

unless one works very hard at it. Comparing the diversity of what the internet offers with what users actually experience, we find that most of us live in very closed online spaces regarding religion, news, geographic location, and so on.

What do we lose when the richness of our diversity, whether religious, racial and ethnic, gender or geographic, is weeded out of our lives? One outcome is often that we become too certain of our own viewpoint. At the end of *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction*, Philip Wogaman writes, "too much certainty about God's ways with humanity, may not leave enough space for God to be God."⁶⁸ When we limit our experiences to people who look like us, talk like us, or even believe like us, we may be limiting the ways we can encounter God.

Both the variety of religious experiences and the diversity of my online communities enrich my faith. What can you do to deepen the diversity of your experiences? What types of diversity are missing from your social networks?

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NETWORKED SELVES

Digital technology has transformed the way we connect with one another, shape our identity, and form relationships. Many Christians are worried that digital technologies are replacing God's presence in our lives with techno-demigods. The concern is both theologically and technologically rooted. Christians have often struggled to define their relationship with God. Historically, God has been seen from a hierarchical position over and against matters of the world. To focus on one's relationship with God, Christians were taught to resist earthly distractions. The theological assumption is that God is not present in earthly things. Perpetuating this theological concern, digital technology is seen as constantly grabbing our attention for trivial, human matters. At the same time, digital technologies are acting more and more human in ways we once thought only God could create.

Counter to these interpretations, we are equally able to recount the effects of digital technology in a way that envisions relationship with self, other, and God in a more generative and responsive manner. We know from our own creation story that humans carry the image of God and that all of creation is the signature of God's presence and intentions. Person-to-person relationships can make God present among us. Nurturing God's creation brings forth the creation God established. We can no longer participate in our world apart from digital technologies; they are part of who we are in different proportions, dependent on economics and geography, from global interfaces to an individual user.

In all human actions, there is moral meaning for our relationship with God. Digital technologies heighten a self-understanding as “networked,” or relational. In an analog past, we might have discussed how God created us as relational beings, connected to one another, our actions impacting more than the self or the immediate persons we know. Yet we could not experience connectivity in the same way we do via social networks. The ripple effects of our connectedness are tangible and quantifiable in a way they were not before. Thus, a networked understanding of the self is highlighted as a key aspect of digital literacy.

In fact, our sense of self as relational leans into the Christian trinitarian view of God as three in one, relational even in God’s beingness. Our digital experiences revise the traditional view of God as separate from us in a hierarchically directed “up above” theology. The metaphor of God as Wi-Fi or the internet is too instrumental, though middle school youth understand the omnipresence of God much better with these metaphors than any others I have used! What I mean is that digital technologies provide an experience of relationality unprecedented in previous generations. This is not always good, and I will address that in this chapter. Social networking or online participatory behavior highlights patterns of moral formation to which Christians must attend. The patterns also evidence the ways in which technology and human behavior interact to shape each other in coconstitutive ways. In this chapter, we will focus on two aspects of how digital technologies shape “who we are” as “datafied” selves and the impact these experiences have on our theological understanding of self, other, and God.

The immense creative power of social networks or online participatory platforms opens up spaces that are embodied yet beyond geographic location, time dependence, and fleshly limitations. Using a virtual-reality viewer, one can travel across the globe to see the sunrise around the world. Viewing these magnificent scenes, the body responds to the sounds and sites (and soon with other technological advances, i.e., smells). Joining a virtual community allows users to design an avatar that may look just like them or nothing like them and interact in everyday activities involving conversation through shared audio or typing. Some platforms allow for experiences we may never do in person, such as sexual encounters with strangers, kingdom building in ancient times, or modern-day warfare. While the avatar may not be the “real” person,

it is an aspect of the user’s self that informs who they are. Whether our relational experiences are online or in person, they inform the sense of self. Online networks allow for a wider diversity and expression of self than our fleshly bodies can accommodate. Simultaneously, the structure of these networks may also regulate and confine our sense of self and redefine relationships (e.g., “friend”).

Second, we will address how digital technologies are increasingly and often seamlessly enmeshed with our daily existence. Some researchers suggest that we have already reached a cyborg-like status where we cannot exist unassisted by or disintegrated with our digital technologies. Others go so far as to suggest that “we have become data” and this is the only way we are intelligible to the computational world around us. Even examples such as the elderly or impoverished individuals who cannot afford personal digital technologies are intelligible to the world around them via technological systems. Every doctor’s visit is logged in a cloud-based online system; tax, birth, and death records are all kept via searchable digital technology. The use of a credit card, ATM, or even a store transaction in cash is logged in a digital record-keeping system that marks where you were, what you bought, and when. Many people, even those in the global South, for whom we in the North may assume there is less access and connectivity to the internet, live digitized lives. Many pay large percentages of their income to keep a mobile phone connection and use wireless technology to connect to the internet wherever possible. That is only personal use; it does not capture the way in which global economic and political systems use data to track, inform, and predict, ultimately transforming how society, from local communities to nation-states, is defined. The society-wide impact of dataveillance will be addressed in more depth in chapter 3.

Users see and feel a change in relationship with our devices via push technologies—software designed to proactively reach out to the user rather than interaction being user generated, such as mobile application notifications for incoming email, recent friend posts, or buzzing of a Fitbit to remind us to walk. Push technologies create a dialogue or communication path between us and our digital technologies—one that can shift internal, self-regulation of attention and desire. Social science literature raises questions about adult internet addictions, the negative habits children are forming with so much screen time, or simply frustration at constant interruptions during everyday conversations.

As an ethicist, I see these as questions of moral formation centrally concerned with our sense of “who we ought to be” and “what we ought to do.” As Christians, we ask these two questions in relationship to who God calls us to *be* and what God calls us to *do*. The formation of self and our relationships in a digital world then relates directly to Christian concerns about virtue and how we can be most responsive to God in relationship with us. As noted above, our theological understandings must also be refined to reflect our experiences of God, self, and other. Often, we turn to a list of rules that we hope creates balance between faith commitment and technological commitments—no use of mobile phones in church, only two hours a day of screen time for kids, never post negative comments or pictures on social media, and so on. We need guidelines to help us navigate our digital lives. Yet these responses still treat digital technology as a tool we can pick up and put down. The integration of digital technology with the self is no longer a separate tool; it is a way of being in the world. We need a richer understanding of digital technology, a literacy with the datafication of the self, to approach moral formation of self-in-relationship that honors our embodiedness and considers how we relate beyond bodily limitations.

