COVENANT
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Electronic Thesis & Dissertation Collection

J. Oliver Buswell Jr. Library
12330 Conway Road
Saint Louis, MO 63141

www.covenantseminary.edu/library

DIGITIZATION & NEODOCETISM

Generation Z's Understanding of Their Bodies
In Light of Expanding Digital Existences

By
Seth Troutt

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry.

Saint Louis, Missouri

2021

DIGITIZATION & NEODOCETISM

Generation Z's Understanding of Their Bodies
In Light of Expanding Digital Existences

By
Seth Troutt

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry.

Graduation Date May 14, 2021

Dr. Dan Doriani
Faculty Advisor _____

Dr. Paul Loosemore
Second Reader _____

Dr. Joel Hathaway
Director of DMin Program _____

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine how Christian therapists and professors describe the impact of digitization on Generation Z's bodily self-concept. Generation Z has grown up with phones in their hands and with their friends in their phones. Pastors must consider the effects digitization will have on the iGen and give substantial reflection on how digitized ecclesiologies contribute to gnostic instincts in the information age.

This study utilized a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with seven Christian therapists and professors with extensive experience working with Generation Z. The interviews focused on gaining data with three research questions: 1) How do Christian therapists and professors describe Gen Z's self-understanding of their bodies? 2) How do Christian therapists and professors describe the impact of digitization on Gen Z's views of their bodies? 3) How do Christian therapists and professors advise ministry leaders to minister to Gen Z concerning Gen Z Christians' views of their bodies? The literature review focused on four key areas to understand ministry in this context: theology of the body, theology of technology, digital effect on bodily self-concept, and Generation Z's relationship with digitization.

This study concluded that digitization contributes to overly developed dualistic instincts in Generation Z. This reduces personhood to cognition, promotes dissociative tendencies regarding bodily processes, dislodges the self from place, and fragments self-concept. Ministry leaders ought to resist the effects of digitization by means of teaching a robust theology of the body, training parents, facilitating embodied experiences, and helping Generation Z see the goodness of congruence in Christ.

To Mom and Dad

you can't have my heart, and
you won't use my mind, but
do what you want with my body
do what you want with my body

— Lady Gaga

2013 ARTPOP

Electric man has no bodily being. He is literally *dis*-carnate. But a discarnate world, like the one we now live in, is a tremendous menace to an incarnate Church, and its theologians haven't even deemed it worthwhile to examine the fact.

— Marshal McLuhan

1977 *The Medium and the Light*

Contents

Acknowledgements

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Chapter One

Introduction

Over forty years ago, media philosopher Marshall McLuhan warned theologians and pastors about the implications of the radio, the telephone, and the television:

> When you are on the air you are, in a way, everywhere at once. When you are on the telephone you have no body. And, while your voice is there, you and the people you speak to are here, at the same time. Electric man has no bodily being. He is literally *dis*-carnate. But a discarnate world, like the one we now live in, is a tremendous menace to an incarnate Church, and its theologians haven't even deemed it worthwhile to examine the fact.[1]

To be everywhere is to be nowhere;[2] to be online is to, in a sense, be everywhere. Technological revolution has only accelerated since McLuhan warned the church nearly five decades ago. The prolificity of digital communication mediums were forced to the center of American reality with the COVID-19 pandemic that locked non-essential Americans in their homes for months. Have pastors considered the warning McLuhan gave over forty years ago? Have theologians examined the idea that digital technology "*dis*-carnates" humanity? With all the blessings that come with digital technology, how must pastors consider its damaging or inadvertent implications?

---

[1] Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 50.

[2] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*, trans. Robin Campbell, Reprint edition (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1969), 16.

The "i" Generation

For Generation Z, things like FaceTime, YouTube, and Houseparty did not become a part of life; these location-transcending apps indwelled their life. Another name suggested for the next generation is iGen: "born in 1995 and later, they grew up with cell phones, had an Instagram page before they started high school, and do not remember a time before the Internet."[3]

Rapid digitization has affected mental health outcomes and personal identity formation in Generation Z. From 2010 to 2015, 31 percent more eighth and tenth graders felt lonely,[4] boys' general depression increased by 21 percent, girl's general depression increased by 50 percent,[5] and 56 percent more teens experienced a major depressive episode in 2015 than in 2010.[6]

Gen Z is not the first generation to deal with new technologies. Yet, the emerging "dictatorship of technology"[7] is disproportionately impacting younger people neurodevelopmentally, socially, and theologically. The question, "what does it mean to be a human?" is increasingly complex. Self-understanding, or self-identity, now encompasses a digital and multivariable being "formed by mutual constitution of real and

---

[3] Jean M. Twenge, *IGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy--and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What That Means for the Rest of Us*, reprint ed. (New York: Atria Books, 2018), 9.

[4] Twenge, 100.

[5] Twenge, 105.

[6] Twenge, 110.

[7] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson, extensive underlining ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 434.

virtual worlds"[8] in which the self is "hybridized,"[9] "fragmented, and unstable."[10] In part, this hybridization grows out of the space-erasing dynamic digital technology;[11] in cyberspace, people become detached from social and physical surroundings and consequently from the real world.[12]

Questions about what it means to be human are not new to theologians. Questions about the nature and relationship between body and soul aside, the biblical witness is clear. "The whole human person is the image of the whole Deity."[13] How do Gen Z Christians who grew up with fragmented, hybridized, trans-locational,[14] digital identities make sense of what it means to have a body and to be located in a particular place? How does church history speak to the present moment?

Docetism and Neodocetism

Christological docetism, an early church heresy, taught that "Christ's human body was a phantasm, and that his suffering and death were mere appearances." [15] Docetism's

---

[8] Eun-Mi Paik, "Educational Ministry for the Formation of Self-Identity in the Information Age: From the Wisdom of Feminist and Process Thoughts," *한국기독교신학논총 (Korea Journal of Christian Studies)* 42 (December 2005): 223–42, 225.

[9] Paul Gordon Brown, "College Students, Social Media, Digital Identities, and the Digitized Self," *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (Ph.D., Boston College, 2016), 81.

[10] Paik, 235.

[11] Neil Postman and Andrew Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business,* anniv. ed. (New York: Vintage, 2005), 79.

[12] Paik, 238.

[13] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 2.284.

[14] Paik, 225.

[15] Norman L. Geisler, "Docetism," Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 202.

name comes from the Greek *dokeo* (δοκέω) which means to seem or to appear.[16] Digital technology is changing the means by which humans can appear to one another which has implications for the identity formation process. "We're in the midst of a major upheaval in our information environment... [and] in addition to reshaping society, dominant communications technology may also reshape us."[17] Digitization is opening the door to anthropological docetism, or neodocetism, wherein humans appear in the flesh to one another without actually being in the flesh to one another, via cameras, microphones, and screens.

Broader cultural concerns about what it means to be an embodied human being intersect with the docetic moment at hand. Gnosticism, of which docetism was a subset, taught people to think of their bodies as completely "other to the self."[18] Secular, modern ideologies influencing current ethical thought see the body as so inconsequential to personhood that some look forward to purely digital consciousnesses apart from the body.[19] The recent increase of gender dysphoria[20] in youth and gender identity disorder[21]

---

[16] Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 442.

[17] John Naughton, *From Gutenberg to Zuckerberg: What You Really Need to Know about the Internet.* (London: Quercus, 2012), 24.

[18] Nancy R. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 35.

[19] Pearcey, 98.

[20] Pierre-Paul Tellier et al., "Gender Dysphoria in Adolescent Population: A 5-Year Replication Study," *Clinical Child Psychology & Psychiatry* 24, no. 2 (April 2019): 379–87, https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104519838593.

[21] John R Blosnich, "Prevalence of Gender Identity Disorder and Suicide Risk Among Transgender Veterans Utilizing Veterans Health Administration Care," *American Journal of Public Health* 103, no. 10 (October 2013): 27–32.

should not be disconnected from the simultaneous escalation of digitization and the digital identities that go along with it.

Pastors must consider this neodocetic path paved by digitization as they are creating ecclesiological structures to connect with iGen members and nonmembers. How does a life-and-church experience full of vicarious experiences[22] shape the next generation's sense of self? There has been much talk about the content of ethics, but the process and means of digitalization must also be taken into account. The content isn't the message; the medium is inseparable from the message.[23] The metaphysical substance of the content can actually reinforce metaphysical lostness. "People are metaphysically lost when they live according to nonbiblical worldviews."[24]

There are four pillars for making sense of ministry in light of these questions: 1. a biblical theology of technology, in particular, a theology of digital technology; 2. a biblical theology of the human body; 3. an analysis of digitization's implications on the self-understanding as it relates to bodies and humanity; and 4. an analysis of Generation Z and the cohort effect they are facing within the web of creational norms and the mixed-bag reality that digitization has fostered.

---

[22] Kristen Harrison, "Scope of Self: Toward a Model of Television's Effects on Self-Complexity in Adolescence," *Communication Theory* 16, no. 2 (2006): 251–79, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2006.00270.x.

[23] McLuhan, 102.

[24] Pearcey, 216.

Problem Statement

Generation Z has grown up with phones in their hands and with their friends in their phones. Pastor-theologian Jay Kim, in his book *Analog Church*, observed, "As much as modern technology wants to tell you so, you cannot eat and drink together online."[25] In a cultural moment in which the validity and necessity of the body is already being undermined by hedonistic visions of paganism, how will digitized ministry platforms exacerbate neodocetistic anthropological frameworks? In a world where "going" to school online, "going" to church online, and "going" to change gender are possibilities, pastors must minister with clarity about the nature of bodies and what it means to be embodied. In a pandemic and post-pandemic world, what are the implications if faith leaders cannot or will not instruct their congregants to "greet one another with a holy kiss" and its modern equivalents?[26] Twenty-four percent of church-engaged Gen Z and 51 percent of Gen Z as a whole do not consider biological sex to be an integral aspect of gender identity,[27] and thus, pastors must consider the effects digitization will have on the iGen and give substantial reflection on how digitized, content-driven ecclesiologies contribute to pagan, gnostic instincts in the information age.

---

[25] Jay Y. Kim, *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in the Digital Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 179.

[26] 2 Corinthians 13:12.

[27] Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation*, 2018.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine how Christian therapists and professors describe the impact of digitization on Generation Z's self-understanding of their bodies. In doing so, the therapists and professors will give vision to how pastors can develop a healthy theology of the human body in their Gen Z congregants.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the qualitative research:

1. How do Christian therapists and professors describe Gen Z's self-understanding of their bodies?
    a. Gen Z's self-understanding the value of their bodies?
    b. Gen Z's self-understanding the nature of their bodies?
2. How do Christian therapists and professors describe the impact of digitization on Gen Z's views of their bodies?
3. How do Christian therapists and professors advise ministry leaders to minister to Gen Z concerning Gen Z Christians' views of their bodies?

Significance of the Study

Pastors make disciples and preach the gospel in a particular cultural context; there is no such thing as a culture-free gospel or an uncontextualized discipleship strategy.[28] At present, a plurality of literature assumes the overlap, but little addresses how the

[28] Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 108.

formative, culture-laden reality of the mediums and mechanisms themselves must be considered.[29] In a digitizing culture, the cultural forms, not just the cultural content, of the next generation need to be analyzed.

This study will serve children's ministry leaders, youth workers, and teaching pastors in two ways. First, it will be a diagnostic tool for contextualization. What trends do therapists and ethicists already see in Gen Z's sense of their bodies and the impact of digitization and neodocetism? Second, it will be a prescriptive tool for best practices within the formative nature of digitized versus in-the-flesh ministry engagement. In what ways are digital ministry platforms helpful and in what ways are they counterproductive?

Definition of Terms

There are a variety of technical terms that are used throughout this study. Key terms are defined as follows:

Digitization – society's progressive conversion to electronic mediums.

Docetism – a Christological heresy teaching that Jesus is not fully human; he only appeared to take on flesh and suffer.

