177/1461444801003001003

¹⁸⁶ Mitra, “Marginal Voices in Cyberspace,” 34.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ This notion becomes increasingly complicated by the fact that India itself is not a just institution.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

distance.¹⁹⁰ In relation to these ideas, Mitra suggests that the Internet “has allowed the formation of a network of voices.”¹⁹¹

What is especially important to note, for the purpose of my research, is the emphasis Mitra places on how the unique voice (in this case, the voice of the Indian) demands *acknowledgement* by the dominant western voice:

This is a voice that is heteroglossic and hyperconnected, and in the case of the marginalized, this voice has the potential of producing a call that the dominant has a moral obligation to acknowledge. Consequently, the metaphor of voice in cyberspace problematizes the relation between the marginal and the dominant by initiating a crisis of acknowledgement on the part of the dominant.¹⁹²

Mitra’s suggestion, regarding the responsibility of the dominant western voice to acknowledge the views of the marginalized Indian voice might seem to align with Ricoeur’s level of recognition at the level of plurality of persons. She does unfortunately appear, in the quote above, to fall into a trap of demand/obligation that resembles that of Taylor. This might be remedied, however, through the consideration of what Mitra has referred to as *cyber communities*. Indeed, when considered in light of Ricoeur’s reciprocal sphere of recognition, and the way I have connected this with social networking research, one might observe how Mitra’s *cyber communities* are capable of generating reciprocal acknowledgement by means of “interpersonal network proximity.”

With reference to the cultivation of online community, Mitra affirms the potential for individual voices to transcend traditional time and space barriers in order to create cyber communities that challenge more traditional understandings of community:

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 30.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 35.

¹⁹² Ibid., 29.

The voice becomes a call for acknowledgement as the speaker attempts to reach out to others who might voice a similar call. This can also be the moment when a cyber community is formed around the common call for acknowledgement. In forming a cyber community around voices that are not geographically restricted or temporally bound, one traditional element of community – the question of proximity – is problematized.¹⁹³

As to this question, I would suggest that a consideration of “interpersonal network proximity” may provide an understanding of the manner in which a common call for acknowledgement might serve as a form of reciprocal affirmation or support. In this sense, Mitra’s work can be considered in light of how members of networked communities might generate reciprocal acknowledgement.

I would also argue that such marginalized communities could characterize the transformative model of Cheong and Poon’s social capital building template as it would appear that the Internet has provided individuals, within these groups, with opportunities for social capital building that simply would not have been available prior to the Internet. Additionally, the Internet serves as a platform from which marginalized individuals might, in time, *challenge authority*, which is also a characteristic Cheong and Poon observe within the transformative model. Indeed, according to Mitra, these cyber communities (or networks) have implications for social/cultural capital and the potential to challenge dominant images and discourses relating to the perception of the Indian people:

When the voice and call of the individuals is used as the starting point of thinking of cyber community it is necessary to recognize that the technology of the web offers *any member*¹⁹⁴ of a group an opportunity to raise a questioning voice as well as produce a community. Eventually the convergence of such voices can make marginal cyber

¹⁹³ Ibid., 41.

¹⁹⁴ Although not represented in this particular comment, Mitra makes it clear that “any individual” is limited to those that have Internet access. Issues that arise concerning access are certainly important but beyond the scope of my present research.

communities grow large and vocal enough to question and challenge traditional structures of cultural and financial capital.¹⁹⁵

It would thus appear that Mitra's work concerning the Internet's ability to provide the marginalized with a voice can be compared in some measure to how I understand marginalized religious individuals – i.e., gay Christians and Muslim feminists – as cultivating new networked forms of community through the use of social media. It is to these groups that I will turn in the next and final chapter.

The development of social media resources does have the potential to level the social, religious, and political playing fields (to a certain extent, at least). Vertical, top-down authority structures become increasingly horizontal as networked individuals engage in common action by virtue of online social networking sites. In other words, individuals and groups that may not have had an opportunity to voice their opinions, prior to this development, now have a platform (a global platform) to do so. At this point, I will turn to the final chapter in which I will discuss how members of gay Christian and Muslim feminist networks utilize social media resources in order to generate affirmation and acknowledgment that could lead to a contemporary mode of reciprocal recognition through religious “interpersonal network proximity.” In doing so, these individuals, who are marginal to their respective traditions, might be able to cultivate ethically grounded forms of social capital that might eventually serve to challenge those traditional authority structures that marginalize them. Through these processes, recognition at the institutional level – and thus justice – might become possible.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 4: Generating Recognition Through Religious “Interpersonal Network Proximity”

I have chosen to focus my study on Muslim feminists and gay Christians, as I am interested in how these networks might utilize online social media resources as a means of working towards the forms of self-fulfillment and authenticity that are inherent to Taylor’s revised ideal of individualism which rests upon recognition. As Taylor’s own understanding of recognition ultimately fails his qualified version of individualism, I have applied the graduated model of recognition, as proposed by Ricoeur, to my research. I have further attempted to broaden his second tier of recognition – i.e., that which takes place at the level of proximity and solicitude – to allow for interpersonal recognition to occur at a networked level. I shall consider, therefore, how marginalized religious individuals utilize online resources, such as social media, to engage in forms of networked affirmation and solicitude that could lead to a contemporary mode of interpersonal recognition through religious “interpersonal network proximity.”

This activity, I have suggested, has implications for the cultivation of a form of social capital that is grounded by a Ricoeurian ethic of justice. Furthermore, it has the potential to challenge existing forms of religious authority that have often denied recognition to gay Christians and Muslim feminists. Cheong has argued that the use of social media tools, such as Twitter, by megachurch pastors facilitates the growth of online viral codes or memes which serve to promote the creation of social capital for the purpose of social change. In these instances, it would appear that social media tools are cultivating a neutral form of social capital that serves to reinforce mainstream forms of religious authority. I have suggested that these examples would fit within the complementary model of Cheong and Poon’s social capital building framework as the Internet appears to be supplementing existing social capital within these mainstream religious communities.