In this chapter, I explore Christian ethics writings on attunement as a virtue that guides digital living. The increasing influence of digital technology reshapes our sense of self in ways that may lead to greater connection or make us feel disconnected. Our networked sense of self requires an ethic of digital literacy that includes consideration of impression management, the curation of online self-presentation, because it impacts who we are in relationship to God and others. Even for those individuals who are not on social media platforms, digital technologies define our existence, from health care records to government information and banking to the function of energy infrastructures. Attunement helps us orient ourselves as datafied, embodied, and spiritual beings.

MORAL FORMATION IN A DIGITAL LIFE

Christian theologians describe virtue as the desire for the good,¹ or we might also think of virtue as characteristics of a person that are morally praiseworthy. Moral formation or virtuous living is a dynamic process with multiple factors that account for individual, communal, and struc-

tural forces and involve intuitive, learned, and creative aspects. Thus, we might think of virtues as social skills, “to have a virtue is to have extended and refined one’s abilities to perceive morally-relevant information so that one is fully responsive to the local sociomoral context.”² That is to say there is a particularity to one’s virtuousness. Moral virtues are cultivated based on a number of factors, some of which may be innate, cultural, or interpersonal. In their essay “The Moral Mind,” Jonathan Haidt and Craig Joseph elaborate on the interconnections between these factors.³ For the purpose of discussing moral formation and digital technology, we do not need to tease out what is innate, cultural, or interpersonal. Rather, we need to be aware that they are all active in moral formation. Haidt and Joseph write, “For those who emphasize the importance of virtues in moral functioning, then, moral maturity is a matter of achieving a comprehensive attunement to the world, a set of highly sophisticated sensitivities.”⁴ This type of approach to virtue focuses on a dynamic link between practice, habit, reflection, and intuition rather than strictly abstract reasoning or top-down, memorized knowledge.

Attunement alters a historically popular orientation to virtue as seeking orderedness (following rules) or temperance of negative or lesser goods (restraining our baser desires) to an embodied and emotionally aware, even relational, approach to moral formation. Christian ethicist Cristina Traina writes about attunement related to the erotic, or desire for connection, in human relationships. In particular, she deals with relationships that involve unequal power dynamics, such as the relationship between parents and children. Traina says that attunement is “perceptive attention and adjustment to feelings, needs, and desires—both one’s own and others.”⁵ The ongoing nature of attunement, which one might get better at but never master, is relational and responsive rather than based on behavioral goals. Traina is not interested in reining in desires or ordering them in a bad, better, best manner. Rather, she wants us to acknowledge desire and attune ourselves from a wholly and perhaps holy realistic and aware disposition. Erotic attunement, for Traina, or attunement as I am using it, is not a relativistic ethical stance that allows for “anything goes.”⁶ Attunement requires a reciprocal back-and-forth awareness of one’s self and the other or others. Attunement, to erotic love, as Traina describes it, requires practice because it “combines perception, imagination, and experimentation in an endless, part-

nered dance"—a dance that partakes in a self-correcting process.⁷ Attunement focuses our attention on the process of moral growth in a responsive, accountable, and expansive manner.

Our digital existence shapes not just our everyday mundane actions but also our moral sensibilities. "Every human act is a moral act. The way we talk, the time we spend, the plans we make, the relationships we develop all constitute the moral life. Morals is not primarily the study of grave actions; rather it is the study of human living,"⁸ writes Christian ethicist James Keenan in *Virtues for Ordinary Christians*. He says that out of the complexity of life, we form particular practices and habits and as we face new experiences or interactions we require an "appreciative self-knowledge" for "moral growth."⁹ This growth, what I am terming *attunement*, is not a lone, individual process but one that is relational with others and directly influenced by our relationship with God. Keenan argues that we need help to see ourselves as better than we currently are to grow in morally attuned ways. It is not simply about avoiding sins but positive development of self and relationships. In his final chapter, titled "Moral Virtues and Imagination," he describes how virtues help us see what can be, who we can be, and what the world might be and that this requires a sense of creativity and imagination.¹⁰

As Christians, relationship with God plays a central role in the moral imagination and moral vision we bring to our everyday lives. Earlier in the chapter, I noted how trinitarian understandings of God could support a networked and participatory approach that promotes inclusivity and provides innovative ways to *be* Christian. Dwight J. Friesen, a practical theologian and author of *Thy Kingdom Connected: What the Church Can Learn from Facebook, the Internet, and Other Networks*, discusses how "the uniquely Christian understanding of God as triune paradoxically draws 'otherness' together in oneness. It is this kind of differentiated unity that we seek."¹¹ Friesen outlines how the theological understanding of God as triune implies that humans as created in the image of God reflect selves-in-relationship or an existence of mutual interdependency. In today's digital world, people as networked selves evidence this.

Reflecting on social networks, Friesen says links are like relationships and nodes connote the networked person. Networked people are not just made up of themselves but include their relationality to others.¹² He invites the reader to consider the way that social networks

show us the intimate and infinite connection that humanity is. He writes, "If we are truly interconnected, then the existence of every person, whether we will ever benefit personally from them or not, contributes to the complex fabric of the human experience."¹³ Thus, we need difference in our networks for them to actually reflect what God has created and to better know ourselves. Friesen redefines the kingdom of God as an "open *We*." The moral virtue of attunement, using Friesen's imagery then, reflects and strives for the "open *We*": as "we proactively seek to help life flourish while also proactively standing against injustice and the oppression of life, we embody the 'open *We*' of God."¹⁴

ARE WE DISCONNECTED IN OUR CONNECTION?