Neodocetism – an anthropological, gnostic heresy that asserts human bodies are inconsequential to personhood.

Gen Z or iGen – the generation born between 1998 and 2013, the first generation that never knew life before smart phones or the internet.

---

[29] McLuhan, 102.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to examine how Christian therapists, neuroscientists, and ethicists describe the impact of digitization on Generation Z's self-understanding of their bodies. There were therefore three primary areas of literature surveyed to provide a dialogical foundation[30] for the qualitative research.

The literature review begins by looking at the theology of the human body from an explicitly neo-calvinist perspective, in contrast to the disembodied visions of the queer theorists and technocratic futurists. Then, it continues with a theology of digital technology in a twofold sense: a broad historical-theological take at the biblical mandate of technological development culminating in digitization and then exploring the effect of digitization on humanity's aspectual relationship with bodies. Finally, the review concludes with an ethnographic analysis of Gen Z's digital-relational world and their experience of embodiment in light of their digitally saturated reality.

Theology of the Body

Theologian Al Wolters argued, "Human civilization is normed throughout: in every field of human affairs there are right and wrong ways of doing things. There is nothing in human life that does not belong to the created order."[31] For the purposes of

---

[30] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 91.

[31] Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 25.

this study, the key biblical horizons for understanding the normative-creational vision for the human body are creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.

Creation

Humanity is part and parcel with creation. Herman Bavinck observed, "There is not a single element in the human body that does not also occur in nature around him."[32] In this sense, G.K. Chesterton noted that the earth and its components should be understood as a sister, not a mother.[33] God formed humanity out of the dust,[34] and he became *nephesh*. Theologian John Frame notes, "*Nephesh* is often translated 'soul,' but in Genesis 2:7, *nephesh* is not a component of man, but the whole person."[35]

Classical debate about human personhood often treated the human body and its innate physicality as of negligible importance.[36] Bavinck argues that a creational doctrine of the image of God will not allow this discarnate view. "The whole human person is the image of the whole Deity."[37] Dualist metaphysics that ontologically separates either the body from the soul or the person from the earth, according to pastor-theologian Eugene Peterson, is sub-Christian and fundamentally gnostic.[38] Author Nancy Pearcy highlights a

---

[32] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 4 vols. (Ada, MI: Backer Academic, 2008), 2.293.

[33] Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane Company, 1909), 7.

[34] Genesis 2:7.

[35] John Frame, *Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013), 798.

[36] Kelly Kapic, *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic And Historical Introduction*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 122.

[37] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 2.284.

[38] Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 62.

popular pun for the ancient Gnostics: the *soma* is a *sema*, or, "the body is a tomb." Thus, for the gnostically inclined, "The goal of salvation was to escape from the material world—to leave it behind and ascend back to the spiritual realm."[39] In contrast, statesman and theologian Abraham Kuyper argued in 1911 that Genesis 1 and 2 require Christians to see that "the spirit of a person cannot be separated from the person's physical existence, and a person's physical existence can likewise not be separated from the rest of nature."[40]

The created person is the image of God;[41] people do "not bear or have the image of God, but he or she *is* the image of God."[42] Adam's physical body is not incidental to the image of God, but is central to it; Old Testament scholars Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum argue that in the ancient world, "The concept of the 'image of god' conveys the idea of a physical representation."[43] The necessity of the bodily dimension of the *imago dei* is further evidenced by the subsequent command to create culture through applying pressure to the land (subdue)[44] as being associated with and enabled by humanity's status

---

[39] Nancy R. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 35.

[40] Abraham Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, ed. John H. Kok, 1st ed. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Kindle 7963.

[41] Genesis 1:26.

[42] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 2.291.

[43] Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 614.

[44] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub, 1996), 461.

as the image of God.[45] To "extend the boundaries of the garden"[46] through the "exercise of physical power"[47] requires that the image of God be corporeal. Ancient Near Eastern scholar Othmar Keel also highlights how the function of "dominion" is to physically intercede or protect; in other ANE usage, a shepherd successfully exercised dominion over a sheep when he preserved it from an attacking lion.[48]

The creational doctrine of the image of God also conveys dignity to the body. In Psalm 8:5-7, the psalmist recasts Genesis 1:26 by envisioning humanity as "the crown of creation."[49]

> Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen and also the beasts of the field.

In its ANE context, humanity would have been understood to be crowned by God himself, bestowing a royal position.[50] Likewise, the phrase 'place under his feet' is an image to be associated with royal position and power; where there is dominion there must be a domain.[51] Bavinck repudiates low views of the body as being an insult to the

---

[45] Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, The *Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, reprint ed. (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 32-35.

[46] G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 17, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; Apollos, 2004), 81-82.

[47] Kuyper, *Pro Rege,* Kindle 2444.

[48] Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (Winona Lake, ID: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 58.

[49] Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty, A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 254.

[50] Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (Winona Lake, ID: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 259.

[51] Gentry and Wellum, 196.

artwork of God himself. “The body is not a prison, but a marvelous piece of art from the hand of God Almighty, and just as constitutive for the essence of humanity as the soul.” [52]

Persons are embodied, and they are embodied in dignity, and so, instrumental to the soul is the body, that to even speak of “embodiment of a soul” may inappropriately infer that the soul is more basic than or exists prior to the body. Theologian Karl Barth noticed that the creation account may in fact infer the opposite: humanity is a “besouled body.”[53] Theologian Nancy Murphy recommends Christians use the language of humans as “Spirited Bodies.”[54] Bavinck highlights how attempting to separate the function of the soul from the body is problematic. “It is always the same soul that peers through the eyes, thinks through the brain, grasps with the hands, and walks with the feet.”[55] Though body and soul are bound up together, differentiating them is important.

Distinctions between body and soul are aspectually helpful and are part of God’s intention in the creation of humanity; distinctions are matters of emphasis and perspective, not ontology, gradations of reality, or hierarchies of existence. Theologian John Frame warns not to make metaphysical distinctions within humanity’s components as though they are “distinct entities within us, battling for supremacy” but rather argues that humanity ought to see body, soul, and spirit as each referring “to the whole person

---

[52] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 2.292. Also, Job 10:8-12; Ps. 8; 139:13-17; Eccl. 12:2-7; Isa. 64:8.

[53] Karl Barth, G.W. Bromiley, T.F. Torrence, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1975), III/2, 350.

[54] Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ix.

[55] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 2.292.

from a particular perspective."[56] Bavinck sees trinitarian echoes within the components of humanity:

> Just as the Father gives life to the Son and the Spirit, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son, so in human beings it is the heart *(memoria*), the deep, hidden life of the psyche, which gives birth and being to the intellect and the will.[57]

The heart and its affections direct the intellect and the will, which moves the body, in a similar way that the Father sends the Son. They are distinct and one.

Many of the limits associated with the human body are to be seen as creational and not only symptomatic of the Fall or as curses in-and-of-themselves. Abraham Kuyper, in his *magnum opus Common Grace,* reminded the church:

> Remember the undeniable truth that our physical life does not maintain itself spontaneously but lasts only by continually taking in nourishment. Our body continually digests, and that loss must be compensated for by the steady intake of new nourishment. This is true not only now, as a result of sin, but was also true in paradise: "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden" [Gen 2:16]. We are therefore mistaken if we imagine that in paradise the maintenance of the body was of secondary importance.[58]

Such integrity created bodies without faults but not bodies without needs. Bodies with needs and faults emerge after the emergence of sin.

Fall

The rebellion of Adam and Eve is a moral/spiritual failing with ontological implications and consequences. Kuyper observes, "An organic connection exists between

---

[56] Frame, 799.

[57] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 2.291.

[58] Abraham Kuyper and Richard J. Mouw, *Common Grace: God's Gifts for a Fallen World, Volume 1*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas (Marlton, NJ: Lexham Press, 2016), Kindle 3255.

all things. That is why Satan's power, once it has broken out in this world, gradually impairs all of creation."[59] The ontological decay of the body could be construed as "creational apostacy," though it is non-moral in that it is an effect and not a cause.[60] The Fall does not eliminate the goodness of the body, for the body itself was not corrupt because "nature in the sense of substance or essence remained, but the moral qualities naturally belonging to his nature were lost."[61] Kuyper sees this loss at the root of the Pauline distinction between "body" and "flesh:"

> [Paul] declares even more strongly not that setting one's mind on the *body* but setting the mind on the *flesh* is death (Rom 8:6). Therefore, with the instrument of your body you must crucify the flesh and combat its temptation. *With the body, against the flesh* is therefore God's holy ordinance.[62]

Flesh, in this Pauline context, should be understood as fallen human nature or sinfulness.[63] Theologian and philologist Al Wolters' concepts of "structure" and "direction" coincide with this Kuyperian distinction: with the body [structure] and against the flesh [direction]. After the Fall, the body remains structurally good but often can be radically misdirected by the flesh.[64]

Secular attempts to make sense of the body/flesh reality are ubiquitous. In *The Shaping of Things to Come*, Michael Frost argues that dualism is one of the primary

---

[59] Kuyper, *Pro Rege,* Kindle 7963.

[60] Kuyper, *Pro Rege,* Kindle 7954.

[61] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 2.290.

[62] Abraham Kuyper, *On the Church*, ed. Ad de Bruijne (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 295 [emphasis original].

[63] Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Flesh,"in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 793.

[64] Wolters, Kindle 701.

problems within the evangelical church.[65] It is not that all distinctions or discourse that emphasizes aspectual relationships or angles within the human person are "dualist." The term, therefore, should not be exclusively pejorative; rather, it is the anti-incarnational, or ex-carnational, thrust that has created an "overly developed dualism" and "has given religious endorsement" to the anti-body forces in secular society.[66]

Where exactly are these forces? For the purpose of this study, four representative thinkers and schools of thought will be considered: Plato (Platonism), Descartes (Cartesianism), Judith Butler (queer theory), and Yuval Harari (transhumanism).

Platonism

More than 400 years before Jesus took on flesh, Plato was shaping Western Society. Platonism can be succinctly understood in terms of its contrast to Aristotelianism, as seen in Raphael's painting *The School of Athens.* In the image, Aristotle is pointing down to the earth, and Plato is pointing up to the heavens, illustrating how Platonism emphasized and gave primacy to the noncorporeal whereas Aristotelianism emphasized and gave primacy to the corporeal. Platonism dominated Greco-Roman discourse, and the majority of Greeks believed in an incarnated soul — a preexistent soul wrapped in flesh; thus, the soul was more fundamental to humanity.[67]

---

[65] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub., 2003), 18ff.

[66] Michael Frost, *Incarnate: The Body of Christ in an Age of Disengagement* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 113.

[67] Frost, *Incarnate*, 41.

Figure 1: Raphael, *The School of Athens*, 1511, Fresco, Stanza della Segnatura, Apostolic Palace, Vatican City.

The early streams of Christianity were not immune from Platonist influence. The heretical gnostic school represented a syncretism of Platonist and Pauline eschatologist and anthropologies. New Testament scholar N.T. Wright highlights how entire theologies were developed that "translated the language of resurrection into a private spirituality and a dualistic cosmology."[68] In contrast to the Gnostics, who saw the body as reprehensible and as merely a holder of the preexistent soul, the Hebrew-biblical vision conceives of an "animated body (Genesis 2)."[69] It is "residual Platonism that has infected whole swaths

[68] N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 50.

[69] Frost, *Incarnate,* 41.

of Christian thinking and has misled people into supporting that Christians are meant to devalue this present world and our present bodies and regard them as shabby."[70] Some of the otherworldliness in the early church can be accounted for when one considers the disappointment at the felt delay of the return of Christ. Rather than ultimate hope being found in the Second Coming, salvation's horizon was reimagined and limited to "when the soul left behind the physical world and entered the celestial state" after death.[71]

Cartesian Dualism

In 1641 Rene Descartes, as a thought experiment, convinced himself that nothing existed. But, in a moment, he realized that something had to exist – and it was him! He knew that he existed because "it necessarily had to be the case that I, who was thinking this, was something."[72] Hence his famous phrase *cogito ergo sum: "*in order to think, it is necessary to exist."[73] Cartesian thought brought about another wave of dualist metaphysic and thus a dualist anthropology to Western culture. Historian Richard Tarnas observes:

> the *cogito* revealed an essential hierarchy and division in the world...*res cogitans*—thinking substance, subjective experience, spirit, consciousness, that which man perceives as within was understood as fundamentally different and separate from *res extensa*— extended substance, the objective world, matter, the physical body.[74]

---

[70] Wright, 18.