On the other hand, I have also referred to the work of Ananda Mitra, who has considered how the Internet might specifically benefit marginalized individuals who would not have had the means to develop reciprocal acknowledgement or influence existing capital structures prior to the development of these online resources. Mitra's article was concerned with how Indians, who have traditionally been marginalized by western structures, used the Internet to challenge the dominant discourse surrounding the nuclear testing by India and Pakistan in 1998. Mitra argued that the Internet provided these individuals with a voice they did not have access to prior to the Internet. In addition, Mitra has suggested that the Internet provides the opportunity for marginalized individuals to cultivate *cyber communities* that can transcend geographic barriers and challenge traditionally dominant authoritative structures. Although Mitra's examples regarding nuclear weaponry do not align with a Ricoeurian model of justice, I have suggested that her cyber communities might have the potential to engage in expressions of affirmation and acknowledgement through "interpersonal network proximity."

Although Mitra's research did not consider religious groups, in particular, I think that some aspects of her work can effectively be applied to the religious networks with which I am concerned. Such instances, I will suggest, should be placed within Cheong and Poon's transformative model regarding social capital building potential. This is because the social capital building agency of these networks is dramatically impacted by the availability of the Internet and, particularly, social media tools. Furthermore, there is the potential for traditional forms of authority to be influenced when marginalized individuals create new networks through these online methods. In other words, the Internet, and especially social media, allows marginalized religious individuals to form contemporary networks through which they can grow and thrive outside of traditional religious authoritative boundaries. This, in my opinion, signifies

the progression of “networked individualism” in modern society, with respect to religion, as it exemplifies the movement away from institutionalized forms of religious community to those characterized by more fluid relationships through which social capital can be cultivated.

To return to Taylor, for a moment, it is important to recall the manner in which his alternative version of individualism rests upon notions of self-authenticity and recognition. Although his expression of recognition ultimately fails, Taylor’s understanding of qualified individualism remains helpful insofar as it provides a framework that can be used when thinking about the way contemporary individuals can cultivate authenticity – which may, in turn, foster the development of recognition – through the creation of various networks. Furthermore, Taylor has noted that within an individualized society, which is largely driven by “invisible hand structures,” there still remains the possibility for social change via collective action. I would relate this idea to the fact that individuals within western society, who have been charged with no longer having the means to cultivate social capital, as a result of growing individualism and decreased engagement with traditional forms of community, retain the ability to create social capital through networks which are increasingly engaged with online social media resources. This becomes especially pertinent for people who are marginalized, as social media provides those who have been denied recognition with the opportunity to challenge the dominant discourse.

It is in this chapter, which concerns the social media activity of gay Christians and Muslim feminists, that I think the ideas I have put forth previously, concerning religious “interpersonal network proximity,” authority, and social capital, begin to intersect in rather remarkable ways. Indeed, where Taylor’s construction of recognition fails, Ricoeur’s more nuanced version – that is free from the confines of perpetual struggle – serves as the fundamental

way that I understand the manner in which recognition might be generated within a society that is moving towards new forms of “networked individualism.” Moreover, I have attempted bridge these social networking theories with the philosophical grounding of my research – especially as it is concerned with recognition. I have done so by means of an experiment through which I have suggested that religious individuals are utilizing social media tools in order to create expanding networked communities. Through these networks, marginalized religious individuals might challenge dominant discourse via online (and visible) reciprocal acknowledgement and affirmation. Through this process, I will suggest they could generate a contemporary mode of interpersonal recognition via religious “interpersonal network proximity. This activity may also eventually have implications for recognition at the institutional level.

I will begin this discussion with an example of a hashtag, created by a female Muslim Twitter user. This particular hashtag (#empoweredmuslimwomen) proved to have a broad reach and did, for a time, even trend on Twitter.¹⁹⁶ On February 26, 2014, @MuslimahMontage tweeted the following:

@MuslimahMontage: I want to have a tweet party #empoweredmuslimwomen, what do you all think? Discuss its importance @aishacs @jazobair @Faineemae @Muslim_Fems.

Later that day, @MuslimahMontage proceeded to send out another tweet to confirm the date and time that the Twitter party would be taking place (March 4, 11:00 PST). She also included a link to a Facebook events page, where individuals were able to RSVP to this (virtual) event. In the days that followed, @MuslimahMontage continued to promote the Twitter event. The public

¹⁹⁶ Trending topics are those that have become immediately popular on Twitter. For more detailed information, see “Facts About Twitter,” accessed on March 25, 2014, <https://support.twitter.com/articles/101125-faqs-about-trends-on-twitter>

Facebook event page included a more detailed description of some of the issues

@MuslimahMontage and her supporters hoped to tackle by means of this public tweet party:

What is the definition of “empowered” in the context of Muslim women? We hope to touch on the nuances of what empowerment means to different women from different backgrounds. Who empowers women? Do they need others to empower them? How can women support each other? Why do we need empowered women? Where are the role models? What does it mean to empower women? What are you doing personally to empower yourself or support others? How can we be role models for young women?

Can gender equality be accomplished through empowering women? Can we empower women by telling our stories of trials and triumph? What are some of the issues that arise with talk of empowering/empowered women? And many more questions. We invite you to ask your own questions, as well.¹⁹⁷

In addition to this, @MuslimahMontage sent out numerous tweet reminders, to the Twitter world, of the upcoming #empoweredmuslimwomen event. She also recruited other prominent female Muslim Twitter users – asking them to take part in, as well as promote, the #empoweredmuslimwomen party:

@MuslimahMontage: @mayalhassen plz join tweet party #empoweredmuslimwomen 3/4/14 4 a vital discussion about how 2 #changethenarrative (6:30pm, Feb 27th, 2014)

@MuslimahMontage: @SanaSaeed plz join tweet party #empoweredmuslimwomen 3/4/14 4 a vital discussion about how 2 #changethenarrative (6:19pm, Feb 27th, 2014)

@MuslimahMontage: So guess who is co-hosting tweet party #empoweredmuslimwomen with Muslimah Montage? @BrownGirlMag yay! ☺ & 2 mods @aishacs @lulainlife (8:10am, Feb 27th, 2014)

¹⁹⁷ “Tweet Party: #empoweredmuslimwomen,” accessed on March 18, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/events/675407675830856/>

In this context, it is interesting to note how @MuslimahMontage made a specific reference to how she hoped that the tweet party would serve to “change the narrative.” I think this point can be drawn into Mitra’s conversation in which she suggests that the Internet can provide marginalized groups with a means to challenge the dominant discourse. In relation to the Indians Mitra discussed, this meant changing the dominant western perception of the “Indian” – the Internet gave them a voice and the means to define themselves against this construct. For Muslim women, part of the task might look quite similar insofar as Muslim women seek to free themselves from the dominant image the west has created of them – that of oppressed and powerless women. This quest, of course, is in addition to their desire to free themselves from authoritarian male impositions.