Digital technologies connect us. We exist as networked selves in unprecedented ways. Do these connections result in a sense of interdependence, or are we increasingly disconnected in our connection? What of our own actions and perception of connection via digital technology and, specifically, social media? In *The People's Platform*, Astra Taylor contrasts two dichotomous reactions to online participatory platforms.¹⁵ She suggests that supporters of social media often attribute to it the power to liberate humans, expand our imaginations, develop never before seen communities, and make us better citizens. Detractors consider social media to have ensnared us in virtual chains, dulled our senses, increased isolation, and shaped us into more efficient consumers. Both have some truth to them, but neither is completely correct. In such debates, it is common to isolate the users and the technology, putting the blame on one or the other. Social media creates a space where humans become producers (producer + user) and prosumers (producer + consumer) of technology and information more generally.¹⁶ That is to say, technology does not determine the user but the user's participation is not free from being transformed by the values and purposes for which the technology is designed.¹⁷

Technological revolutions related to broadband access, mobile devices, and social media platforms have significantly shifted access to information, forms of communication, and divisions between private and public as well as human networking.¹⁸ These shifts impact relation-

ship formation. In the introduction to their volume *Digital Media, Social Media and Culture: Perspectives, Practices and Futures*, Pauline Hope Cheong and Charles Ess suggest, "Very clearly, digital media facilitate and mediate social relations, including people's notions of relationship, patterns of belonging, and community."¹⁹ We are relational people; we want connection whether via text message, phone, Facebook, or Pinterest. Media scholar Lisa Nakamura notes that social media produces the "desire to connect and the need to self-regulate."²⁰ In particular, she notes that women's self-regulation on social media is often in response to unwanted and unwelcome misogynist behavior by men. For women of color, the response can be particularly virulent not only in its misogyny but racist as well. What information we share and how we shape our online profiles and interactions require regulation of privacy settings, appearance in photos, type of language used, and so on. These forms of regulation are often set by the platforms we use, though not solely.

Sometimes, our experience in these webs of relationship leave us feeling isolated rather than connected. In the well-known book *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, social scientist Sherri Turkle suggests that digital technology is actually instrumentalizing human relationships rather than deepening them. She writes, "The self shaped in a world of rapid response measures success by calls made, e-mails answered, texts replied to, contacts reached. This self is calibrated on the basis of what technology proposes, by what it makes easy."²¹ There is a loss of uninterrupted thought, self-reflection, and just being. Turkle describes a life defined by the computer paradigm or based solely in the values of the digital world—speed, quantity, profit, and efficiency.

As long as we allow the values of digital technology to drive moral formation of self, we may be more networked but less relational. "In a surprising number of epistemological traditions, introspection is a key ingredient of informed decision-making. However, introspection requires time,"²² writes media theorist Kerri Harvey in *Eden Online: Re-inventing Humanity in a Technological Universe*. Computer-mediated communication most often pushes instantaneous replies. For this reason, she warns, "More and more, it is on technological bones that human self-definition is hung."²³ We need to be more aware of both how digital technologies shape desire for response and how they influence

the way we define and value relationships—this is the core work of attunement.

DIGITALLY CREATING THE SELF

Formation of self online is often discussed as impression management. We engage in impression management all the time; consider the choices we make about how we will dress when going to work, school, or church. Online platforms add new rules of participation related to impression management that affect self-formation and presentation. Many Christians scoff at the idea of translating secular ideas about branding or marketing for faith communities. Also, we are skeptical about narratives that suggest we shape our self-presentation as part of a "culture" of media. I have certainly been guilty of dismissing megachurch Christian pastors for spending more time on glitz and glamour than theological content.

For some, any talk of branding is anti-Christian and too capitalist to gain a hearing. Phil Cooke, a media executive and Christian, addresses this issue in *Unique: Telling Your Story in the Age of Brands and Social Media*. Cooke breaks down the basic concepts in a way that reminds us of the basic social and cultural practices in which we engage daily. We are constantly "presenting" ourselves to others. Presumably, we want our Christian identity and story to be known based on our self-presentation either by what we say, wear, or do in the world. Any form of self-presentation reflexively informs who we are as moral people in this world. That process is not solely owned by each individual. Cultural, historical, and geographic location shapes this as does our gender, race, ethnicity, body shape, socioeconomic status, physical and mental abilities, and so on. We try to present ourselves in particular ways, and we are also read by others based on their own experiences, knowledge, and assumptions.

Cooke suggests that a brand or your brand is essentially a story. He asks, "what do people think about when they think of you?"²⁴ He does not want Christians to shy away from the awareness of branding, especially in a digital media environment. Cooke argues, "stories have remarkable power, which is exactly the reason Jesus used them."²⁵ He continues, "Stories drill deeply into your brain and explode later with

meaning. Sometimes the meaning comes when you least expect it. Stories impact audiences because each person interprets the story in light of his or her own personal situation and experience."²⁶ Narrative or stories help us make sense of moral issues; this is also the main purpose of Jesus' parables and stories. Haidt and Joseph, whose work I discussed above related to virtue and moral formation, remind us that narrative thinking or storytelling is an innate aspect of human cognition. They suggest that "human morality and the human capacity for narrativity have co-evolved, mutually reinforcing one another."²⁷ The link between narrative and morality is a cultural tool for modifying and socializing humans. "The telling of stories is an indispensable part of moral education in every culture, and even adult moral discourse frequently reverts to appeals to narratives as a means of claiming authority,"²⁸ conclude Haidt and Joseph.

Many readers will be familiar with the famous phrase, "The medium is the message!" In 1964, Marshall McLuhan, a media theorist, published a now seminal text in media studies, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, in which his first chapter is titled "The Medium Is the Message."²⁹ Much of what he said in that text and in the subsequent lay version of the text titled *The Medium Is the Massage* (1967) (based on a typesetting error by the publisher but kept by McLuhan for its multiple meanings, like mass/age or massage as it relates to slight forms of manipulation) foreshadows and predicts issues that have come to fruition in digital communication. He argues for a shift in attention from content to stressing the importance of the medium. For example, consider the different experiences produced by hearing scripture read from the pulpit, reading a scripture text printed in a bible, or reading the specific verses on a bible app on a smartphone. The medium of speech, written text within a book, and segmented electronic text produce different experiences even if the content is the same. McLuhan's work forces us to deal with the unknown effects shifting mediums have on culture, individuals, and social systems. There is much more that can be said about McLuhan's work. For our purposes, this main point generates plenty of insight and leads us back to considering how the medium of digital technology, specifically social networking, shapes the story we tell about ourselves and thus how we are formed as moral people in today's world.