[71] Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 133.

[72] Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress, 4th ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 18.

[73] Descartes, 19.

[74] Tarnas, 178.

In Cartesian thought, it is the "fundamentally different" substance, the "subjective experience," which gives validity and ground to "the physical body." This view is diametrically opposed to the Hebrew view in which the body precedes the spirit in order[75] and in ontological priority in which "we *are* our bodies. We don't live *in* our bodies."[76]

Queer Theory

Queer Theory is a critical approach to bodies and gender committed to questioning and challenging assumed or inherited norms. "Queer" has to do with the non-typical and its participial form "queering" with undermining, obscuring, or attacking established ideas.[77] In 1990 Judith Butler (she/they) published *Gender Trouble* and shortly thereafter published *Bodies that Matter*. Butler's central thesis asserts that gender is a construct and thus performed and is not ontological or fixed. "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted."[78] Butler's central thesis on bodies as being sexed is similar in the sense that binary "regulatory schemas are not timeless structures, but historically reversable criteria of intelligibility."[79]

---

[75] Frost, *Incarnate*, 41.

[76] Frost, *Incarnate,* 53.

[77] "QUEERS READ THIS; A Leaflet Distributed at Pride March in NY," June 1990, http://www.qrd.org/qrd/misc/text/queers.read.this.

[78] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 25.

[79] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2011), xxii.

These categories or schemas are not neutral, but are violent, militant, and oppressive. They "vanquish bodies that matter."[80] There is a "regime of heterosexuality" that "operates to circumscribe and contour the 'materiality' of sex, and that 'materiality' is formed and sustained through and as a materialization of regulatory norms that are in part those of heterosexual hegemony."[81] The biology of sex, ontology of sex, and materiality of sex are socially constructed categories that are designed to oppress the non-typical (queer) persons. This is a matter of life and death for Butler. She asks:

> What qualifies as a viable body… what qualifies as bodies that matter, ways of living that count as "life," lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, lives worth grieving?"[82]

The history of ontological materiality and how the West has understood bodies is important. Butler writes, "Matter itself is founded through a set of violations, ones which are unwittingly repeated in the contemporary invocation" such that "matter is rendered irreducible and simultaneously ontologizes and fixes that gendered matrix in its place." [83] In Butler's view, one cannot approve of the biological sexual binary without inheriting the patriarchal and anti-female gender norms attached since Plato.

Plato dismissed the female body as ontologically on the same level as the male body, the female body being understood by the absence of a phallus rather than the presence of something female. Thus, "there may not be a materiality of sex that is not

---

[80] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xxii.

[81] Butler, *Bodies That Matter,* xxiv.

[82] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xxv.

[83] Butler, *Bodies That Matter,* 5.

already burdened by the sex of materiality." [84] Butler sees the supposed "neutral" or "objective" categories of biology as being obscured by culture in every circumstance. Thus, feminism has not gone nearly far enough and "has made a mistake in thinking that there are categories such as male and female. Both the masculine and the feminine are "culturally presupposed."[85]

This line of thought makes sense of queer theory, in contrast with traditional feminism. Theorists "believe that the power to enforce gender permeates all of society in the form of discourses—how we talk about things—and that the liberation can only come from disrupting the stability and relevance of categories of sex, gender, and sexuality."[86] The disruption of categories, even biological ones, is the means of stopping the hegemonic forces from vanquishing/oppressing the "bodies that matter."[87]

The disruption of typical categories is not limited to content, but also includes process, prose, and style. Pluckrose and Lindsay, in their book *Cynical Theories,* draw attention to Butler's use of opaque language and the purpose it serves:

> Being comprehensible would be inconsistent with queer theory's radical distrust of language and would violate its ambition to avoid all categorization…the incoherence of queer theory is an intentional feature, not a bug.[88]

---

[84] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 26.

[85] Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity* (New York: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019), 54.

[86] Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone Publishing, 2020), 299.

[87] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xxii.

[88] Pluckrose and Lindsay, *Cynical Theories*, 95.

Similarly, Douglas Murray, in his book *The Madness of Crowds,* argued that Butler uses a "deliberately obstructive style ordinarily employed when someone either has nothing to say or needs to conceal the fact that what they are saying is not true."[89] Carl Trueman, in his book *The Making of the Modern Self*, notices how queer theorists participate in the queering of gender, in part, by means of queer (non-typical, elitist) prose.[90]

A helpful framework for understanding the gap between queer theory's view of biology and a biblical view of biology are the categories of mimesis and poiesis. Trueman explains:

> A mimetic view regards the world as having a given order and a given meaning and thus sees human beings as required to discover that meaning and conform themselves to it. Poiesis, by way of contrast, sees the world as so much raw material, out of which meaning and purpose can be created by the individual.[91]

Is there a grain to reality? Is there a created order? Mimetic thinking answers yes and poietic thinking answers no. Queer theory, generally speaking, wants to see biology and sex through the lens of poiesis, whereas the traditional biblical view wants to see biology and sex through the lens of mimesis. Thus, "for Butler, gender is a performance and possesses no prior ontological status. To be a woman is not to have certain biological substance but to repeatedly act like a woman." [92] Mimesis is thus viewed as oppressive violence, "claiming that the idea of male and female as a natural binary is itself merely a

---

[89] Murray, 60.

[90] Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 364.

[91] Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self,* 39.

[92] Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self,* 362.

means of maintaining heterosexuality as the norm."[93] It is now the noble task of humans to reimagine "our intimacies within and beyond biological relation."[94] Mimesis has the final word on issues of the disputation of identity, though. Trueman quips, "My body, not my psychology, has the last word on whether I am the last queen of France in the eighteenth century."[95]

Queering Paving the Way for Technologizing

The present and ongoing queering of gender is catalyzed and facilitated by concurrent developments in technology. J. Jack Halberstam, in their book *Gaga Feminism,* asks the question that many sociologists have asked of the recent changes to how culture thinks about sex and gender, "What has brought so many changes on and so quickly?" They answer:

> Advances in computer technology; new medical research; increased mobility [planes/trains/automobiles], new forms of social contact and social networking; new modes of media including Twitter feeds; new levels of media… [these are leading us to] a reconsideration of the terms, the names, the categories we use to understand our bodies.[96]

Trueman observes a similar contribution to the new reality:

> Sex outside the ideal of monogamous heterosexual marriage has always occurred but has only recently become much easier to transact (with the advent of cheap and efficient contraception). First, there was the promiscuous behavior; then there was the technology to facilitate it. [97]

---

[93] Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self,* 362.

[94] J. Jack Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), xx.

[95] Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self,* 165.

[96] Halberstam, xx.

[97] Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self,* 38-39.

Douglas Murray noted, "When you are headed in the wrong direction, tech will help you get there faster."[98] However, it is not simply technology working as mediator or facilitator, as Trueman highlights, but it is also technology working as epistemological queerification engine and anthropological lens that has sparked this cultural moment. Long before the turn of the century, a tech-centric worldview began reducing the human to an object for piecemeal study and technological manipulation.[99]

In 1976 Michel Foucalt observed how an Enlightenment, rationalistic technological analysis of sexuality created a species-within-a-species dynamic, as it relates to sexual behavior and desire. "The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species."[100] The atomizing of humanity into its constituent parts transformed activities into components. Sexual activity (sodomy) was transitioning from an activity to an activity that created or revealed an identity as homosexual.

It was not the body, but the will above and the desires within the body, that gave the body identity. "As soon as the mind or the will was recognized as separable from the body or as a separate constitutive element of the person, psychological man became a very real conceptual possibility."[101] The technologized self goes hand-in-hand with the psychologized self, with the "soul" forming, framing, and manipulating the body, because in a technologist understanding of the body, the body's "ontological weight is

---

[98] Murray, 112.

[99] Egbert Schuurman, *The Gospel and Globalization: Exploring the Religious Roots of a Globalized World*, ed. Michael W. Goheen and Erin Glanville (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2009), 205.

[100] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, reissue ed. (Vintage, 2012), 43.

[101] Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self,* 106.

not presumed."[102] The whole body is treated like the hair on one's head – subject to change on the basis of desire with the change brought into fruition by the hands of trained helper with sharp utensils. Where will this anthropology lead? The transhumanists have been helpfully speculating about the direction of a human race that subjects itself to a disontologized and technocratic future.

Transhumanism

Controversies about the gender spectrum will be short lived, and controversies about the Homo Sapiens spectrum will emerge. Mike Bess, in his book *Make Way for the Superhumans*, addressing changes including sex and gender bodily modifications, wrote, "We are headed into a social order whose most salient new feature may well be the systematic modification of human bodies and minds through increasingly powerful means."[103] Queer theory paves the way for transhumanism, which Alex Hamilton summarizes as "humanity taking control of its evolutionary destiny."[104]

Transhumanism exists on a spectrum. On the medical and conservative side, pacemakers and motorized prosthetic limbs have existed for decades. Forms of transhumanism like this have been well depicted in pop culture in movies like "Star Wars" and "Terminator." Such stories portray human improvement and supplementation. At present, the majority of transhumanist research and development would fall into the

---

[102] Butler, *Bodies that Matter,* 9.

[103] Michael Bess, *Make Way for the Superhumans: How the Science of Bio Enhancement Is Transforming Our World, and How We Need to Deal with It* (London: Icon Books Ltd, 2017), 7.

[104] Alex Hamilton, "Transhumanism: Morphological Freedom Is Individual Liberty," *Medium*, July 30, 2015, https://medium.com/wirehead/transhumanism-morphological-freedom-is-individual-liberty-b51ea31de129.

category of medical research. Elon Musk's *Neuralink* is "currently focused on making medical devices." [105] Similarly, Jakob Schatzer articulates how "transhumanists do not loathe the body" but rather are seeking to improve the standards of the human body without "denying the body" as essential and good.[106] Yet, it is seems as though what begins as medicinal and therapeutic will give way to transformative visions.

The other end of the spectrum is more relevant for the purposes of this study. Popular entertainment has more recently been illustrating this end of the spectrum in shows like Amazon Prime's "Upload," in which consciousness is uploaded after or prior to bodily death, and the computer-generated self enjoys different tiers of heavenly after-life bliss based on one's financial position. This utopian future is still plagued by the wealth-driven elitism endemic in human history.

There is no intention to limit technology to the medicinal, repairing what is broken or breaking; there is a desire to improve and go beyond natural bodily limits in every person. Transhumanists are already dreaming about "ways to leave biological humanity behind."[107] Technological hubris among the evolutionists in the twenty-first century is such that they are already conceiving "bodies, brains, and minds" as "products." [108] This is peak anthropological poiesis.

---

[105] Elon Musk, "Engineering with the Brain," Neuralink, 2020, https://neuralink.com/applications/.

[106] Jacob Shatzer, *Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today's Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 44-45.

[107] Shatzer, 90.

[108] Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, illustrated ed. (New York: Harper, 2017), 275.

Yuval Noah Harari wrote *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* in 2015 and *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* in 2017. He argues that the current tech revolutionary moment in human history has been analyzed with far too small of a timeline. The "process should be understood from a cosmic perspective of billions of years, rather than from a human perspective of millennia."[109] Glitches occur at every point in the divergent-evolutionary process, and glitches will occur in this one, so the outcome possibilities are infinite. The difference in this round of evolutionary process, for Harari, is intelligent design. Natural selection has governed all prior evolutionary development, but now, because of the capacity of the Homo Sapiens, natural selection is giving way, for the first time ever, to the possibility of intelligent design.[110] Thus the title of his second book: *Man is God*.