The response to @MuslimahMontage was tremendous as women, through Twitter, began to promote the event. By the time March 4th arrived, there was already a great deal of hype surrounding the approaching affair – the stage was set. As a result of such diligent promotion of the event, once the time came for @MuslimahMontage to announce the commencement of the Tweet party, the tweets began to pour in immediately. There were, as always, those individuals who sought to undermine the goals of the conversation by tweeting statements such as the following:

@Soha1|: #empoweredmuslimwomen have the power to switch the cooker on and off as and when they please (1:24pm, Mar 4th, 2014)

@msaadkb: I bought her a fully automatic washing machine because I care about her delicate soft hands. #Empoweredmuslimwomen (1:25pm, Mar 4th, 2014)

@JibbyD: Gave her the opportunity to find me a second wife.
#Empoweredmuslimwomen (1:12pm, Mar 4th, 2014)

@JibbyD: I love, respect and appreciate all the ugly feminists tweeting angry on #empoweredmuslimwomen (3:14pm, Mar 4th, 2014)

Tweets such as these, however, were largely lost in a conversation pervaded by the voices of Muslim women eager to define themselves and their faith:

@loredsaviour: #Empoweredmuslimwomen define themselves. They don't need you to define them (1:24pm, Mar 4th, 2014)

@OccupiedMuslim: When #Empoweredmuslimwomen read "Men don't like it when women wear..." they think: who cares? who cares? who the fuck cares? (1:56pm, Mar 4th, 2014)

@lsarsour: Let's not impose Western standards on #EmpoweredMuslimWomen. Uncovering my hair does not make me more or less empowered (1:10pm, Mar 4th, 2014)

@_arena_: We need to also create a space where LGBTQ Muslim women are welcomed, their voices matter too. #Empoweredmuslimwomen (12:31pm, Mar 4th, 2014)

@RaquelEvita: #EmpoweredMuslimWomen are subject to hostility from all sides. Our strength comes from within, our power from above. We will not be deterred (1:21pm, Mar 4th, 2014)

@maureen_ahmed: Talking about the unspoken topics in Islam (domestic violence, LGBTQ rights, female Imams) will lead to empowerment #empoweredmuslimwomen (11:27am, Mar 4th, 2014)

The event proved to be very successful. Indeed, the #empoweredmuslimwomen hashtag even trended in the United States.¹⁹⁸ An article in *Brown Girl Magazine*, written very shortly after the event took place, suggested that the #empoweredmuslimwomen Twitter chat saw five

¹⁹⁸ See Tweet by @trendinaliaUS, accessed on March 23, 2014, <https://twitter.com/trendinaliaUS/status/440937860330692609>

hundred original tweets and one thousand retweets.¹⁹⁹ The chat continues, even after the end of the official party, as individuals continue to engage in the conversation.

Interestingly, a few short days after the above tweet party took place, I came across another instance of Muslim women coming together via social media – this time, however, it was to counter a very specific case of adversity. International Women’s Day (IWD) has been a growing annual celebration for nearly 100 years. Although birthed out of the socialist movement in Russia in the early 1900’s, the observation of IWD has become a global event – recognized by both developed and developing countries. The day is observed every year on March 8th, as this day marks the beginning of the Women’s Strike in Russia in 1917, which eventually won Russian women the right to vote.²⁰⁰ The event is, in many ways, much more than simply a celebration of women – it also has social and political implications. The following quote was taken from the IWD official website.

Many from a younger generation feel that 'all the battles have been won for women' while many feminists from the 1970's know only too well the longevity and ingrained complexity of patriarchy. With more women in the boardroom, greater equality in legislative rights, and an increased critical mass of women's visibility as impressive role models in every aspect of life, one could think that women have gained true equality. The unfortunate fact is that women are still not paid equally to that of their male counterparts, women still are not present in equal numbers in business or politics, and globally women's education, health and the violence against them is worse than that of men.²⁰¹

In other words, IWD draws awareness to the continuing battle women face for equality, freedom, and human rights.

¹⁹⁹ Ainee Fatima, “Post Twitter Party,” *Brown Girl Magazine* (March, 2014),

<http://www.browngirlmagazine.com/2014/03/post-twitter-party-empoweredmuslimwomen/>

²⁰⁰ “About International Women’s Day,” accessed on March 26, 2014,

<http://www.internationalwomensday.com/about.asp#.UzCt4HlbTwi>

²⁰¹ Ibid.

Therefore, many women took great issue with the comments posted on Twitter by prominent Muslim figure, Sheikh Abu Eesa Niamatullah, in response to International Women's Day. Abu Eesa is of British-Pakistani origin and studied at the University of Manchester before going on to study Arabic, Islamic Law, and the Qur'an at various locations.²⁰² In addition to having a very strong social media following (over 50,000 Facebook followers and 21, 000 Twitter followers) Abu Eesa is also an instructor at the AlMaghrib Institute – a prominent Islamic education centre in the west.²⁰³ It is thus no surprise that his following tweets elicited a strong response, particularly from Muslim women.

@Niamatullah: The sole objective of Int'l Women's Day is to see if we, as men, can avoid being sexist for at least a day #winning #rolemodel #IWD (12:13pm, Mar 8th, 2014)

@Niamatullah: Anyway I don't care how much you hate it or think amazing International Women's Day is, y'all still can't drive. Ay n'am. #IWD (10:32am, Mar 8th, 2014)

@Niamatullah: Int'l Women's Day is great, but starting tomorrow, it's 364 International Men's Days again. So stick that in your oven and cook it. #IWD (5:37am, Mar 8th, 2014)

@Niamatullah: Yes, Int'l Women's Day has officially started. Or as it's more widely known, "Men not giving a monkeys that it's Int'l Women's Day. #IWD (1:04am, Mar 8th, 2014)

The Twitter public was quick to respond to these remarks – many of whom were not impressed with Abu Eesa's derogatory statements. Abu Eesa received numerous messages on both Facebook and Twitter. His response to one particular comment on Facebook was found, by his critics, to be especially offensive. The comments I am referring to were posted to a photo meme

²⁰² AlMaghrib Institute, "Instructor Profile," accessed on April 1, 2014, <http://almaghrib.org/instructors/abu-eesa-niamatullah#profile>

²⁰³ AlMaghrib Institute, "About AlMaghrib," accessed on April 1, 2014, <http://almaghrib.org/about>

Abu Eesa shared on his Facebook wall – a photo of himself, along with the words, “Don’t try to understand women: Women understand women and they hate each other.”²⁰⁴ One woman expressed concern, regarding these remarks, insofar as she believed they had the potential to encourage the subordination of women. Other women also asked him to issue a public apology. Abu Eesa responded with the following comment, which he posted to the aforementioned photo meme:

You’re right, I apologise. I don’t understand women and tell the guys not to bother either, and we make jokes about them too. The aforementioned two crimes power my thirst and desire to rape women, beat them black and blue, harass them, abuse them, lock them in the boiler room at home and in the Masjid, belittle their hijab and niqab and tell everyone to mutilate their girls’ private parts and then marry them off whilst they’re still at Nursery. Right. Got it. Lads, feel free to do all of the above. I give you the fatwa to do it dammit!