Computer-mediated communication affects human interaction beyond issues already mentioned, such as speed. It raises questions of authenticity or coherence between online and offline selves. It also shifts how and with whom we interact, including issues related to audience such as control of perception, constituent contributions, and influence of dominant social systems. All of this is negotiated within the constructs of the medium, as McLuhan reminds us. We are, as Cooke suggests, always telling a story about who we are as Christians, which is an outward, though not always conscious, embodiment of our moral character. How is that story "read" differently if I am telling it via Facebook, a blog, or in person as we serve food at a homeless shelter?

On Facebook, I may post a picture, link to the shelter, and add a verse from Matthew 25. A friend can then investigate the rest of my page (presumably years of posting) to see if other aspects of my posting line up with this self-presentation. On a blog, I have more space to add photos and detail how and why I came to serve at this shelter. This medium allows more personal control over the narrative. Again, a visitor to my site may read other posts or follow links I include that provide data on homelessness and ways to get involved, signaling a different form of engagement. In person of course, I share with those present the immediate experience of faith in action, but they have little access to know more about my motivation for service other than what I choose to verbally communicate. It is not the case that computer-mediated communication provides less information or requires a fast read. Social networking platforms may in fact require more time and care dedicated to impression management, or curation of one's self-presentation.

Sociologist Erving Goffmann describes impression management in *The Performance of the Self in Everyday Life*.³⁰ His 1959 work predates the internet and social media; however, his description of self-presentation is perhaps more acutely felt in these environments where dramaturgical elements, such as front stage, back stage, audience, role, props, cast, and so on, are more easily identified. Goffmann was interested as a sociologist in describing how people negotiated performance and its everyday effects. Here, I am more interested in how awareness of this performance via social media shapes our ethical character. In other words, how is impression management part of moral formation?

Whether one is seeking a coherency or multiplicity of online and offline identities, all of these performances shape the totality of the self.

A key aspect of moral formation relies on integrity, the sense that our lives hang together. We are who we say we are, and we act in a way commensurate with that self-identification. Early internet pioneers heralded the bodiless space on online platforms to free users from the bodily restrictions that accompany our offline existence. For example, one could enter a platform and be a different race, ethnicity, or gender or leave behind a physical disability. Anonymity provided a creative space to *be*, beyond the oppressive identity elements of offline lives. Users often found it was difficult to leave behind the speech or interactive markers these identities had shaped, and thus being a different person online did not always work as seamlessly as one hoped. Additionally, many use the possible anonymity of the internet to act in violent, racist, sexist, and homophobic ways toward other users. Freedom of identification with one's offline persona did not lead to a liberated and oppression-free online world.

While early internet users may have created radically new presentations of self, Judith E. Rosenbaum, Benjamin K. Johnson, Peter A. Stepman, and Koos C. M. Nuijten have found that the Facebook effect of "real names"—requiring users to verify themselves and their association to their "real" name—has changed the way users interact on social media. In "Looking the Part' and 'Staying True': Balancing Impression Management on Facebook," these researchers found "evidence is accumulating that online self-presentation requires a healthy dose of authenticity, or at least a balance of self-promotion and accuracy, and that Facebook profiles better match the user's actual personalities than their idealized selves."³¹ They found that users prioritize goals in their self-presentation, not a new phenomenon in social interactions. In their study, Black college students in the southeastern part of the United States had three main goals: (1) creating an authentic self-presentation; (2) creating a professional, positive, and current self-presentation; and (3) controlling information, including what others put on their page. Unlike offline self-presentation, the third goal requires a different set of social skills. "In conclusion, our findings suggest that interaction is an important part of self-presentation, and just as vital as the construction of one's image, which appears to be a balancing act between enhancement and vulnerability, and between authenticity and selectivity, all of which is complicated by audience heterogeneity,"³² find the researchers.

Participatory social platforms raise particular questions for impression management that are perhaps exacerbated by the functions of social media. For example, we have always judged people not just by their own actions but also by the crowd with whom they hang out, the people they associate with. This was a particular problem for Jesus. He was often with the outcasts and powerless of society—beggars, lepers, disabled, children, and thieves. Thus, Christians might have a different orientation to this aspect of self-presentation, though I doubt we are much different than Jesus' critics when we judge daily interactions with friends, neighbors, or strangers. Online, however, various platforms not only allow for association with certain groups but also allow individuals and groups to contribute to one's self-presentation by adding posts to one's wall, tagging related to a particular set of information, or simply posting a photo or video without permission that presents the user in a positive or negative light. The ability for this information to travel and be ever present is a function of digital media, unlike past analog ages when physical presence was the only way to know with whom someone associated. "The power to identify or to self-identify ultimately raises the question of to whom one's identity belongs,"³³ writes Bruce E. Drushel in "Virtual Closets: Strategic Identity Construction and Social Media." He argues that identity is now, more than ever, a multiplicity of negotiations that include a networked audience. That is to say, our identities are a relational construction rather than an autonomously owned action.³⁴ They also require an audience to be "realized," or made real.³⁵

These aspects of social media and impression management generate a good deal of anxiety, especially for young people. They also require a significant amount of time to manage. While most research confirms users are seeking authenticity in self-presentation, they are also savvy about highlighting particular aspects that make them look better. In *The Happiness Effect: How Social Media Is Driving a Generation to Appear Perfect at Any Cost*, Donna Freitas chronicles the use of social media through the experiences of college students who represent those immersed in digital technology at the cusp of generational change from Millennial to Generation Z.³⁶ Most students with whom she speaks are unhappy with the overarching social pressure to appear happy and the feeling that if they are not present on social media, they do not exist. I raise this point specifically as a generational shift but also one that

reflects a way of “being” that is not far off for most of us. We communicate less with friends and family who are not reachable through social networks or computer-mediated communication. Imagine individuals in the United States who use only a landline and can be reached only if they are physically at that location. Accessibility and connection to that person are drastically reduced. Now, consider a generation that primarily communicates via social media. If you are not on the platforms, you are not in the network, and you do not exist to those enveloped in social networks. This directly affects the self’s existence.