Bodily biology, being a product of natural selection, is a "shackle" that culture can and is releasing itself from, using technological means.[111] Given a Darwinian anthropological framework, this move is unsurprising. "Darwin dealt the real death blow: by removing teleology from the story of humankind, he eliminated the notion of human exceptionalism."[112] Darwin, in making the theory of intelligent design optional, removed an authoritative teleology or purpose from the Homo Sapiens; if there is no ought, then why not seek to "progress" from the shackle of Sapiens biology? The death of human

---

[109] Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, illustrated ed. (New York: Harper, 2015), 399.

[110] Harari, *Sapiens,* 397.

[111] Harari, *Sapiens,* 409.

[112] Trueman, *Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self,* 194.

exceptionalism and eternality by means of Creator in Darwin simply gives way to a self-created, self-defined, and tech-enabled human exceptionalism and eternality.

What will the next iterations of the technologically liberated Homo Sapiens look like? According to Harari, first, they will look like heathier and stronger versions of humans, a result of the medical side of transhumanism discussed above. They will look like hyper-connected, networked pseudo-humans. Thus, they will not look like humans at all, but will leave the organic realm altogether. Transhumanism will lead to posthumanism, at some point beyond what is understood as humanity, a product. [113] In the minds of the transhumanists, homo sapiens is just one link in the evolutionary chain; something will come next and that transition will likely be facilitated by the technology that the homo sapiens give birth to.

The pursuit of networking human brains together begins with "the attempt to devise a direct two-way brain-computer interface that will allow computers to read the electrical signals of a human brain, simultaneously transmitting signals that the brain can read in turn." [114] Then, just as the internet creates instantaneous inter-computer collaboration, one could link a brain to the internet or link several brains together "thereby creating a sort of Inter-brain-net."[115] This "global brain" that networks together human brains and artificial intelligences is a possibility this century: "90% of field-experts believe this could happen by 2075, 50% by 2040." [116]

---

[113] Shatzer, 41.

[114] Harari, *Sapiens,* 407.

[115] Harari, *Sapiens*, 407.

[116] Shatzer, 95.

The implications of shared-brain processing are something beyond current imaginative capabilities. Harari rightly raises a key question: "What happens to concepts such as the self and gender identity when minds become collective?" [117] The reduction of personhood to electronic, upload-able signals divorces the body from identity. This technology also changes the experience and category of "death." The body experiences a technical failure while the uploaded mind continues ad-infinitum; scientists will work to undo the technical failure while the mind/soul continues unabated, [118] so long as the power never goes out. This capability will not solve humanity's anxiety problem, though. If anything, it will exacerbate it:

> Future superhumans could still die in some war or accident, and nothing could bring them back from the netherworld. However, unlike us mortals, their life would have no expiry date. So long as no bomb shreds them to pieces or no truck runs them over, they could go on living indefinitely. Which will probably make them the most anxious people in history.[119]

If there is no life after death and life could go on indefinitely by means of technological intervention, then at every moment there is more to lose than ever before. If life expectancy is 75 years old and you are 25, then you have 50 years to lose. If life expectancy is 175 years old, then you have 150 years to use. Thus, anxiety skyrockets.

These anxious and uploaded "persons" will not be confined or "located" in any meaningful sense. Like an email, they are here, and they are there with the click of a button. Such "persons" would become the end of the organic-compound life altogether. After nearly four billion years, "life will suddenly break out into the vastness of the

---

[117] Harari, *Sapiens,* 407.

[118] Harari, *Homo Deus*, 22.

[119] Harari, *Homo Deus*, 25.

inorganic realm." [120] This shift will "enable life to finally break out of planet Earth." [121] Even the transhumanists have a "rapture" doctrine.

How accurate are these predictions, and how seriously should they be taken? In 1960, Jacques Ellul estimated that by the year 2000, "Natural reproduction will be forbidden" and thereby formally replaced by a state-sanctioned *in vitro* process. [122] Obviously he presented an overblown hypothesis. Harari's prophesies should not be read as predictions per se, but rather, for the purposes of this study, as prescriptions from the futurist-Darwinist perspective. They help the reader understand the bodily-organic teleology with which culture-making humanists are operating.

Summary of the Fall

The Fall of humanity in Genesis 3 extends in effect and inventive modes of parasitic existence throughout human history. For the purpose of this study, dualistic anti-body trends are key dynamics. These previously mentioned worldviews and movements see the body as, at best, ancillary to personhood and, at worst, a threat to personhood, in that it constrains and limits the bodyless, infinite, and uploadable psyche. Philosopher-Theologian James K. A. Smith, in describing the anthropologies which followed Descartes, described them as ex-carnational in contrast with the Biblical story which

---

[120] Harari, *Sapiens,* 409.

[121] Harari, *Homo Deus,* 45.

[122] Ellul, 432.

emphasizes incarnational.[123] The biblical worldview is pro-body in Creation and in Redemption, signed and signified by the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus.

Redemption

God does not abandon humanity's bodies while saving humanity's souls. Nor does he use ex-carnational means of saving incarnate man. The Word became flesh. The "incarnation of God is proof" that embodied persons remain structurally good, though they be sinful and disordered, and in the image of God even after the Fall.[124] This theology is not newly countercultural. Historian Justin Holcomb argues that the "enfleshment" of God required a positive view of the body that was a stark contrast to the low view of the body in the first century, as it "seemed impossible that anything good, spiritual, pure, and divine should mix with anything evil, ugly, filthy and decaying."[125]

In contrast with Greek thought, just as Adam's body was not incidental to his created purpose, neither was Jesus' body incidental to his purposes in the gospel. Kuyper highlights the centrality of Jesus' body to his mission:

> It was in the body that he arose from the dead, and it was in the body that he ascended into heaven. He did not put off that body at his ascension or even thereafter. He lives in that body. He came to earth in that body. He will return to judge in that body.[126]

---

[123] James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 58.

[124] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 2.292.

[125] Justin S. Holcomb, *Know the Heretics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2014), 55.

[126] Kuyper, *Pro Rege,* Kindle 8179.

This doctrine contrasts sharply with the Hellenisitic heresy of docetism, which taught "Christ's human body was a phantasm, and that his suffering and death were mere appearances."[127] The "form" in which Christ came mattered to the biblical authors,[128] and so it ought to matter as God's people study the history of redemption and work of Jesus on their behalf. God's people follow Jesus in a body surrounded by other bodies who make up the body of Christ: a local, placed, embodied community sent out with a global mission.[129] To healthily inhabit the body is part of the Christian participation in God's restoration of all things.

Restoration

Christians at present live in the clash of ages. Inhabiting the kingdom of sin and death and the kingdom of God, they truly face an already-and-not-yet experience as their members are at war with one another.[130] Commenting on Romans 6:13, Bavinck notes that in the present age Christians ought to see their bodies as "instruments" and "weapons with which we fight in the cause of righteousness."[131] Many translations choose "instruments" over "weapons," but the word is militaristic both in use and etymology.[132]

---

[127] Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), s.v. "Docetism."

[128] Philippians 2:6, John 1:14.

[129] Frost, *Incarnate,* 153.

[130] Romans 7:23.

[131] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 2.292.

[132] S. J. Fitzmyer Joseph A., *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 33, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

The body is not incidental to Adam's call, Christ's call, nor the present day Christian calling.

Such thinking does not underestimate the ongoing effects of sin that remain the person in whom the Spirit of God dwells. Many Christians, in believing their desires fully redeemed, embrace a triumphalist eschatology. Ethicist Richard Hays warns Christians of this naive eschatological impulse and calls Christians to not "equate personal fulfillment with...[bodily] fulfillment... [in the] now."[133] Christians can look forward to the new creation in which the complicated war between sinful and holy desires will be eliminated. Theologian Dan Doriani reminds Christians of this hope. "A proper appetite for food and its pleasure, felt by the stomach (*stomachos*), will remain. But the disorderly cravings of the belly (*koilia*) will end."[134]

Death in the present intermediate state is a sobering picture of reality. When one dies in the midst of the overlap of the ages, the body is "violently torn from the soul by sin." But restorative grace actively works against this divorce to ensure they "will be reunited...in the resurrection."[135] Thus, vision is cast for healthy conservatism as it relates to the body. Kuyper argues that "true conservatism seeks to preserve what is in terms of what it will become in Christ, that is, resurrected from the dead."[136] Sanctification in the present age looks like striving to live out the identity that will be consummated at the

---

[133] Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethic* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2013), Kindle 11172.

[134] Daniel M. Doriani, *The New Man: Becoming a Man After God's Heart* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2015), 214.

[135] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2.292.

[136] Abraham Kuyper, *A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 80.

Second Coming of Jesus and putting to death those aspects of bodily life indicative of the Fall, with its various disorders and maladies.

To rightly live in the overlap of the ages, Christians must be in tune with how the present age is manifesting various aspects of the Fall. Ethicist Mike Bess warns followers of Jesus, "We are headed into a social order whose most salient new feature may well be the systematic modification of human bodies and minds through increasingly powerful means."[137] Inhabiting this elitist, monetized, and hierarchical world faithfully will require Christians to have a robust theology of not only the body but of technology as well.

Theology of Technology

The twenty-first century in the West is a technological society. Oliver O'Donovan writes, "For every problem, we tend to presume there is a technological solution."[138] Technological philosopher Egbert Schuurman adds that a technological society presumes that "modern technology can bring us the perfect humanity and the perfect world."[139] Yuval Harari combines the two, saying, "Death is a technical problem that we can and should solve."[140] Death as a technical problem connects to O'Donovan's condition, and death as something humanity can "solve" connects to Schuurman's condition. To what extent do these judgments line up with the account of technology and its biblical role

---

[137] Bess, 7.

[138] Oliver O'Donovan, *Begotten or Made?: Human Procreation and Medical Technique* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 4.

[139] Egbert Schuurman, *The Gospel and Globalization: Exploring the Religious Roots of a Globalized World*, ed. Michael W. Goheen and Erin Glanville (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2009), 204.

[140] Harari, *Homo Deus,* 22.

within God's creation? To provide a broad but robust analysis, this study will examine technology in light of creation, rebellion, redemption, and restoration.

Creational Unfolding

God placed humanity on the earth and commanded them to subdue and exercise dominion over the earth. The word "dominion" speaks to the authority by which they to accomplish their task — they are agents of the King of Kings. The word "subdue" has to do with the means by which they are to work — in Hebrew the word conjures up images of treading grapes, plowing ground, or kneading and massaging dough.[141] Subdue also would have had sexual connotations, such that humanity is being called to a personal insertion of seed, or impregnation, of the land.[142] To subdue is to apply creative pressure. This aspect speaks to what Kuyper calls humanity's inherent technological aptitude.[143] Placed within the creation are the "infolded seeds of not-yet-actualized possibility"[144] that humanity is to participate in unleashing.

This unfolding what was infolded, according to Augustine, is the primary means by which God presently extends his providence to us. "The works which God produces even now as the ages unfold have their beginning in [the original creation]."[145] From the

---

[141] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 461.

[142] Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, 2 vols.,* study guide ed. (Boston: Brill, 2002), 469.

[143] Kuyper, *Pro Rege,* Kindle 3295.

[144] Alister E. McGrath, *A Fine-Tuned Universe The Quest for God in Science and Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 125.

[145] John Hammond Taylor, *St. Augustine, Vol. 1: The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 23.46.

beginning, God gave humans the goal of technological development, "to unfold and cause to flourish."[146]

To lose sight of the creational dimension of technology is to give technology a divine status: eternality. Author and culture-critic Neil Postman highlights how society tends to see only the newest forms of technological development as "tech" whereas older forms of technology are subconsciously assigned mythical-eternal status. We assume that digital screens are technology because they are new and cars, clocks, and newspapers are not because they are old; we feel like they have always been there.[147] Any human creation that was not originally present in Eden ought to be understood as "technology."