This comment, as well as the initial tweets Abu Eesa posted, elicited a further public outcry from Muslim women across various social media outlets.

In the hours and days that followed, Twitter and Facebook were abuzz with activity and responses regarding Abu Eesa’s remarks. On March 10th (two days after his comments were made) a more organized response was initiated. In order to create this response, Abu Eesa’s critics made use of the hashtag function. For instance, @HindMakki tweeted the following:

@HindMakki: So tired of loudmouthed men ignoring Islam’s ethical teachings. Let’s honor our #MuslimMaleAllies instead today #WomensHistoryMonth (11:59am, Mar 10th, 2014)

²⁰⁴ Abu Eesa, “Facebook Photo,” accessed on March 15, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=277701102393064&set=a.164105940419248.1073741828.145643265598849&type=1&theater>

The hashtag #MuslimMaleAllies became instantly popular as individuals, men and women alike, discussed the role of Muslim men in Muslim women's journey to equality.²⁰⁵

Another hashtag was created which called upon the AlMaghrib Institute to fire Abu Eesa as a response to his misogynist comments. This hashtag also took off very quickly.²⁰⁶

@rabiasquared: @almaghrib #FireAbuEesa for his disgusting comments about women and defaming #MuslimMaleAllies @Niamatullah (2:01pm, Mar 10th, 2014)

In addition to starting the #FireAbuEesa hashtag, @rabiasquared also wrote an article on the *Patheos Muslim* blog site concerning, what she personally felt to be, the very painful remarks made by Abu Eesa.²⁰⁷ @Rabiasquared noted how the fact that Abu Eesa is a scholar of Islam, and thus in a position of authority, intensifies the problem and urged the AlMaghrib Institute to reconsider the sort of individuals it would like to have representing its educational institute. The article was shared over 66, 000 times via various social media outlets – this, unquestionably, put a great deal of pressure on Abu Eesa, as well as the entire AlMaghrib Institute, to, at the very least, respond to the issue at hand. To add further fuel to the fire, an online petition was also started, invoking individuals to sign their names if they wanted to see Abu Eesa fired from his position at AlMaghrib.²⁰⁸ It has yet to be seen whether or not Abu Eesa will be losing his job. However, both he and the AlMaghrib Institute have issued public responses as a result of these pressures.

²⁰⁵ "Twitter Search Results: #muslimmaleallies," accessed on April 10, 2014, <https://twitter.com/search?q=%23muslimmaleallies&src=typd>

²⁰⁶ "Twitter Search Results: #fireabueesa," accessed on April 15, 2014, <https://twitter.com/search?q=%23fireabueesa&src=typd>

²⁰⁷ Rabia Chaudry, "Wa'Mutasima," *Patheos Muslim*, (March 10th, 2014), accessed on March 18, 2014, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/splitthemoon/2014/03/wamutasima/>

²⁰⁸ "Fire Abu Eesa Niamatullah," accessed on March 31, 2014. <http://www.change.org/petitions/al-maghrib-institute-fire-abu-eesa-niamatullah>

What I am suggesting is that, in the cases above, online social media resources offered Muslim feminists a means to extend reciprocal affirmation and acknowledgement to others within their network. In this sense, I would therefore suggest that these connected women could generate a mode of reciprocal recognition through religious “interpersonal network proximity. By extending Ricoeur’s interpersonal sphere of recognition to include relations within one’s proximate network, one can begin to see how the Internet, and particularly social media, increases the potential for recognition to occur in new and interesting ways. I think this is especially important for marginalized people that have often been denied recognition. The #empoweredmuslimwomen hashtag, for instance, provided Muslim women with an organized public platform from which they were able to define themselves and their faith – and offer concern and support to one another throughout this process – in a way that was visible. This activity has implications with respect to the generation of interpersonal recognition via “interpersonal network proximity.”

In regards to the activity of Muslim women online, Anna Piela has stated the following in her article, “Claiming Religious Authority”:

Collectively, this activity has a lot of significance, as it enables the simultaneous contradiction of several negative stereotypes of Muslim women, existing both in non-Muslim and Muslim communities worldwide. On the one hand, they challenge the neo-Orientalist notions of a submissive, silent Muslim woman unable to voice her agenda...and, on the other, they often openly critique misogynist prejudices in some traditional understandings of their religion.²⁰⁹

Although the #empoweredmuslimwomen hashtag may not just yet be explicitly challenging institutional authority, it no doubt has the potential to do so, if only insofar as it gives Muslim women a means to generate a contemporary mode of recognition, through “interpersonal

²⁰⁹ Anna Piela, “Claiming Religious Authority,” *Media, Religion and Gender*, ed. Mia Lovheim, (London: Routledge, 2013): 137.

network proximity.” This is something they may not yet have in the local mosques and more traditional Islamic institutions. As Piela has noted, this sort of activity gives Muslim women the opportunity to challenge existing stereotypes. This, I think, is of particular value for Muslim women as it seems that other people are often quite keen to determine what is or is not best for them and, like the Indians Mitra discussed, there is an image put forth of Muslim women by western institutions (i.e., the media) that does not take into account the voices of Muslim women themselves.²¹⁰ With these ideas in mind, it would appear that recognition at the institutional level for Muslim women might eventually be possible and that, therefore, justice might be achieved.