Most students Freitas interviewed used a variety of social networking platforms, which contributes to the networked and multiplicity of self-presentation. They often did so with specific intentions. For example, students report using Facebook primarily as an overarching profile that will contribute to career and professional goals; they use Snapchat for small-group or one-on-one communication that integrates text, visual, and audio and disappears in twenty-four hours; and others use geolocated, anonymous sites to post about what’s happening in their area and often to eschew the need to appear happy because anonymity allows rude, trash-talking, cyberbullying behavior to happen undetected by other users. While cyberbullying and cyberstalking also happen on other platforms, college students are less likely to engage in these behaviors because they have internalized the message that platforms linked to one’s real identity directly affect future employment. Some avoid any mention of politics or social action or anything that might reflect or elicit a negative emotion.³⁷

These students, like many of us, recognize that we have audiences on social media. In “Branding as Social Discourse: Identity Construction Using Online Social and Professional Networking Sites,” Corey Jay Liberman reports on the difference in use between LinkedIn and Facebook. He notes that LinkedIn’s “predominant branding method” relies on “posting information about oneself and uploading photos and videos.” In comparison, Facebook includes “a quantitative measure of one’s friends and the groups to which one belongs, [and] this branding mechanism involves a much more proactive approach to creating and shaping one’s socially constructed identity.”³⁸ We cannot necessarily control our audiences in a mediated public space; when this happens, users experience what danah boyd, a principal researcher at Microsoft, has termed “context collapse.”³⁹ For example, a high school student

posts a picture on Facebook of themselves at a party, and their parent (who is a Facebook friend of one of their Facebook friends) comments on the picture. Of course, they could have managed the privacy settings of the picture to allow only a limited group to see it, but they forgot. Or a “friend” could have copied the image and reposted it, creating a larger and unknown audience. Similar things happen in person, when, for example, a teacher walks in the room earlier than expected and catches two students imitating the teacher. The intended audience collapsed. The difference is the reach of the in-class experience is severely limited in an unmediated space versus online in a mediated public space. That has significant consequences for impression management and the impact a mistake or success can have on our self-presentation.

The reach of social networks is not always a negative aspect of identity formation. Sara Green-Hamann and John C. Sherblom address how digital technologies often create spaces for oppressed and ostracized groups to be empowered and claim their self-identity, which translates to their flourishing offline. In “Developing a Transgender Identity in a Virtual Community,” Green-Hamann and Sherblom write, “social identities are negotiated and developed through the communication processes that occur within a person’s social network and community. The communities’ values confirm, corroborate, or contradict that person’s identity.” For individuals who are transgender, offline expression of their identity can be deadly in some cases. Online spaces offer an initial space to explore and live into this self-formation. Their research focused on experiences in the Transgender Resource Center in Second Life, an online virtual community where more than fifteen million registered users interact via avatars in a three-dimensional virtual space using synchronous communication. They found that “as the boundaries between physical lives and social media become increasingly fluid and inseparable, an individual’s online identity and community participation interact with and affect the physical one.”⁴⁰

The line is increasingly blurred between an online and offline identity. Even when users can manage audiences and information with precision, the medium still affects the process of formation. The experience of anxiety when trying to always look happy and accomplished impacts one’s sense of self in ways that cannot be separated between digital and fleshly spaces. Like any new form of communication, impression management on computer-mediated communication has to

take into consideration the technological affordances that may be similar to or different from in-person communication techniques that look at facial expression, clothing, location, tone of voice, and use of language and consider new forms of language, such as text messaging, emojis, and use of color, layout, format, video, audio, and filters. While digital communication forms are expanded, they still exist within their own sets of limitations.⁴¹

Is it morally wrong to portray one's self in various forms? Why, if I have a body with female genitals, must I present as a woman in an online discussion? Should gender matter? If so, who benefits from the enforcement of that self-presentation? This raises significant questions about which identity categories matter when considering the moral formation of self or whether my actions—how I treat others and what attitudes I espouse and support—matter more than my physical form, to which most identity markers are connected. In other words, is multiplicity of identity necessarily antithetical to authenticity or integrity? If we think back to the notion of a trinitarian theology that exemplifies difference in unity, there must be a possibility for authenticity and multiplicity to coexist. Being a networked self is simply a more experiential way to know ourselves as relational. Is it the medium that is perpetuating unhappiness, or is it real and preconceived social expectations generated by economic and political systems? When one gains anonymity online, both experiences of freedom from oppression and increased oppressive behavior are consequences. I am not arguing that these mediums necessarily contribute to moral malformation. However, they do make us increasingly aware that critical engagement with the medium is necessary when considering moral formation of the self.⁴²

THE SELF AS DIGITAL, OR I SHARE, AND THEREFORE I AM

For centuries, Christian theologians have struggled to make sense of human existence as embodied spiritual beings—embodied spirits and inspirited bodies.⁴³ Now, we must consider how we are digital embodied spirits. That is to say, we are not only inseparable from our online identities, but increasingly, digital technology is an appendage of who we are. Many feel a sense of loss when they cannot find their mobile phone; others attach watches and wristbands that transfer data telling

them via notifications what and when to do things as well as keeping communication lines open for texts and calls. The cyborg image that comes to mind most readily is the person who wears their Bluetooth earpiece all day, every day, available for a constant stream of music, news, or phone calls. The meshing of human and machine that digital technology promotes raises important questions for us about moral formation and the virtue of attunement. If our devices or the mechanization of our lives increasingly drives our desires and sense of self, to what must we be attuned and how?

Push technology is the most common way technology grabs our attention and reshapes our behavioral responses. When digital technology began, humans interacted with computers primarily in a pull relationship. We pulled the data we wanted from software or internet searches. Increasingly, software is designed to both pull and push information. Mobile devices push information to the user regularly by posting notifications on the screen of a new email, calendar reminder, or Twitter update. The hardware of phones is also linked to push technology by blinking with differently colored lights to show what notifications are available or making a noise or vibration to get the user's attention. People are not simply obsessed with checking messages; rather, our devices signal to us, maybe even train us, to respond when we see a light or read a partial message. There is a dialogical, or conversational, relationship between the technology and the human that elicits emotional responses such as happiness, laughter, anxiety, frustration, stress, and wonder.