Ecological Development

Theologian Tony Reinke argues that there is no "subdue and dominion" without substantive changes to society. Technology was intended to change "the fundamental social dynamics of how we relate to the world, to one another, and to God."[148] Written language would be developed, first with chisels on stone tablets, then on papyrus, then on scrolls, then in books, and then on screens. Neil Postman observes how each new technological development:

> is not additive; it is ecological. I can explain this best by an analogy. What happens if we place a drop of red dye into a beaker of clear water? Do we have clear water plus a spot of red dye? Obviously not. We have a new

---

[146] Schuurman, 214.

[147] Postman, "Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change," 6.

[148] Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 35.

> coloration to every molecule of water. That is what I mean by ecological change. A new medium does not add something; it changes everything.[149]

Smartphones do not simply join society; they change society. Thus, developing and using new technologies are cultural artifacts; they shape the values, patterns, and assumptions of societies. Innovation does not merely create new things that are isolated from the rest of what exists; rather, each innovation creates culture and cultural ripples that affect the way that people relate with one another and inhabit creation. Thus, theologians have described the command to subdue and have dominion as the cultural mandate. Kuyper beautifully observes how humanity is both similar to and different from the rest of creation in this regard:

> A spider weaves its web century after century with uniformly impeccable accuracy. The ant lives marvelously in its ant colony from generation to generation. The bee gathers honey then as now. But it is not so with man. In his case two things stood at the door. In the first place, there was the development of that which had only been imagined. And second, within that development there was the choice between two possibilities: a development in accordance with God's ordinance, or a development that went against that ordinance.[150]

Kuyper is naming what Al Wolters would later call structure and direction.[151] Development in and of itself is structurally good, but it may or not be directionally holy. Before discussing misdirected aspects of technological development, it is important to consider often overlooked or misunderstood dimensions of technological development.

---

[149] Postman, "Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change," 5.

[150] Kuyper, *Common Grace*, Kindle 4043.

[151] Wolters, Kindle 701.

Epistemological Development

Neil Postman has much to lament concerning modern technologies, but his primary objection concerns the new epistemology where television has become a "command center."[152] One key way that epistemology takes sociological shape has to do with what Leslie Newbigin describes as a society's "plausibility structures." By what standard or process does a culture decide what is possibly or probably true? The answer(s) to these questions are what "largely control our perception of what is the case," and are, for Newbigin, certainly socio-cultural artifacts. He does not argue that the truths themselves are socially produced, merely that how people decide what is "plausible" limits the "freedom of the individual in deciding questions about truth."[153] Humanity's process and ability to evaluate truth is connected to the culture made, in part, by means of the technology it develops.

Postman's category of "television-centric epistemology" and Newbigin's category of "plausibility structures" approximate how technology contributes to "mediums" or "means" of discourse. Postman writes:

> A technology becomes a medium as it employs a particular symbolic code, as it finds its place in a particular social setting, as it insinuates itself into economic and political contexts. A technology, in other words, is merely a machine. A medium is the social and intellectual environment a machine creates.[154]

---

[152] Neil Postman and Andrew Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, Anniversary ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 92.

[153] Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 54.

[154] Postman and Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death,* 97.

How conversations and connections happen matters; form matters[155] and means matter because they simultaneously inhabit and change their environment. Postman argues that the reason the God of the Jews chose to exist "in the Word and through the Word"[156] was because the "author assumed a connection between forms of human communication and the quality of a culture."[157]

Catholic technology philosopher Marshal McLuhan famously said, "The medium is the message." He expands on this principle more explicitly in 1977, saying, "The content isn't the message. The real message is all the secondary effects produced by the services and disservices that the medium demands. All these are the social and psychic changes that the medium causes in the lives of its users."[158] The act of waiting to have the paper delivered in the morning to read the news is itself formative; the act of waiting four months for a response to a handwritten letter delivered on horseback creates cultural and psychological ripples; the act of refreshing Twitter multiple times in an hour to stay in touch with global breaking news shapes both writer and reader.

Under the banner of "creation" and "culture making," Christians must see these developments, in part, as part of God's designed purpose. The ecological-epistemological dimensions of technological development are often lamented, for good reason, but to see them as curses in-and-of-themselves misapplies the Christian doctrine of creation.

---

[155] Philippians 2:6.

[156] John 1:4.

[157] Postman and Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 9.

[158] Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 102.

Nonetheless, Postman observes, "Only those who know nothing of the history of technology believe that a technology is entirely neutral."[159]

Fall

Going back to the scriptures, readers quickly see how Adam and Eve, after rebelling, quickly run to technology for solace. In Genesis 3:7 they manufactured[160] loincloths out of leaves; their craftsmanship ("to make something into something else"[161]) was used as a means of hiding from God. Their son, Cain, according to a speculative Hebrew tradition in Jasher 1:25, used "the iron part of his ploughing instrument" to impale and kill his brother Abel in Genesis 4; a revolutionary farming tool, which was meant to produce life, is quickly turned into an instrument of harm. Then, in Genesis 11, defiant humanity chooses to go their own way and create a city and a tower that would do the opposite of what God had commanded Adam and Eve — make their own names great instead of filling the earth with the image of God. God scatters and disconnects the people for disordered and demonic use of technology. Pastor Jay Kim has noticed how this trend of disconnection for disordered use of technology has continued and is now culminating in the modern era.[162]

---

[159] Postman and Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death,* 97.

[160] Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament,* 890.

[161] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon,* 793.

[162] Jay Y. Kim, *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in the Digital Age* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 85-92.

"The technology that promises to release us from boredom is actually making it worse—making us more prone to seek empty distractions than we have ever been."[163] When real life is happening, the habit of taking phones out and document, document, document is creating billions of people programmed to experience their children with a phone between them. Oliver O'Donovan highlights how a technologically driven society "is incapable of acknowledging the inappropriateness of technical intervention in certain types of activity."[164]

The narrative that technology will save humanity and the world should be running out of steam. Yet, secularized culture continues to trust in gods that have already proven themselves false. Schuurman highlights the futility of the tech-savior: "We are trying to solve these problems by the same means and the same methods that have called them into being in the first place! The solutions turn out to be . . . part of the problem."[165] Humans, rather than having dominion over creation, have given themselves over to being led, shaped, and dominated by the rest of creation. This fruit of the Fall is manifesting in a variety of ways today by means of technology. For the purposes of this study, specific issues related to bodily affect will be discussed under the headline of digitization, a late-stage development of modern technologism.

---

[163] Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), Kindle 1325.

[164] O'Donovan, *Begotten or Made?*, 3.

[165] Schuurman, *The Gospel and Globalization,* 210.

Redemption

God Most High allows himself to become a victim of humanity's inhumane technological schemes. The tree, the great symbol of life (i.e. Psalm 1), becomes the great symbol of death: the wooden cross, a piece of technology designed to shame, torture, and kill. Consider the variety of technological means employed in the murder of the Son of God: he is flogged using a designed whip "made of several pieces of leather with pieces of bone and lead embedded near the ends of the leather strips."[166] With artistic irony, he is crowned and clothed in thorns and wool twisted together, woven, and dyed.[167] Iron was mined and formed into hammers and nails for crucifixion, the most advanced death-technology known to humanity. Crafted to be as shameful and painful as possible, crucifixion enabled the lead executioner to pursue "sadistic ingenuity."[168] Then, as a sign to shame him,[169] a sponge was put in his face to extend his suffering,[170] and a spear was used to verify the death.[171] The Creator was murdered by his creation's creations. The Lord submitted himself to the sinful misdirection of the creation, physically and spiritually.

---

[166] Rodney L. Cooper, *Mark*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2000), 256.

[167] John 19:2.

[168] Jeannine K. Brown and Nicholas Perrin, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 174.

[169] John 19:19.

[170] John 19:29.

[171] John 19:34.

Restoration

At the resurrection of Jesus, the new creation is secured, and God's people are given a foretaste of that new creation in the coming of the Spirit. New creation is not a repristination, restoring something back to its original condition, or a return to Eden, rather, it is a restoration:

> In the terms of the analogy of the teenager who had been sick since babyhood, a return to health at a later stage of development would not entail a return to the stage of physical development that characterized the youth's earlier period of good health. Genuine healing for the youth would be a matter of a healthy progression through adolescence to adulthood. By analogy, salvation in Jesus Christ, conceived in the broad creational sense, means a restoration of culture and society in their present stage of development.[172]

If the goal of history is restoration and not repristination, then technological development is part of both the creation and the new creation. Not only that, but Christians can expect, in some form, existing human technological and cultural developments, the good and pure ones, will be present with us in the new creation. "They will bring into it [New Jerusalem] the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it."[173] So, Christians cannot simply withdraw to avoid the creations of humanity. Instead, Christians need to insist on a biblical view of technology in place of the popular Western view. Schuurman argues that "a new motivation for science and technology is needed... the dominant view... must be replaced with an orientation to the unfolding of creation as

---

[172] Wolters, Kindle 880.

[173] Revelation 21:26-27.

disclosure of its potentials, a historical process that began in a garden and will end in a city."[174]

In learning how to do this, Cal Newport says, society can learn from the Amish. In wisdom, "they start with the things they value most, then work backward to ask whether a given new technology performs more harm than good with respect to these values."[175] This cost-benefit analysis is necessary and ought to supersede the purely economic cost-benefit analysis in the midst of Western optimism about technology. Postman reframes the questions Westerners ought to ask:

> the question, "What will a new technology do?" is no more important than the question, "What will a new technology undo?" Indeed, the latter question is more important, precisely because it is asked so infrequently.[176]

Imagine a society in which these questions ruled the day instead of markets that faithfully follow the demands of sinful humans? Maintaining the creational vision Schuurman casts whilst resisting the liberal tech-messiah story requires discernment on a worldview level and a personal use level. For the purposes of this study, asking a version of Postman's question, "What has technology done and undone as it relates to the human body, in general, and the next generation (Gen Z), in particular?" will give shape to the major sections of content.

---

[174] Schuurman, 208-209.

[175] Cal Newport, *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World* (New York: Penguin LCC US, 2019), 51.

[176] Neil Postman, "Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change," 2.

Digitization and Bodily Effect

In 1964, technological philosopher Jaques Ellul wrote the book, *The Technological Society.* In his work, he described how technology has begun to develop "autonomously in such a way that man has lost all contact with his natural framework."[177] Half a century later, the digitization of technological means has accelerated the phenomenon he observed.

The sociological category of digitization is different from the material category of digital technology. "Digital" has to do with electronics and how to process information; digitization has to do with the psycho-social effects of increased digital technology use -- less to do with "what" and more with "how" digital technology functions within a society and itself creates culture.[178] Digitization is not about volume per se, but identity process, "sense of being," and increased inseparability of the online and the offline senses of self and social existence.[179] For the purposes of this study, the effect of digitization place, personhood, psychological health, and morality will be examined.

Place and Space

In the year 65, Seneca prophetically observed that "to be everywhere is to be nowhere."[180] In the first century, "being everywhere" was more of a mental state than an

---

[177] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson, extensive underlining ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 428.

[178] Paul Gordon Brown, "College Students, Social Media, Digital Identities, and the Digitized Self," *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (Ph.D., Boston College, 2016), 205.

[179] Brown, 205.

[180] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*, trans. Robin Campbell, (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1969), 16.

actual possibility. In the year 2009, “Saturday Night Live” released a digital short comedy entitled, “Threw It On The Ground,” in which one character hands another a cell phone and says, “It’s your mom” to which the other character, with a confused look on his face, replies, “That’s not my Dad; that’s a cell phone.” He then throws the phone on the ground.[181] This anachronistic response to a typical twenty-first century colloquialism illustrates the complicated nature of “being somewhere.” In 1985 Postman discussed how electricity in the services of communication eliminated “the problem of space once and for all.” [182] Was “space” a problem that needed to be solved? A person can now “be on the phone” when they are not “there” at all.