In an earlier chapter I mentioned how visibility might play a role in terms of the manner in which a contemporary mode of interpersonal recognition, which is generated through reciprocal affirmation and acknowledgement at the level of “interpersonal network proximity,” may serve to increase the likelihood for recognition to occur at the institutional level. In connection with Muslim women online and the notion of visibility, Piela has also observed that, “Muslim women are becoming more visible by participating in social networks, writing blogs, posting videos online, and setting up online businesses.”²¹¹ It does appear that the generation of reciprocal recognition online, through “interpersonal network proximity,” can become more visible and thus has the potential to increase the affordances of marginalized groups in relation to the cultivation of an ethical form of social capital. I would suggest that this idea has been effectively exemplified in regards to the online response to Abu Eesa’s misogynist remarks.

Because of social media, the network of Muslim women who responded was exceptionally

²¹⁰ Here I am speaking primarily about the ongoing debate regarding how Muslim women should dress. It may be considered oppressive, according to western standards, to force a woman to wear a form of covering against her will. It thus should follow quite logically that forcing a woman to remove this same form of covering is, at the very least, equally unacceptable.

²¹¹ Ibid.

visible – @rabiasquared’s article, for instance, was shared via numerous social media outlets over 66,000 times. This increased their social capital as well as the pressure it placed upon existing forms of Muslim authority – namely, Abu Eesa and the AlMaghrib Institute.

Abu Eesa did eventually issue a public response for his remarks.²¹² He later referred to these remarks as a public apology – considering the tone of the post, however, this does seem questionable. Abu Eesa also stated that he sent out over three hundred private apology messages to those whom he had offended.²¹³ Moreover, the AlMaghrib institute responded to the public pressure exerted by individuals across social media networks, by putting forth a public message, recognizing – and distancing itself from – the actions of Abu Eesa.²¹⁴ Although I would not claim that the responses of Abu Eesa and the AlMaghrib institute could be classified as institutional recognition, it is arguably a step in that direction. Through these sorts of online engagements, Muslim women are able to generate reciprocal support and solicitude that could lead to a contemporary mode of interpersonal recognition by means of “interpersonal network proximity.” In cases like the ones I have just discussed, this activity might serve to challenge existing forms of authority through the cultivation of a form social capital that is grounded by Ricoeurian notions of justice and equality. This, in turn, could eventually lead to forms of institutional recognition, or justice.

Like Muslim feminists, gay Christians have also been marginalized by the traditional authoritative structures of their faith – namely, the church. Indeed, both Catholic and Protestant

²¹²Abu Eesa, “Facebook Post,” accessed on March 20, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/AbuEesaPersonal/posts/278375788992262>

²¹³ Abu Eesa, “Facebook Post,” accessed on March 20, 2014 <https://www.facebook.com/AbuEesaPersonal/posts/279020342261140>

²¹⁴ AlMaghrib Institute, “On Recent Remarks of an Instructor,” (March 13, 2014) accessed on March 20, 2014, <http://almaghrib.org/blog/2014/03/13/on-recent-remarks-of-an-instructor/> – although I cannot say whether or not this is related to the controversy at hand – Abu Eesa’s profile on the AlMaghrib website states that he is not teaching any upcoming seminars.

institutions have long defined homosexuality as sinful and, essentially, “un-Christian”. In regards to gay Christian networks online, I have focused my research on one particular network that, in my opinion, is effectively utilizing social media resources to generate acknowledgement and solicitude through religious “interpersonal network proximity.” Indeed, “The Gay Christian Network” (or “GCN”) serves as another prime example of how reciprocal recognition, through “interpersonal network proximity,” can have implications for an ethically based mode of social capital. This, I would suggest, might also eventually have consequences for traditional forms of religious authority. Gay Christians, like Muslim feminists, are not yet widely accepted within the traditional Catholic and Protestant institutions of their faith and thus are often unable to freely engage with both their faith and their sexuality within these confines. Through social media and religious “interpersonal network proximity,” however, gay Christians have the ability to acknowledge one another’s integrity outside of the traditional authoritative barriers, as they are able to engage with like-minded individuals that might otherwise be separated by geographic restrictions.

Justin Lee, executive director of the Gay Christian Network, was recently interviewed by conservative Catholic television host, Michael Coren.²¹⁵ During the interview, Coren asks Lee a variety of questions including, “can you be both gay and a Christian?” Lee responds, first off, by saying “absolutely.” He then continues with a brief discussion concerning the notion that being gay is not a choice, but that once he came to terms with his homosexuality, the choice to remain a Christian was where real decision making, in regards to his identity, came into play: “I’m gay. I’m still a Christian, I still love Jesus, and I still have to decide how to live my life – and that part is then what I have to choose.” Indeed, the content of the interview is interesting and sheds light

²¹⁵ See Michael Coren, “Gays and Christianity,” *Sun News Network* video, (March 5, 2014), accessed on March 30, 2014, <http://www.sunnewsnetwork.ca/video/gays-and-christianity/3299076052001>.

on the divisive issue concerning gays and the church. Lee touches on controversial topics, including whether or not homosexuality is a sin, according to scripture. This challenges traditional forms of church authority that would still largely lean towards the affirmative, in regards to the question above.

What is perhaps more interesting, for my purposes here, is how the video was immediately made available online via social media outlets. This instantaneous outreach no doubt increases the potential of these offline engagements to generate affirmation and support that may lead to interpersonal recognition through religious “interpersonal network proximity.” Therefore, what might have been theoretically challenging to authority, in terms of the content discussed, now becomes more tangibly challenging as it reaches a broad audience. The video was shared on Lee’s public Facebook and Twitter pages which, in total, have a following of over twenty thousand people. On Facebook, the link was ‘liked’ 230 times and shared 80 times. On Twitter it was both retweeted and added to other users’ favourites list over 70 times as well. It might thus be understood that the recognition produced, via “interpersonal network proximity,” becomes more visible as it occurs through the use of social media resources. Again, this increased visibility may contribute to the cultivation of an ethically informed mode social capital that might serve to challenge those traditional Christian authorities (both Catholic and Protestant) that have denied recognition to gay Christians.