In chapter 1, I discussed the role of algorithms in interpreting the mass amounts of data that are generated by digital technology. In this section, we turn the focus to how that data constitutes who we are as human beings. Roberto Simanowski in *Data Love: The Seduction and Betrayal of Digital Technologies* comments on self-tracking devices and the "smart things" that now guide our living: "Commonly also referred to as the quantified-self, the culture of self-tracking has been developing for years generating products like Fitbit, Digfit [*sic*], Jawbone's wristband, and Nike+, which monitor—and thereby control—the frequency of steps and pulses and thus also how we move, sleep, and eat."⁴⁴ The idea sold with these products is the promise that if you can measure it, you can control and change it.⁴⁵ Measurable self-assessment becomes the key to a better self, a virtuous self. Of course, that self is

defined by market-driven and consumerist notions of health, so attunement is not directed toward self-reflection, or relational growth, or God. With the promise of erasing social inequalities, advocates of digitization promote objective measurements. Simanowski remarks that the quantified self lives by the numbers: "it is only the enumeration of views, shares, and likes that guarantee an equal right to be heard regardless of all differences in education or financial prosperity."⁴⁶ This is a democratized equality done by number, based in a consensus view of self-optimization—crowd-regulated, individuality at its best.

The self becomes more and more quantifiable because that is in fact how data is read. "To participate in today's digitally networked world is to produce an impressive amount of data,"⁴⁷ and that data is read by algorithms that reduce the user to logics and measurements. John Cheney-Lippold's thesis is the title of his book, *We Are Data: Algorithms and the Making of Our Digital Selves*. He argues that we are no longer intelligible in a digital world as only flesh and spirit. We are "represented and regulated" by data or collections of interpreted data he refers to as measurable types.⁴⁸ These measurable types "have their own histories, logics, and rationales. But these histories, logics, and rationales are necessarily different from our own."⁴⁹ That is to say, the gender that Google thinks I am has nothing to do with my fleshly body. It is a collation of data points related to my searches, use of Gmail, language content analysis in Google Documents, and user information from an Android phone. If my actions fit the measurable type of male, then that is what I am to Google for marketing category purposes. There is no moral import to gender for Google, only financial (though that has other moral implications). Cheney-Lippold writes, "What algorithmic gender signifies is something largely illegible to us, although it remains increasingly efficacious for those who are using our data to market, surveil, or control us."⁵⁰

The meaning of who we are as digital, embodied spirits is interpreted differently by people in our network than by the companies profiting from our data. In chapter 3, we will discuss how the datafication of the self relates to dataveillance—the use of data for surveillance. Oftentimes, we cannot even see the structures that control us, and overwhelmingly we willingly give our data away. When it comes to data, digital devices are a one-way mirror "[i]n which internet users remain ignorant of how their data is used while site owners are privileged with

near-universal access to that data."⁵¹ Take, for example, quizzes users do online that will create a data type of who you are; the input data means something different to the company collecting the information than it does to your Facebook friends, to whom you put out the information and the link to which type of preacher you are, who your spirit animal is, or which celebrity you resemble.

In the process of datafication of the self, or being an embodied digitized spirit, lack of awareness of how social structures such as marketing shape what we see and whom we see online directly affects moral formation of self. In *Everybody Lies: Big Data, New Data, and What the Internet Can Tell Us about Who We Really Are*, economist and data journalist Seth Stephens-Davidowitz has dedicated his work to following the data trails we leave online. He says, "It turns out the trails we leave as we seek knowledge on the Internet are tremendously revealing."⁵² For example, he predicted that Trump would win the electoral college votes in the 2016 US presidential election even when sophisticated data-computing firms, such as FiveThirtyEight.com, could not. How? He begins with a simple assumption that everybody lies and we lie the most during person-to-person interactions, such as a polling phone call. However, when typing in a random search on a search engine, we are more likely to be truthful, very truthful. He writes, "in this case, the search window serves as a kind of confessional."⁵³

Like most confessionals, we share subtle and explicit details, believing no one will know or share what we have said. Related to the 2016 election, he found a number of indicators related to candidate preference that polls could not calculate. When conducting a search, a voter is more likely to first type the name of the candidate they prefer, as in Trump–Clinton or Clinton–Trump. Across midwestern states, there were many more searches for Trump–Clinton than for Clinton–Trump, predicting that, overwhelmingly, White voter districts voted for Trump. Additionally, people may tell campaign outreach callers they plan to vote, but online searches on "where to vote" or "how to vote" better predict the final percentage of citizens in an area who do vote. For example, voters in predominantly Black voting districts reported they were planning to vote, but there were very few online searches for voter information in these voting districts. Voting in these districts was down in the 2016 election. Rather than simply see this as a fault of geography, Stephens-Davidowitz also found, after four years of collating data on

racial differences during the Obama administration, that “areas that supported Trump in the largest numbers were those that made the most Google searches using the word ‘nigger.’”⁵⁴ He suggests that there is an explicit connection between racism and supportive votes for Trump. These are a number of the factors collated via Google search data that helped Stephens-Davidowitz predict the 2016 presidential Electoral College vote.

Based on his data related to race, he suggests that we need a different explanation for racism in the United States. Black and Brown people can clearly show evidence of incidents of racism. And yet, many White people believe racism does not exist. Researchers have put forward a theory that racism is often caused by an implicit bias—actual biased actions that arise from an unconscious reaction to people or events based on race among other factors such as gender and class. Stephens-Davidowitz shows via his research that “an alternative explanation for the discrimination that African-Americans feel and whites deny: hidden *explicit* racism.”⁵⁵ Each year, the word *nigger* appears in more than seven million American searches. He controlled for the word “nigga,” often used in rap and R&B lyrics. Also, “nigger jokes” are the most searched identity-based joke category. Searches using this term rise when African Americans are in the news, including whenever President Obama gave a nationwide address. He argues, “it’s hard to imagine that Americans are Googling the word ‘nigger’ with the same frequency as ‘migraine’ and ‘economist’ without *explicit* racism having a major impact on African Americans.”⁵⁶ As we consider how the confessional of the Google search box affects our moral formation, I would also argue that Whites are deeply, morally deformed by their own racism.