Synchronic communications like phone calls and video calls created questions related to “places in space,” but asynchronous modes of communication have added complicated questions of “places in time.” Cyberspace detaches people “from their social and physical surroundings” and often, consequently, “their responsibilities in the ‘real world.’”[183] Andy Crouch, in his reflective book *The Tech-Wise Family,* writes about the special dimensions of electronic means of communication. “Even at their best, social media, like all media, substitute distant relationships for close ones.”[184] The close becomes far; the far becomes, in an illusory sense, close.

---

[181] Saturday Night Live, *SNL Digital Short: Threw It on the Ground - SNL*, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=RTgBfRTABs4.

[182] Postman and Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death,* 79.

[183] Eun-Mi Paik, “Educational Ministry for the Formation of Self-Identity in the Information Age: From the Wisdom of Feminist and Process Thoughts, *한국기독교신학논총*(Korea Journal of Christian Studies) 42 (December 2005): 238.

[184] Crouch, Kindle 1080.

Ecclesiology and Cyberspace

"Cyberspace" as a category of "location" rather than a means of communication has deeper roots in techno-ecological changes. Trueman, commenting on how ecclesiological practice radically changed once the automobile was normalized, quipped, "Church discipline ended when the car was invented."[185] Mobility dramatically increased with the car, but digitization has created a form of mobility without "going" anywhere. In cyberspace, people are "detached from their social and physical surroundings."[186]

Pastor Nona Jones, who works for Facebook, in her book *From Social Media to Social Ministry,* advocates for the legitimacy of "doing church" in cyberspace in general and on Facebook in particular. "Online church is real church because it's filled with real people,"[187] she writes. Are people online? If in the aforementioned psychologized Hararian or Butlerian sense that locates personhood in the conscience, then yes. Pastor Jay Kim, who does not work for Facebook, argues against Jones' view. Church "does not occur in thin air but always happens on a specific occasion and with particular people in a cultural setting."[188] The centerpiece of the Christian gathering, for Kim, is the communion table, and tables do not exist in cyberspace. "As much as modern technology wants to tell you so, you cannot eat and drink together online."[189] This dichotomy is part

---

[185] Carl R. Trueman, "On Cars, Vows and the Slow Death of the Church," *Reformation21* (blog), March 12, 2012, https://www.reformation21.org/mos/postcards-from-palookaville/on-cars-vows-and-the-slow-death-of-the-church.

[186] Paik, 223-42, 225.

[187] Nona Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry: A Guide to Digital Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 33.

[188] Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching,* 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 26.

[189] Kim, 179.

of the pull and the problem with media: it can only "deliver vicarious experiences."[190] Someone somewhere is doing something real, and pixels reproduce that place in another place, but the viewer is not really "there" at all. Kim emphasizes that worship in the scriptures "explicitly communicates a whole-body participation in reverent response to God"[191] that cannot be reduced to digital means.

Privacy

This "there but not there" phenomena is thought of by many in a positive light. Hara Marano, in her book *Nation of Wimps*, discusses how both parental monitoring of children and peer communication via digital means has destroyed the separateness that was a vital component of psychological development. Kids were able to be away from their parents at school and away from their peers at home. Already in 2007, parents were able to keep "an obsessive eye on their kids" throughout the day, and peers had eternal access to their friends when at home with their parents.[192] Digitized means opened the door to the erasure of privacy and well-bounded existences.

Douglas Murray, in his book *The Madness of Crowds,* discusses the implications of digitized social identities where images, conversations, and memories are on display to those who are both near and far, both known and unknown. At any moment, he observes, "we may be speaking to another person or to millions around the world." This fluid

---

[190] Kristen Harrison, "Scope of Self: Toward a Model of Television's Effects on Self-Complexity in Adolescence," *Communication Theory* 16, no. 2 (2006): 254, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2006.00270.x.

[191] Kim, 37.

[192] Hara Estroff Marano, *A Nation of Wimps: The High Cost of Invasive Parenting* (New York: Crown Archetype, 2008), 11.

presence has drastic implications on how to think about social environments. "The notion of private and public space has eroded."[193]

This ambiguity is hugely problematic, in part, because the nature of digitized communication fosters disproportionately quick self-disclosure. Katie Davis, in her article "Friendship 2.0," argues that this speed of disclosure has a twofold cause. The first is "the perception of reduced nonverbal cues."[194] Nonverbal cues are often negative feedback loops that inhibit candor: what if words spoken cause pain in the hearer or shame in the speaker? Because digitization both insulates from the nonverbal and simultaneously eliminates space, digital communication lowers speech anxiety and is thus a catalyst for hyper-intimacy.

The second cause is "the feeling of being in control." [195] Davis notes how technology makes the mess of human interaction "clean." Texts can be worded and reworded in a way that phone calls and in person conversations cannot. There is risk in "blurting" out unedited words; digital communication makes for edited interactions. Relational work becomes a chess match between constructed identities and thus a catalyst for pseudo-intimacy.

The hyper-self-disclosure in non-private cyberspace is particularly harmful to teens. Lucia O'Sullivan has observed that online communication is "deceptively

---

[193] Murray, 109.

[194] Katie Davis, "Friendship 2.0: Adolescents' Experiences of Belonging and Self-Disclosure Online," *Journal of Adolescence* 35, no. 6 (December 2012): 1527–36, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2012.02.013, 1534.

[195] Davis, 1534.

private"[196] but, in actuality, almost always possibly public, shareable, and monitored by the owners of the digitized mediums. Teens know this, yet, because these technologies "provide immediate gratification, are constantly accessible, (and) are typically quite affordable," they continue to engage.[197]

In his book *Live Not by Lies,* Rod Dreher draws attention to an older generation that grew up under Soviet oppression. These survivors of the USSR are baffled by the willingness of many in the West to disclose the personal information online that fascist states used to secretly mine from their citizens. Dreher writes:

> the willingness of people to disclose deeply personal data about themselves—either actively, on platforms like Facebook, or passively, through online data harvesting—is creating a new kind of person…who cannot imagine why privacy matters at all.[198]

The erasure of space is creating the erasure of privacy, and the general population is okay with it. Postman foresaw this technological socializing phenomena as the fulfillment of the Huxleyan vision of the end of education. People will stop reading and thinking, but society won't care because they'll be so well entertained. "People will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think… What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one."[199] Dreher argues that these hyper-disclosed, entertained, and

---

[196] Lucia F. O'Sullivan, "Linking Online Sexual Activities to Health Outcomes Among Teens," *New Directions for Child & Adolescent Development* 2014, no. 144 (Summer 2014): 37–51, https://doi.org/10.1002/cad.20059, 38.

[197] O'Sullivan, 38.

[198] Rod Dreher, *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents* (New York City: Sentinel, 2020), 71.

[199] Postman and Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death,* 17.

digitized social settings are creating a new type of person altogether: the social media personality.[200]

Person and Personalities

Sociologist Paul Brown, in his article "College Students, Social Media, Digital Identities, and the Digitized Self," discusses how these social media personalities' senses of "self and identity… are far more complex than when they existed in only the physical world."[201] This complication is due to what he labels a "hybridized" sense of self that blends offline and online identities. These online identities often include personas that are "anonymous, pseudo-anonymous, or display varying ties to students' physical world being."[202] These multiple selves or identities are subject to a variety of contextual and relational processes and therefore require "constant maintenance and reconstruction."[203]

Similarly, Eun-Mi Paik observed in the article "Education Ministry for the Formation of Self-Identity in the Information Age," that digitized self-identity is "formed by mutual constitution of real and virtual worlds."[204] This dual constitution creates self-identities and senses of self that are fragmented, unstable, immoral, and anonymous.[205] They are fragmented, because the hybridization process is not seamless; unstable,

---

[200] Dreher, 71.

[201] Brown, 194.

[202] Brown, 220.

[203] Brown, abstract.

[204] Paik, 225.

[205] Paik, 236-237.

because multiple environmental variables are in flux; immoral, because of the rapid forms of self-disclosure working on concert with anonymity; and anonymous, because amendable screen names and technologies like photoshop enable concealment.

Some of these variables are endemic to adolescence and cannot be "blamed" on digital media. Samuel Ehrenreich draws to attention co-construction theory, which "posits that in digital communication, adolescents actively construct content that shapes their social experiences."[206] The opportunities for adolescents to have these 'fragmented, unstable, and immoral' self-identities exist because of supply and demand, to some degree; teens have shaped the environments they desired to exist in. This shaping does not imply that intent and impact are aligned. Ehrenreich writes:

> a large body of research has examined identity exploration via digital communication… Although these digital realms provide opportunities for identity exploration, they can simultaneously undermine consolidating one's identity by allowing adolescents to engage in continuing exploration without committing to an identity.[207]

The inability to ultimately 'consolidate one's identity' is precisely what contributes to eternal experimentation that facilitates an unstable and "fractured sense of self." Ehreinreich also observes how regularly and passively viewing other people's "curated self-presentations on social media could create an unrealistic image that facilitates the engagement of potentially harmful social comparisons." This regular viewing creates a cycle of curation, observing the curated, then re-curating to better contextualize the self.[208]

---

[206] Samuel E. Ehrenreich et al., "How Adolescents Use Text Messaging Through Their High School Years," *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 30, no. 2 (2020): 521–40, https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12541.

[207] Ehrenreich, 524.

[208] Ehrenreich, 535.

This cycling is not limited to viewing self-presentations on social media but is correlated with media conception more broadly. Kristen Harrison, in *The Scope of Self,* writes, "There is very good reason to conclude" that viewing persons and bodies on television in any amount increased the complexity of one's "overall" and "physical self-concept."[209] The hyper-visual culture's effect on self-identity is not limited to various social medias but is connected to the broader visual-digital existence Postman observed and predicted in 1980, in which humans and human thought are reduced to images, and all of life becomes some form of "Show Business."[210]

Social and Parasocial Effect

Chia-Chen Yang and B. Bradford Brown highlight how this digitized self and social formation process should not be seen as exclusively negative. In their research they noticed how curating identities online via social media platforms facilitates a greater degree of self-reflection. This increased self-reflection was "related to lower self-concept clarity" in the short run but was related to "higher self-esteem longitudinally."[211] It might be the case that digitization applies pressure towards self-presentation that facilitates premature self-awareness that disorients adolescents, but it may be ultimately related to a higher view of self.[212] Because adolescence is already a time of insecurity, especially in

---

[209] Harrison, 264.

[210] Postman and Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 24 and 103.

[211] Chia-chen Yang and B. Bradford Brown, "Online Self-Presentation on Facebook and Self Development During the College Transition," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence; New York* 45, no. 2 (February 2016): 402–16, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-015-0385-y, 402.

[212] Yang and Brown, 414.

face-to-face encounters, relational experiences beyond those in-the-flesh interactions online can decrease anxiety.[213] In particular, the reduction of non-verbal cues can facilitate experiences of higher control and lower negative non-verbal feedback.[214] For the purposes of this study, it is worth emphasizing that it is precisely the lack of the Other's body in the room that creates the sense of control and reduces the possibility of negative non-verbal feedback. Obviously, the lack of possibility of positive non-verbal feedback, which is a tremendous source of empathy and connection, is lost along with the negative alternative.

Distance fosters disclosure. Yet, disclosure also fosters the desire to eliminate distance. Paul Gordon Brown in his article, "College Students, Social Media, Digital Identities, and The Digitized Self," noticed how observing and interacting with the lives of others via digital communication means that which is far away creates a social dysphoria that manifests as what is popularly known as FOMO or "fear of missing out."[215] Social anxiety creates mediated communication, mediated communication creates disclosure, and disclosure creates social dysphoria. Social dis-ease is the cause and the effect.

Outside of Western contexts, similar phenomena have been observed. Wei Wang, in the article "Mobile Social Media Use and Self-Identity Among Chinese Adolescents," documented that in China "adolescents' mobile social media use was associated with a higher quality of friendship, which, in turn, contributed to their formation of self-

---

[213] Yang and Brown, 403ff.