Mitra has also referred to how online resources, specifically, are changing how marginalized groups relate to larger society and navigate traditional capital building structures:

For marginalized groups, gaining access to a space that exists in the virtual with implications for the real could have far reaching social and political consequences... This is so primarily because the Internet offers the opportunity for those who traditionally have had limited speaking capital now to harness the new technologies to produce and

circulate a discourse that is their own and not modulated and refracted by the dominant who have always controlled the voice of the powerless.²¹⁶

I think that this becomes especially pertinent in regards to the example at hand. There is little question that traditional religious institutions have largely sought to resist homosexuality within – and outside of – the church. It has been a widely upheld ideal, within both Catholic and Protestant circles, that homosexuality is a sin and, moreover, that gay marriage must be prohibited. Although this narrative remains pervasive, I would argue that gay Christians are becoming more visible than ever before. Indeed, Lee’s comments, during the aforementioned interview, challenge the discourse surrounding homosexuality and Christianity that has, up to recently, been shaped by traditional religious hegemony.²¹⁷ Moreover, it appears that gay Christians could generate a mode of reciprocal recognition, through affirmation of each other within their online networks, via religious “interpersonal network proximity.” Through this process, which is becoming increasingly visible online, gay Christians have the ability to cultivate an ethical form social capital, challenge authority, and perhaps, eventually, receive recognition at the institutional level.

Another interesting example, concerning the Gay Christian Network, is in regards to its annual conference. Since 2005, the GCN has held a conference every year at which time gay Christians from across the world can come together and engage in physical fellowship. In order to draw awareness (thus increasing the visibility and social capital building agency of the conference), the GCN uses social media to promote the event – in fact, the conference has its own Twitter handle (@gcnconf) and hashtag (#gcnconf). In addition to attracting attention to the

²¹⁶ Mitra, “Voices of the Marginalized on the Internet,” 498.

²¹⁷ I should note that there has already, in the past 25 years, been dramatic changes with respect to homosexuality and the church. The legalization of gay marriage, in most western countries, is an example of this. I would argue, however, that religious institutions still have a long way to come with respect to equality for gays.

annual conference, throughout the year, conference leaders, promoters, keynote speakers, and attendees also use the handle and hashtag to share live updates, throughout the conference, in real time.²¹⁸

@MargHerder: "...The GCN conference didn't feel like just any church. It felt like my church." @GCNconf @GCNJustin <http://www.eewc.com/wheresheis/weconnect-and-there-was-singing> (9:42pm, January 13th, 2014).

@DJRarela: A time of worship where you can pray openly with who you love: it's one of the many reasons why the #GCNconf matters pic.twitter.com/mawk6Kyhaq (9:47am, January 12th, 2014).

@CuzHeBreathes: Honored and humbled to be worshipping my Lord this morning with my LGBTQ brothers and sisters #GCNconf #HolyGround (9:16am, January 12th, 2014).

@elielcruz: This conference is unapologetically Christian #GCNconf (2:43pm, January 11th, 2014).

@EleisonBlog: It is rare to find such a gathering of people who know pain and suffering more deeply than at #GCNconf it's something profoundly special (2:55pm, January 10th, 2014).

The following Twitter user was unable to attend the event but remained engaged with the event via the pictures and posts made on Twitter:

@drlovegrove: Still chewing on @rachelheldevans powerful words at #GCNconf that impacted my life just through Twitter (8:40pm, January 12th, 2014).

I would thus argue that, through "interpersonal network proximity," these sorts of online social networking engagements increase the potential for a contemporary mode of interpersonal recognition to be generated by a face-to-face networking event such as the GCN conference.

²¹⁸ "Twitter Search: #gcnconf," accessed on March 29, 2014, <https://twitter.com/search?f=realtime&q=gcnconf&src=typd>

Furthermore, the use of social media makes this sort of event more visible to those outside of the network itself, and thus potentially more challenging to existing forms of authority.

Interestingly, the Muslim feminists I have observed also seem to recognize the value in face-to-face communication. About a week after the #empoweredmuslimwomen tweet party, @MuslimahMontage tweeted the following:

@MuslimahMontage: We need #EmpoweredMuslimWomen symposium. Reconstruct/redefine role&rights of Muslim women ordained by Allah. @DawudAlid would you be interested? (4:18pm, Mar 12th, 2014).

Therefore, although the agency of these marginal religious individuals, as it pertains to reciprocal acknowledgement and social capital, has surely been increased through the cultivation of new online networked communities, it would appear that they remain aware of the added networking strength that might be achieved through occasional face-to-face activity. Although this conversation is beyond the scope of this particular paper, it is interesting to consider how members of these networks might move seamlessly between social media interaction and physical interaction as the Internet becomes increasingly embedded in the everyday life of individuals in the western world, as opposed to being perceived as a virtual world that exists independently from the “real” physical world.²¹⁹ Nevertheless, I would maintain that the relationship between these groups and online resources, in regards to Cheong and Poon’s social scientific model, remains transformative as online networking has proved fundamental in terms of cultivating social capital within these networks. In other words, if it were not for the availability of social media and online networking tools, these religious networks would look a

²¹⁹ For a more detailed discussion concerning how the Internet is embedded in everyday life, see Caroline Haythornthwaite and Barry Wellman, “The Internet in Everyday Life: An Introduction,” in *The Internet in Everyday Life*, ed. Barry Wellman and Caroline Haythornthwaite, (Malden, Mass.; Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002), 4-41.

lot different – and would certainly have more difficulty forming a united front from which social capital could be built as quickly and effectively as it is via social media.

For Muslim feminists and gay Christians, the challenge to authority is often two-fold as not only are they challenging traditional forms of religious authority, but they are also challenging various secular forces. For instance, Muslim women seek to define themselves in a secular world where they are often misjudged and discriminated against. The religious freedom bill in Quebec, which would force women working in various public service positions to remove their religious head coverings, is but one example of this. Muslim women must seek to define themselves amongst those who think they have the right to decide what is best for them. What might come as a surprise is that this currently includes forms of western feminism that often serve as the overarching model regarding how feminism should or should not look. For instance, western feminism was largely a movement existing outside of and in opposition to religion. Muslim feminists, however, seek to return Islam, which they view as having been warped by various forms of social patriarchy over many centuries, to its roots that inherently value equality for women.²²⁰ In other words, Muslim feminism is at its core a religious movement, whereas western feminism was largely secular in nature. I have come across a great deal of activity, amongst Muslim feminists on Twitter, in regards to this issue:

@DialaAO: “The Western woman came to Feminism because she did not have Islam. The Muslim woman has Islam” – Liberating Feminism:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdzBKwQNRdM&feature=youtu.be> (6:48am, June 19th, 2014)

²²⁰ Fereshteh Nouraie-Simone has edited a helpful volume that addresses some of the many issues faced by Muslim women in the modern globalized era, including those concerning feminism. See Fereshteh Nouraie-Simone, ed., *On Shifting Ground: Muslim Women in the Global Era*, (New York: The Feminist Press, 2005).