Overwhelming explicit, active racism is evident when following the digitized aspects of White selves in the United States. Now, those searching for this term may not agree that racism is a deformation of their moral selves. However, that claim is counter to the theology and ethics presented in this book. The theology we have discussed thus far calls for a recognition and celebration of diversity, not a hierarchy or eradication. Also, the joining of one nation to suppress and homogenize all others is what God stands against at Babel (see chapter 1). Christian ethicist Jennifer Harvey in *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation*, describes for the reader how White racial identity is constructed. She says, “Whiteness literally and directly

emerged from violence as a socially real, meaningful, and recognizable category”—one created by laws, pseudo-science, economic and social practices ranging from slavery and lynching to policing and incarceration.⁵⁷ For White Christians who view violence and coercion as a moral evil, “to be white is to exist in a state of profound moral crisis.”⁵⁸ White embodiment, even in a digital realm, perpetuates that violence again and again. Harvey argues, “white racial identity has emerged as those deemed white have lived in active or passive complicity with racially unjust practices and have continually accrued, even until today, the material benefits of those histories and their contemporary manifestations.”⁵⁹

The reflection in digital device mirrors is a racist America. “Although each of us as individuals interact with technological artifacts countless times every day, the character-shaping properties are especially clear when viewed at the level of community and society,” writes Brad Kallenberg in *God and Gadgets: Following Jesus in a Technological Age*.⁶⁰ Kallenberg is referring mostly to desire-shaping technologies, such as push notifications, and changes in communication style, but we must also be keenly aware of how digital technologies afford new spaces for our moral deformations to perpetuate and grow. The internet did not become a utopia or bring about the eschatology (God’s heaven on earth, the here and not yet). Rather, the inspired digital body is as morally entangled with sociocultural oppression now as in the analog past.

ATTUNEMENT AND DIGITAL MORAL FORMATION

Attunement cultivates perceptive attention; adjustment to needs, desires, and feelings of self and other; and sophisticated sensitivities to the world around us. Attunement is an embodied awareness as much as a thoughtful and reflective practice. As we have discussed, in a digital world, one must be informed about how we are digitally constituted in addition to our inspired bodily existence if we strive for attunement. This requires we move away from an instrumentalist view of technology as a tool we can pick up and put down, entirely under our control; on the other hand, digital technology is not a new paradigm of existence beyond human control or intervention. Kallenberg reminds us, “Technology is neither our dictator (technological determinism) nor merely

our tool (cultural determinism) but something much closer to us, under the skin or in the blood as it were. . . . We are social cyborgs. So closely is technology bound to our life together that we must conclude that all technology has moral, political, communal, even human properties.”⁶¹

Attunement responds to the two main qualitative shifts of self-formation in a digital culture—impression management and datafication of the self. Who we are includes the content we produce, but perhaps more important, the *way* in which the content (including our self-formation) is produced. In *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church*, Shane Hipps unpacks McLuhan’s wisdom for Christian ministries. He remarks, related to digital technologies,

Their power is staggering but remains hidden from view. Because we tend to focus our gaze on their content, the forms of media appear only in our peripheral vision. As a result they exert a subtle yet immense power. By exposing their secrets and powers, we restore our ability to predict and perceive the often unintended consequences of using new media and new methods. This understanding of media is crucial to forming God’s people with discernment, authenticity, and faithfulness to the gospel.⁶²

Discernment, authenticity, and faithfulness are makers of attunement. However, each is re-envisioned in a digital landscape. Discernment requires a counter-digital-cultural approach to computer-mediated communication, which forms us toward quick, constant, and multifocal response. Researchers suggest that we take digital technology breaks or fasts in the ritually religious sense of the word—intentionally build in time for slow reflection. Others offer simple and probably more realistic suggestions such as turning off notification settings on mobile devices or reducing the number of devices we rely upon that link us to the Internet of Things. As we have discussed, leaving behind or even disentangling the self from the digital is increasingly difficult if not impossible when we zoom out beyond our own use of digital devices and software to the digital social systems that manage communities, nation-states, and global trade for example.

Donna Freitas found two distinct groups in her research cohorts that were not as prone to impression management anxiety on social media. These groups give us clues to the process of attunement. The first

group were students at highly prestigious schools.⁶³ Freitas found students at this type of school had a critical approach to social media not found at other institutions. Some maintained an objective distance, engaging social media only as needed; others discussed aspects of identity creation with literacy of “medium,” not just message content. In other words, they assumed a critically engaged and thoughtful stance to social media from their initial engagement with the medium that other students began to consider only once Freitas invited it. Freitas found that few if any institutions integrate social media studies across the curriculum. She notes that students are taught to professionalize their accounts but “are not being challenged to think about social media during their studies” at any of the institutions she visited.⁶⁴ Of the students who do critically engage social media, she writes, “these students had come to college with such a high level of intellectual engagement that it seemed natural for them to apply those skills to social media too. It’s just what they do.”⁶⁵ Discernment is not simply achieved by breaks from our digital devices, though that can be a helpful response. We also need to critically reflect on the mediums we use in an ongoing, daily manner.

The second group that Freitas identifies are religiously engaged students. These students’ engagement with social media exemplifies the intersection between discernment, authenticity, and faithfulness. “Those students who allow the devotion to their faith to permeate their online worlds use their religious traditions as a framework for navigating their behavior and posts—one they find far more meaningful and sturdier than warnings about future employers and prescriptions for curating one’s online image,” reports Freitas.⁶⁶ These students exhibit a sense of attunement that stems from their process of discerning what God requires of them, how they will engage various social media to present that, and the importance or commitment to this in their lives. Freitas says, “while these students are just as image-conscious and as aware as everyone else that they have an audience, having God and their faith tradition filtering their online decision-making seems to help them stay grounded.”⁶⁷ These students are not following a preset list of rules given to them by their churches. Rather, they are able to critically engage their digital self-formation because they have a “sturdier” moral sensibility about the world around them, their place in it, and how this relates to God. The religiously affiliated students’ version of authenticity does not mean they have only one way to present themselves. In fact,

they sometimes use a variety of group and privacy settings to distinguish who sees what post. They have figured out that a networked self requires sophisticated sensibilities to build and maintain relationships that will nurture God's presence.