[214] Davis, "Friendship 2.0,"1529.

[215] Brown, 215.

identity."[216] Though there was an overall gap in the ability of mobile social media use (MSMU), "the positive effect of MSMU on quality of friendship was stronger among male adolescents than among female adolescents."[217] How do these friendships play out online verses offline?

In Taiwan, researchers have documented possible causes and effects that contribute to digital relationships similar to Davis' observations. Because electronic means are "less rich than face-to-face communication,"[218] the risk of disclosure seems lesser than otherwise. That said, the "less rich" nature of digitized communication inhibits long-term intimate relationships, though it "can be said that during the development period of interpersonal relationships," digitized communications are effective in "forming and maintaining individual friendships" and even aid in "joining peer groups." After a form of intimacy is initially established, digital communication has no significant effect on friendships.[219] Digital means of connection initially catalyze relationships compared to face-to-face interactions, but the faster-formed digital connections are not as likely to progress into fulfilling relationships.

Israeli researchers Gustavo Mesch and Ilan Talmud evaluated the quality between online and offline social relationships. Their research has shown that even self-reported

---

[216] Wei Wang et al., "Mobile Social Media Use and Self-Identity among Chinese Adolescents: The Mediating Effect of Friendship Quality and the Moderating Role of Gender," *Current Psychology: Research and Reviews; New York*, August 2019, 1–9, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-019-00397-5.

[217] Wang et al, 6.

[218] Yueh-Chiang Lee and Ya Chung Sun, "Using Instant Messaging to Enhance the Interpersonal Relationships of Taiwanese Adolescents: Evidence from Quantile Regression Analysis," *Adolescence* 44, no. 173 (Spring 2009): 199–208., 201.

[219] Lee and Sun, 207.

data suggest that friendship origin matters. If a connection began online, it is generally "perceived as less close and supportive" in part because they "are involved in less joint activities and less topics of discussion."[220] Online connections tend toward myopia and a lack of the breadth of spontaneity and small talk that fosters whole-person connection. Mesch and Talmud's research supports the perspective that "ties seem to be weaker, less holistic, and less personal in comparison with offline relations."[221] The 'less holistic' dimension is precisely what enables rapid self-disclosure but simultaneously puts a limit on the bond created. "Less personal" is not necessarily "impersonal," though, it can be.

One unique aspect of digitized personalities is the commonness of "parasocial relationships, wherein an individual develops a one-sided emotional attachment to someone like a media personality or someone they have never met but follow on Instagram or Twitter."[222]

This dynamic is not altogether new – celebrities of various kinds have always existed. It is simply now much more common and is "exacerbated by the affordances of certain social media sites."[223] The degree to which people can now become emotionally attached to someone who, conversely, knows absolutely nothing about them by means of seeing and hearing about the details of their lives is something that was previously

---

[220] Gustavo Mesch and Ilan Talmud, "The Quality of Online and Offline Relationships: The Role of Multiplexity and Duration of Social Relationships," *Information Society* 22, no. 3 (July 2006): 137–48, 137.

[221] Mesch and Talmud, 147.

[222] Katie Davis, Linda Charmaraman, and Emily Weinstein, "Introduction to Special Issue: Adolescent and Emerging Adult Development in an Age of Social Media," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 35, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 3–15, https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558419886392, 7.

[223] Davis, Charmaraman, and Weinstein, 7.

reserved for criminals and stalkers. The effect of digital means of communication on the psycho-social health users is worthy of analysis.

Psychological Health

The effect of digitized communication on psychological health is a preeminent concern for Sarah M. Coyne. In February 202,1 she published the results of a ten-year longitudinal study that examined the link between various types of digital media consumption in adolescence and suicide risk in emerging adulthood, given that suicide risk is the second leading cause of death for people ages 10-34. For both girls and boys, it was not simply usage but "marked increase of usage over time" in adolescence that was a predictor of suicide risk in emerging adulthood. This predictor held true for video games, social media apps, and TV. For boys, screen use was less of an indicator of overall suicide risk, though suicide risk for boys was disproportionately affected even by digital reading apps. Compared to boys, girls saw a marked increase in association with suicide risk with as little as two to three hours per day of social media use, if followed by an increase over time. [224] Two to three hours per day as an indicator of suicidality is significant in that the average screen time per day for teen girls is approximately seven hours.[225]

---

[224] Sarah M. Coyne et al., "Suicide Risk in Emerging Adulthood: Associations with Screen Time over 10 Years," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, February 2, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-020-01389-6.

[225] Victoria Rideout and Michael B. Robb, "The Common Sense Consensus: Media Use by Teens and Tweens" (San Francisco: Common Sense Media, 2019), 23.

Why is digital media so highly associated with negative mental health outcomes? For many, digital communication has become a substitute rather than a supplement[226] and "has led to less in-person social interaction, which then led to unhappiness and depression."[227] The reason has to do with how attachments on the moderate side and addictions on the more severe side have developed with and to the electronic means themselves, leading to an oppressive self-subjugation of tech users.

Attachments and Addictions

Human society dominated by technology has been described as a "technocracy" by Egbert Schuurman, a "technopoly" by Neil Postman, and a "technological society" by Jaques Ellul. They see that the anthropologies which emerge in digital tech-shaped societies reduce humanity "to an object for technological manipulation."[228] This willful submission to the spirit of the age is different from totalitarian regimes of the past, but the fact that "it is to be a dictatorship of test tubes rather than hobnailed boots will not make it any less a dictatorship."[229] Writing in 1964, Jacques Ellul already thought that "man

---

[226] Albert Mohler and Joshua Mitchel, "Identity Politics and the Spirit of the Age: A Conversation with Political Theorist Joshua Mitchel," Thinking In Public, February 24, 2021, podcast transcript, https://albertmohler.com/2021/02/24/joshua-mitchell.

[227] Jean M. Twenge, *IGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy--and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What That Means for the Rest of Us*, reprint ed. (New York: Atria Books, 2018), 114.

[228] Egbert Schuurman, *The Gospel and Globalization: Exploring the Religious Roots of a Globalized World*, ed. Michael W. Goheen and Erin Glanville (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2009), 205.

[229] Ellul, 434.

has lost all contact with his natural framework" because of the power of "autonomously" and rapidly evolving technology.[230]

There has already been discussion on how use is not the problem but only excessive or problematic use. Australian Shari Walsh, in her article "Needing to Connect," argues that technological addictions are a subset of behavioral addictions and that they develop "when people depend on a technological device to produce favourable outcomes."[231] In particular, those dependencies in adolescence surround using "the mobile phone as a form of self-esteem enhancement." Walsh warns that "if young people become reliant on the mobile phone for these positive outcomes [validation and feelings of connection], they may not develop alternate strategies."[232] It is precisely "young people for whom mobile phone use positively reinforces their self-concept and who perceive they are valued by others" who are likely to develop the type of excessive and increasing use that is a predictor of negative outcomes. [233]

This observation is consistent with emerging models of general human emotional attachment and the process by which humans can develop emotional attachments that become "addictions" to non-human entities. Lixiau Huang, Jose Picart, and Douglas Gillian trace forms of emotional attachment across human developmental through adolescence. Their research was groundbreaking because "the major works by attachment

---

[230] Ellul, 428.

[231] Shari P. Walsh, Katherine Marie White, and Ross McD Young, "Needing to Connect: The Effect of Self and Others on Young People's Involvement with Their Mobile Phones," *Australian Journal of Psychology* 62, no. 4 (December 2010): 194–203, https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530903567229, 195.

[232] Walsh, White, and McD Young, 201.

[233] Walsh, White, and McD Young, 201.

researchers have not included nonhuman entities, let alone non-living objects or activities."[234]

Huang, Picart, and Gillan found that "the self-regulating process promotes human attachment to nonhuman entities when those entities are perceived to be congruent with the self (i.e. when they help develop and maintain self-worth or self-concept)."[235] Similarly, humans "develop the sense of relatedness with non-human entities that support their self-concept, autonomy, and competence."[236] Congruence and support are key themes – when humans resonate with or feel validated by inanimate objects they develop connections to them. When incongruence (non-resonance) or non-support (challenge, dissonance) exists, bonds are not similarly formed. What determines one's sense of congruence? The researchers observe that "the degree of control" determines how intimately the object is connected to the inner self.[237] In adolescence, an individual's self-regulating process is focused on enhancing self-esteem, self-efficacy, and the ideal self-identity.[238] If digital technologies prop up the self, validate the self, and enhance the self in a context where there are high degrees of control, then emotional attachment will develop between the person and the object. This is dangerous because, as was previously discussed, increased screen use is highly associated with a plurality of negative outcomes.

---

[234] Lixiao Huang, Jose Picart, and Douglas Gillan, "Toward a Generalized Model of Human Emotional Attachment," *Theoretical Issues in Ergonomics Science*, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1080/1463922X.2020.1790690, 6.

[235] Huang, Picart, and Gillan, 17.

[236] Huang, Picart, and Gillan, 5.

[237] Huang, Picart, and Gillan, 8.

[238] Huang, Picart, and Gillan, 13.

The medium's need for congruence and support, not to mention the algorithms behind the medium, fosters division online. Christopher Baile and his team of researchers documented these divisions in their article "Exposure to Opposing Views on Social Media Can Increase Political Polarization."[239] Many would expect exposure to contrary views to soften one's convictions and foster connection between disagreeing groups, but when that exposure happens across digital means of communication, the opposite happens. Exposure to content not congruent with pre-existing self-concepts is experienced as a threat, whereas if such content is congruent with their pre-existing self-concept, it creates a sort of euphoria. They concluded that society is more polarized and suicidal in the West than it has ever been, and there is growing evidence that encourages us to see social media as, in part, to blame.[240] Digitization creates distance, facilitates social division and dysphoria, and also immorality.

Moral and Ethical Effects

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann prophetically critiqued the digitized cultural situation over forty years ago, saying, "propelled by electronic technology, is one of narcoticized insensibility to human reality."[241] This insensibility comes from multiple variables. First, Eun-Mi Paik connects the "lack [of] of any connection to a particular moral framework" directly to the absence of real bodies in cyberspace, "because a

---

[239] Christopher A. Bail et al., "Exposure to Opposing Views on Social Media Can Increase Political Polarization," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115, no. 37 (September 11, 2018): 9216–21, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1804840115.

[240] Bail et al.

[241] Walter Brueggemann and Davis Hankins, *The Prophetic Imagination,* 40th anniv. ed. (Fortress Press, 2018), Kindle 227.

physical body cannot be identified with the electronic persona."[242] The anonymity and dualism inherently possible online is to immorality what warm milk is to bacteria.

Second, the visual-first nature of digitized mediums like social media, building on the foundation of television, according to Postman, puts "its emphasis on imagery, simultaneity, immediate gratification, and quick emotional response."[243] People looking to connect with others sense this, so they adapt their socialization strategy. One college woman Davis interviewed put it like this: "With social media, you can't put your personality out there so easily, so instead you use your body."[244] The distance from three-dimensional bodies creates a demand for two-dimensional bodies.

Third, the "bodies first" ecology of digital media drifts towards sexualization. "Use your body" has layers of sexuality that do not merely amount to undertones. Lesley-Anne Ey's research, published in the article "The Influence of Music Media on Gender Role and Self-Identity," connected the way women are more obviously and commonly sexualized in music videos and how children understood their own sexual identity. She showed that it is not always the case that exposure to sexualized digital media affects the moral or gendered self-understanding of children.[245] Therefore, viewing sexualized but not explicitly sexual material does not carry the statistically significant effect Christians might predict in children.

---

[242] Paik, 237.

[243] Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 16.

[244] Davis, Charmaraman, and Weinstein, 4.

[245] Lesley-Anne Ey, "The Influence of Music Media on Gender Role and Self-Identity: Perceptions of Children Aged 6 and 10 Years," *Children Australia; Melbourne* 39, no. 3 (September 2014): 147–60, http://dx.doi.org.search.covenantseminary.edu/10.1017/cha.2014.17.