@Faineemae: I can't believe this needs to be said again. The feminism you hate is the feminism most of us hate too, western feminism. #IfKhadijaCanDoIt (7:29pm, March 29th, 2014)

@loredsaviour: I use my hijab as a tool for my feminism. Western feminism isn't the only feminism #lifeofamuslimfeminist (8:54am, January 10th, 2014)

@thegirlgodbook: Western feminism that asks Muslim women to leave their traditions at the door: fundamentally disempowering. @rafiyakaria
<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/10/14/malala-yousafzaiislamfeminism.html>
(11:28am, October 14th, 2013)

When taking examples such as these into consideration, it seems evident that Muslim women are utilizing social media tools to challenge both religious and secular forms of authority.

Because of the rather unique situations of both gay Christians and Muslim feminists – and particularly due to the challenge they represent to the traditional institutions of their respective faiths – I think it is helpful to place them in the transformative branch of Cheong's model regarding social capital building and online religious networks. This is due to the fact that, as I mentioned in previous chapters, the potential to influence existing authority structures is a characteristic of Cheong's transformative category. Indeed, these communities function primarily as religious networks, which make use of social media tools for the purposes of cultivating community, generating recognition, and creating a qualified mode of social capital that is grounded by notions of justice and equality.

It is, however, interesting to note how these networks maintain an appreciation for more tangible forms of face-to-face networking. What is also important to keep in mind, is how these groups exemplify the forms of “networked individualism” I discussed previously. Social media tools are, in many ways, individualistic as they provide a space for individuals to define

themselves outside of the communities in which they are physically located. This being said, however, one must remember that social media resources also provide individuals with the ability to create networks through which they can generate reciprocal affirmation and solicitude, via “interpersonal network proximity,” that could lead to a contemporary expression of interpersonal recognition. This has implications relating to the way that an ethically grounded form social capital might be cultivated in new and interesting ways. There are, moreover, implications pertaining to the potential to challenge existing structures of authority that have worked to deny recognition to the marginalized.

In order to understand social media as occupying both individual and social characteristics, and thus how it relates to the notion of “networked individualism,” it might help to refer back to Taylor and the *Malaise of Modernity*. Indeed, it is at this juncture that it is important to relate the way that Taylor’s thought becomes directly pertinent to how I understand the function of social media, despite his insufficient understanding of mutual affirmation in relation to recognition. I am, of course, aware of the stretch it would be to link the development of social media directly to Taylor’s tracing of the rise of an alternative individualism. Nevertheless, I think it is fair to suggest a potential relationship between the explosion in social media forms and Taylor’s ethic of qualified individualism (which inherently rests upon notions of recognition). What is interesting, for the purposes of my research, is the manner in which Taylor’s ideas concerning the ethic of qualified individualism and authenticity might work in tandem with the “networked individualism” documented by sociology and new media scholars.

As Taylor has noted, however, individualism has the potential to slide toward forms of narcissism. This can indeed be observed in certain forms of social media. Facebook, Twitter, and the like can arguably be used just as easily as tools for narcissism as for networking. I would

argue, however, that Taylor's alternative construction of qualified individualism, which rests upon his notion of recognition, is better suited to the forms of "networked individualism" that society is moving towards, in secular society, than are the more narcissistic forms. Rainie and Wellman have also argued that a society which functions on the basis of "networked individualism," is not one composed of narcissistic, alienated, individuals:

This is the era of free agents and the spirit of personal agency. But it is not the World According to Me – it is not a world of autonomous and increasingly isolated individualists. Rather, it is the World According to the *Connected Me*, where people armed with potent technology tools can extend their networks far beyond what was possible in the past and where they face new constraints and challenges that are outgrowths of networked life.²²¹

I think this notion can be observed in relation to the gay Christian and Muslim feminist networks I have been discussing.

When considering the more narcissistic forms that social media has the potential to take, I think that Ricoeur's ideas might again prove helpful. This can be seen in Ricoeur's development of the notion of *imputation*, which exists at the level of self-recognition (or self-esteem) that I discussed earlier. For Ricoeur, one is unable to fully achieve self-esteem without imputation as it adds an ethical dimension to the awareness one has of his or her capacity to act – which is a key feature of self-esteem. In other words, imputation implies the necessity of taking ownership or responsibility for the actions one makes in the world. With this in mind, Ferguson has noted how imputation further assumes the ability one has to make choices – both good and bad.²²² Through this process, actions become intrinsically joined to the agent who has taken ownership for them. Thus, through the identification of ownership, an individual is engaged in a process of self-examination, or "critical self-estimation" which is the foundation of Ricoeur's model of self-

²²¹ Rainie and Wellman, 19.

²²² Ferguson, 41.

esteem.²²³ In light of these ideas, one might hope to address the issues of narcissism pertaining to social media. Ownership and responsibility for one's activity online creates an ethical foundation through which narcissism might be identified by means of self-examination. Once this takes place, recognition at the interpersonal level has the potential to flow more freely.

Unlike Taylor's model of recognition, Ricoeur's development provides a mechanism through which one might move beyond reciprocal affirmation and solicitude at the level of self, even beyond proximate recognition, to recognition at the institutional level or plurality of persons. It is, for Ricoeur, through solicitude at the interpersonal level – i.e., one's proximate relationships, or friendships – that institutional recognition, and therefore justice, is alone made possible. As Ferguson has noted, this gradated process of recognition frees Ricoeur from the demand/obligation of struggle that Taylor's model requires. This deficiency in Taylor's understanding undermines his alternative model of individualism that otherwise succeeds in demonstrating how contemporary individuals might develop their authenticity in a dialogical fashion, thus remaining inherently connected to others in a secular and individualized society. It is by means of Ricoeur's more nuanced understanding of recognition, therefore, that Taylor's problematic understanding of recognition can be refined and, moreover, that Taylor's alternative understanding of individualism might effectively be realized.