Social media is not the only place we are formed as embodied digital spirits. However, these two examples give us clues to how we must attune our moral selves. We need to assume a stance of critical engagement with everyday digital interactions that questions the medium. Second, we need to ground ourselves in a moral community and relationship with God that informs our sense of self and formation of relationships regardless of platform or space.

Some theologians argue the latter is not possible in a digital world. Christian theologian Quentin Schultze writes about the need for "shared commitments to truthfulness, empathy, and integrity" in order to "regain authenticity in an information society."⁶⁸ The lack of physical identity markers or authenticators in cyberspace led Schultz to claim, "It is increasingly difficult in cyberspace to know who says what, what he or she really means, and whose self-interest is shaping online rhetoric."⁶⁹ Schultze is writing in the early 2000s prior to an explosion of audio and visual technology that is the foundation for most social networking. As well, research finds that more often than not, users represent themselves in a manner that coheres with their offline selves, even if they err on the side of more favorable self-presentations (as we do in initial meetings in person). Virtue is often characterized as doing what's right even when no one is watching. The opposite may be true in a world of social media, where it seems everyone is or could be watching even when we think we have limited our audience. Thus, self-narratives tend not to produce a chasm between online and offline representations. However, social phenomenon such as fake news should still lead us to question the authenticity of third-party information. This is different than self-presentation.

For other theologians, digital technology raises a more significant issue related to embodiment and our ability to ground ourselves in a moral community and relationship with God in a space that is not enflashed. Early Christians railed against the constraints of the body. Some even denied the body as part of the baser, earthly existence from which they sought freedom. Christian beliefs about the body and ethics in response to our embodiment have varied across history. Incarnation-

al theology—Jesus as God coming to humanity in embodied form—affirms the body as a morally significant and necessary part of our creativeness. So rather than shunning the body or creating a list of behaviors to control its desires, we seek embodied, emotional attunement with ourselves, others, and God, which deepens the relationship between body and spirit while balancing commitments in relationships.

Much anthropological investigation in the early 2000s considered cyberspace a place that lived in the now of instantaneous communication and a bodiless, nonphysical space. As digital technology has grown, we see more and more reliance on digital expressions of embodiment, such as video and audio, not to mention that there is an everlasting memory of each data point that represents our digital life constituting a new form or body.

We heard from Kallenberg at the start of this section claiming that we are social cyborgs and technology is under our skin and in our blood. In chapter 2, titled "Is Technology Good News?", he considers the impact of communication on evangelism and whether digital communication can be as effective as in-person communication. He suggests that it could but rarely is. In chapter 3, "The Technological Evangelist," he argues that the Christian minister and ministries need to incarnate the word as Jesus did, which is labor and time intensive. He claims we need bodies and in-person conversation to incarnate the word so it does not become Gnostic and unidirectional.⁷⁰

Christian educator Gordon Mikoski, in an editorial for *Theology Today*, agrees with Kallenberg.⁷¹ He investigates the practice of communion-on-demand websites, where communion can be experienced outside the physical church. After touting the benefits of various online worship practices, such as live streaming worship or using audiovisual software for pastoral care, he draws the line at online communion. Eucharist, he believes, requires our real, bodily presence: "The Eucharist never takes place in the abstract. It can only be celebrated in particular places and times."⁷² Mikoski connects his conclusion to the incarnation, writing, "if disembodied communication were a sufficient strategy for relating to the human family, there likely never would have been an incarnation. God could have continued to communicate with the human family virtually and remotely through a series of voice messages and disembodied holographic images (think burning bushes and still, small voices)."⁷³

Mikoski's points are persuasive and lean toward earlier claims I have made about the "scandalously particular, embodied, and contextual" nature of God incarnate in Jesus.⁷⁴ It is at exactly this point at which the digital self presents new theological insights. Our systems and ourselves are increasingly digital, which does not make us any less embodied or spiritual. Only a few people lived alongside the incarnate Christ as an embodied human. And yet, in our time period, our experience of the incarnation is no less real, embodied or communal, because we experience it through relationship with those around us and the narrative we have in scripture. As networked selves, we can view a trinitarian theology with greater creative possibilities than in the past. The incarnation is central to one aspect of how God lives difference in unity. We ought not to forgo the aspects of our religious practice that exemplify that embodiment. Yet God is also the burning bush, still small voice, tongue of fire, breath over the waters, and many more nonfleshly embodiments we do not, perhaps cannot, yet perceive. We will explore this in chapter 4 as we turn to questions of digital technology, ecology, and environmental degradation.

God's presence is communication in multiple forms. Theologians have often played off the presence of the word *communion* in communication as part of an understanding of God. Talking specifically about humans and our relationships, Kerri Harvey in *Eden Online* writes, "Communication then, in both its process and its products, is the canvas on which the converging forces of time, space, and culture paint various constructed and socially functional portraits of the other and of this self."⁷⁵ I would add, of and with God. Communication takes time, location, and physicality. The experience of these three is altered from analog to digital, but it is not lost.

Why does attunement as the process of moral formation make more sense when discussing our digital lives? Digital existence heightens our connectedness and relationality. Attunement locates virtue in relationship and requires an ethical approach that confronts personal "narrative diversity and the otherness of others."⁷⁶ Digital interaction and integration are changing so rapidly that most of our "sets of rules" are outdated within months of developing them. Additionally, digital technologies bring us into contact with various cultures and geographic locations, at times creating new ones. The digital expands a sense of self beyond the outer casing of our skin and into worlds and lives we experience in new

ways. Attunement requires awareness and attention to internal and external dynamics in an ongoing, critically discerning manner rather than a static or predetermined formula.

Digital is not a new utopia. We must recognize, understand, and liberate ourselves and society from racism and other moral deformations of our digitally embodied spirits if we are to live into God's example of difference in unity as the *imago dei* of a networked self. Attunement requires emotional, embodied, and spiritual awareness as much as responsive digital affectability. As a historically rooted and diverse community, Christians bring a wealth of moral insight to this process. In some cases, we must shed old forms of moral practice that no longer produce attunement in today's digital world. In other cases, like the one addressed in chapter 3, moral practices of metanoia are fertile ground for attunement in response to a networked self in a digital landscape that never forgets.