Additionally, with respect to Ricoeur's gradated model of recognition, I have suggested an experiment through which his interpersonal sphere of reciprocal affirmation and recognition might be broadened to include relationships at the level of, what I have termed, "interpersonal network proximity." In doing so, I have aimed to bridge Ricoeur's philosophy of recognition with the social scientific research concerning the contemporary movement away from traditional

²²³ Joy, 88. See also Ferguson, 41.

forms of community to those characterized by “networked individualism.” In this way, I have attempted to expand Ricoeur’s understanding of interpersonal recognition to include those relationships that exist on a networked level. Shared interests and goals, as opposed to close intimate bonds, will often characterize these relationships. Through this process of affirmation and acknowledgement, which can occur when individuals utilize online social media resources, it could become possible for a contemporary mode of interpersonal recognition to be generated via what I have termed, “interpersonal network proximity.” I have further suggested that my own explorations considering “interpersonal network proximity” might have significant implications for the religious networks of the marginalized individuals I have been discussing – those of gay Christians and Muslim feminists.

I would argue, therefore, that one might observe how ideas concerning a contemporary expression of recognition, “networked individualism,” and social capital intersect in light of the notion of “interpersonal network proximity.” It is true that western secular society is moving away from more traditional forms of tight-knit community to a networked model by which modern individuals engage with one another via various fluid ties that often exist online and across geographical boundaries. These would have proved insurmountable prior to online resources. Within this new form of society, it had been predicted that social capital would decline as individuals become increasingly alienated from one another. However, this does not seem to be taking place. Rather, individuals maintain their ties to one another by means of a networked framework through which they are able to affirm each other through “interpersonal network proximity.”

This progress has positive implications for the development of a form of social capital that is grounded by a Ricoeurian ethic of justice and equality. By means of this ethically

grounded mode of social capital, marginalized individuals within a networked society might have the opportunity to challenge those forms of authority that serve to deny them recognition by effectively utilizing social media tools in order to extend their networking capabilities. By exploring these possibilities, one can gain a better understanding of the way that individuals maintain connected to one another in the secular age. In addition, one can discern the manner in which marginalized people are afforded new opportunities to create expanding networks through which they are able to establish forms of reciprocal affirmation and acknowledgement. I have suggested that this could generate a contemporary mode of interpersonal recognition via “interpersonal network proximity.” Through this process, recognition at the institutional level might eventually be realized. In this sense, therefore, it might be argued that gay Christians and Muslim feminists are on the path to justice.

Conclusion

It is fascinating to consider the manner in which recognition occurs in an increasingly networked society. Social scientists have shown much interest in the secular societal trend towards new forms of “networked individualism.” Through these forms, individuals engage with one another on the basis of numerous loose and fluid ties. It has been argued that this transition can also be observed within contemporary religious realms. With respect to religion, members of religious networks – and most importantly those who have been marginalized – have the ability to cultivate social capital through various forms of networking. Social media, I have argued, is playing an increasingly pivotal role with regard to this notion.

The contemporary western social imaginary is, without question, one that has come to be defined by forms of individualism. Unlike some critiques of secular society – that charge it with narcissism and alienation – Taylor’s alternative model of individualism allows for the cultivation of self-authenticity while remaining aware that individuals do not develop in a vacuum. Rather, Taylor’s qualified individualism understands that the development of authenticity is an interdependent process that relies upon recognition. This understanding of individualism is compatible with a networked societal model, which also remains aware of the inherently communicative nature of contemporary individuals. Where Taylor falls short, in his construction of recognition, Ricoeur’s gradated development succeeds in freeing the notion of recognition from the perpetual struggle that Taylor’s model falls into. Building on his interpersonal sphere of recognition, which is characterized by solicitude for the proximate other, Ricoeur moves beyond reciprocal recognition to recognition at the level of institutions which concerns a plurality of persons, i.e., the general public who may not be known personally. It is at this level that justice supersedes friendship and solicitude.

By introducing the term religious “interpersonal networked proximity,” I have attempted to bridge those social networking theories, which concern networked individualism and social capital, with Ricoeur’s three-stage philosophical development of recognition. I have done so in hopes of extending Ricoeur’s interpersonal sphere of recognition to include those interactions that take place within one’s proximate network of other human beings. Through this process I have become better equipped to understand the manner in which interpersonal recognition might be generated by members of gay Christian and Muslim feminist networks through the use of social media tools.

Through the process of “interpersonal networked proximity,” marginalized religious individuals – who have often been denied recognition by their respective religious institutions – have the ability to cultivate a form of social capital that appeals to a Ricoeurian ethic of justice and equality. By introducing Ricoeur’s model of recognition, I am able to refine Taylor’s depiction which does not differentiate between the type of recognition that occurs at the interpersonal level and that which takes place at the institutional level. In doing so, I can provide a model of recognition that is not completely dependent on a Hegelian dialectic of struggle. Rather, this model allows for a space at the interpersonal level of recognition that can be more effectively applied to the networking activity of marginalized religious individuals than can Taylor’s more generalized model of recognition. Furthermore, the introduction of this networked model of recognition, and its reconciliation with a form of social capital that is grounded by an ethic of justice, is something I have not yet encountered in sociological scholarship.

I further suggest that, through the use of both Taylor and Ricoeur, a necessary philosophical dimension has been added to my study of new religious networks. In addition, my

application of Ricoeur's work regarding recognition – which helps to distinguish the interpersonal level from the institutional level – to contemporary forms of networking is the first time that Ricoeur's work has been used in this way. As a result, I would claim that this new usage of the philosophy of Ricoeur, as well as my introduction of the term "interpersonal networked proximity," serves as the original contribution of my thesis to present-day scholarship. In light of this claim, I would suggest that I have accounted for how a contemporary understanding of Ricoeur's interpersonal sphere of recognition, which is characterized by friendship and solicitude, might be broadened to include relations beyond physical proximity to those within one's proximate network.

Through this networking process, marginalized religious individuals could then be able to cultivate a form social capital that is grounded by Ricoeur's ethic of justice and equality. The potential to build this qualified mode of social capital is expanded when considered in light of the visibility of online networking activity. Through this process, therefore, gay Christians and Muslim feminists may eventually have the ability to challenge those forms of religious authority that have denied them recognition at the institutional level. Although beyond the scope of my current research, an interesting future path of study would be one that provides in-depth considerations concerning the manner in which institutional recognition might be realized for marginalized individuals who are generating a contemporary mode of reciprocal recognition through "interpersonal network proximity." Through the formation of online networks, marginalized individuals are afforded a new space through which they can be heard and acknowledged by their peers. Through this reciprocal process they may gain a sense of personal integrity – of recognition – that has hitherto been denied them.

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