However, there are strong moral outcomes associated with viewing sexually explicit material. Lucia O'Sullivan's research documented that "those who watched more porn tended to report more physical and casual motives for sex (e.g., "to get off") rather than affectionate or relational motives."[246] Distanced and disconnected observation of sexual activities via digital means fosters distanced and disconnected participation in sexual activities. Her research shows that viewing pornography did not affect the range or breadth of category of sexual activity, but it did increase frequency and decrease relationality within that frequency.[247]

Christians Within A Digitized Society

To what extend should these digitizing and dissociative social trends affect the church? Obviously, Christians are not on the same page ethically as their non-Christian counterparts. Sociologist Mark Regnerus, in his work, *The Future of Christian Marriage,* asks this very question: to what extent do broader societal trends affect the ability (or willingness) of Christians to faithfully behave sexually in line with their beliefs? This issue is a concern for Regnerus, because to simply throw away Christian teachings on sexuality is to remove the key factor that gives Christianity its power as a social force.[248]

First, he notes, the gap between belief and behavior is more severe among Christians who attend church infrequently compared with those who attend weekly.[249]

---

[246] O'Sullivan, 42.

[247] O'Sullivan, 42.

[248] Mark Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 198.

[249] Regnerus, 10.

More broadly speaking, there are two school general schools of thought: the "moral communities" theory and the "embattled and thriving" theory. The embattled and thriving theory argues that, amid social disapproval of Christian sexual ethics, an "embattled" identity is created and personal resolve forms. Based on his research among Christians around the globe, Regnerus says "I see no wide evidence to support this optimistic conclusion."[250]

The moral communities theory argues that "any impact of religion on individuals' own personal behavior is felt or experienced more powerfully when that [sexual ethic] is widely practiced." Regnerus concludes that "the weight of evidence" falls on the side of the moral communities theory. Sociologically speaking, Christian sexual behavior, though not necessarily Christian sexual beliefs, is linked to "the future of marriage in general." [251]

Why the inextricable link to marriage? Regnerus connects gender, sexuality, and marriage to what he calls familism, or familialism: "a social structure wherein the family is prioritized over the individual." Contained within this family social structure are "convictions about the reality of sexual difference between men and women, as well as the importance of mothers and fathers."[252] Regnerus connects the decline of familism with the rise of extreme individualism. Regnerus connects the reader to Pope Francis' analysis. "Extreme individualism which weakens family bonds and ends up considering each member of the family as an isolated unit [leads]… to the idea that one's personality

---

[250] Regnerus, 194.

[251] Regnerus,193-195.

[252] Regnerus, 202.

is shaped by his or her desires, which are considered absolute."[253] The absolutizing of desire in the identity formation process cannot be disconnected from the decline of the esteem of marriage in the West, nor can it be disconnected from digitization. Online humans can realize their desires apart from the family systems in which they are embedded.

As Christians consider the dissociative and dualistic effect of digitization on the broader Western culture, recognizing the pull that exists on even the most committed followers of Jesus is crucial. For the purposes of this study, looking closely at the effect of digitization on those that have grown up within an already digitized world, Generation Z, is crucial as the church seeks to care for and equip the next generation.

Generation Z: the iGen

Generation Z (Gen Z) is the name sociologists have given the generation between Millennials and Generation Alpha (those born after 2013).[254] Jean Twenge, in her seminal analysis of this group writes, "Another name suggested for this group is iGen; born in 1995 and later, they grew up with cell phones, had an Instagram page before they started high school, and do not remember a time before the Internet."[255] The title iGen

---

[253] Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia: On Love in the Family* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2016), section 33. As cited by Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, 206.

[254] Twenge, 18.

[255] Twenge, 9.

fits, as they are the first generation to grow up with access to portable digital technology.[256]

As a whole, Gen Z is unlike any previous generation. Over 30 percent of Gen Z identify as some form of LGBTQ.[257] They are less productive and less ambitious than previous generations. In 1980, 70 percent had a summer job, which sank to 43 percent in the 2010s.[258] By virtually every metric from driving to sex to careers, "they are simply taking longer to grow up,"[259] says Twenge.

Nonetheless, researchers describe the preeminent cohort effect as being the marked increase in digital existence over that of prior generations. They are a generation, according to sociologist Anthony Turner, with a bond to the internet.[260] For many adults, smartphones "have become extensions of our bodies."[261] But, for Gen Z, smartphones have been a part of their psycho-social development and therefore their self-concept from the beginning of adolescence. Further research addresses this generation's use of digitized mediums for communication and connection and their various effects.

---

[256] Anthony Turner, "Generation Z: Technology and Social Interest," *The Journal of Individual Psychology* 71, no. 2 (2015): 103–13, https://doi.org/10.1353/jip.2015.0021.

[257] "LGBT Data & Demographics – The Williams Institute," accessed March 3, 2021, https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/visualization/lgbt-stats/?topic=LGBT#demographic.

[258] Twenge, 36.

[259] Twenge, 47.

[260] Turner, "Generation Z."

[261] Matthew Kitchen, "Smartphones Transformed Everything. Now, There's More Disruption to Come.," *Wall Street Journal*, September 9, 2020, https://www.wsj.com/articles/smartphones-transformed-everything-now-theres-more-disruption-to-come-11599681809.

Digital Media Use

The average Gen Zer spends over seven hours per day on a screen, not including work or homework time.[262] They already know this: 60 percent of Gen Z thinks their generation spends too much time on screens.[263] The reasons for this tension are well-documented and, for Jean Twenge, "could not be clearer: teens who spend more time on screen activities are more likely to be unhappy, and those who spend more time on non-screen activities are more likely to be happy."[264] There is a gap between personal device use and public screen use showing that shared/public media experiences are not as detrimental to well-being.[265] Nonetheless, "there's not a single exception: all screen activities are linked to less happiness, and all non-screen activities are linked to more happiness."[266]

The pull to go back to what is commonly known to make oneself unhappy is not new to humanity. Many Gen Zers who run to screens may do so to enable escape from offline difficulty;[267] screen time is proving to be both a cause and an effect. There are "real causes of low self-worth" with long-term psychological consequences that can be avoided by buying into the positive feedback loop from social networking audiences.[268] Yang and Brown argue that there are "specific ways of usage" that do not contribute to

---

[262] Rideout and Robb, "The Common Sense Consensus: Media Use by Teens and Tweens."

[263] "Gen Z Volume 2" (Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute, 2021).

[264] Twenge, 82.

[265] Twenge, 88.

[266] Twenge, 82.

[267] Turner, "Generation Z."

[268] Yang and Brown, 414.

false sense of self-esteem. Users who engage in "broader, deeper, more positive and authentic Facebook self-presentations," in contrast with purely positive and curated messaging, can experience meaningful self-developmental social processes online.[269] This experience constitutes a severe minority, however. The overall research points towards higher clarity of self-concept and well-being with less screen time and higher complexity and dis-ease with increased viewing of digitized mediums.[270] The dynamic creates the question: given the prolificity of their digital existence, is iGen mentally healthy?

Mental Health

The trends on mental health in Generation Z are not positive, and the recent shifts are remarkable. Thirty-one percent more eighth and tenth graders felt lonely in 2015 than in 2011, along with twenty-two percent more twelfth graders.[271] Gen Z boys' depression increased by 21 percent between 2012 and 2015, and girls, who overall spend more time on social media than boys, had an increase of 50 percent —more than twice as much.[272] Fifty-six percent more teens experienced a major depressive episode in 2015 than in 2010.[273] What else changed so drastically in that five-to-ten year window? Smartphone

---

[269] Yang and Brown, 404.

[270] Harrison, 353.

[271] Twenge, 100.

[272] Twenge, 105.

[273] Twenge, 110.

use tripled[274] with upwards of 95 percent of Gen Z having access to smartphones and thus "near constant" access to digital communication media.[275] Jean Twenge sees more than merely correlative association here. "More screen time has led to less in-person social interaction, which then led to unhappiness and depression."[276]

Screen time affects bodies and body image. Digitization fosters physical inactivity, and Gen Z has triple the obesity rates of Gen X.[277] Increased cortisol levels might also be to blame for obesity-related trends, and lack of sleep is associated with increased cortisol hormone, which is associated with fat retention and slowed metabolic processing.[278] Fifty-seven percent more teens were sleep deprived in 2015 than in 1991. Twenge again sees causal, not merely correlative, connection here. "The timing of the increase is suspicious, once again occurring just as most teens began to have smartphones, around 2011 or 2012."[279] So, poor body image is, in part, due to bodies being in poorer shape.

Many might assume that prolific pornography consumption would also implicate body image, but Gen Zers see a different preeminent cause. In the UK, while teenagers

---

[274] "Smartphone Penetration in the US 2010-2021," *Statista*, accessed March 3, 2021, https://www.statista.com/statistics/201183/forecast-of-smartphone-penetration-in-the-us/.

[275] Anderson Monica and Jiang Jingjing, "Teens, Social Media & Technology 2018," *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech* (blog), May 31, 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/.

[276] Twenge, 114.

[277] David Biber, "Attraction to Physical Activity of Generation Z - A Mixed Methodological Approach," *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*, April 1, 2013, https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/27.

[278] R. Leproult et al., "Sleep Loss Results in an Elevation of Cortisol Levels the next Evening," *Sleep* 20, no. 10 (October 1997): 865–70.

[279] Twenge, 116-117.

reported concerns about body image as a result of watching pornography, "many young people felt that the way they viewed their overall body image was more likely the result of the kinds of body images they saw on Instagram."[280]

Relationships

The "fractured identities" described by Ehrenreich as being a result of digitized social process is manifesting in Generation Z. There is real incrongruence between online and offline identities. For example, *PinkNews* reports that eight in ten self-identified transgender Gen Z people, that is, those who identify as a gender incongruent with their bodily sex, Gen Z people "have only come out online and are still closeted in real life."[281] So, only two in ten parents of gender dysphoric children know the extent of their child's angst. For iGeners, online relationships have replaced offline relationships.[282] The number of teens who get together with their friends every day has been cut in half in just fifteen years.[283] In 2015, high schoolers spent 200 percent as much time online as they did in 2006.[284] Conversely, Boomers and Gen-Xers went on 200 percent as many dates in high school as iGen high schoolers do.[285] In 2016, iGen seniors spent 66 percent less time

---

[280] "Porn Survey Reveals Extent of UK Teenagers' Viewing Habits," *The Guardian*, January 31, 2020, http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/jan/31/porn-survey-uk-teenagers-viewing-habits-bbfc.

[281] Lily Wakefield, "Overwhelming Majority of Generation Z Transgender People Remain Closeted and Have Only Come out Online," *PinkNews*, July 1, 2020

[282] Twenge, 80.

[283] Twenge, 76.

[284] Twenge, 56.

[285] Twenge, 26.

at parties than GenX did in 1987.[286] Twenge points out that these shifts are not going well:

> When the first iGeners became high school seniors in 2012 and 2013, satisfaction suddenly plummeted, reaching all-time lows in 2015. So, as teens spent less time with their friends in person and more time on their phones, their life satisfaction dropped with astonishing speed.[287]

As real, physical presence decreases, life satisfaction plummets. Constant "connection" by means of digital media divorced from embodied, located relationships does not improve quality of life.

Gail Aitor, in her article "Why Gen Z Is the Most Connected Generation but Also the Loneliest," draws attention to how COVID-19 highlights this reality. The lack of proximity taught the most connected and yet loneliest generation to realize "the difference between friends and classmates."[288] This loneliness fostered by the empty promises of digitization has created a younger generation that registers "much higher rates of loneliness than older Americans, as well as significantly greater support for socialism. It's as if they aspire to a politics that can replace the community they wish they had."[289] There now exists a generation that longs for meaningful connection by any means necessary. Yet, the most ancient form of connection is not something iGeners are engaging with.

---

[286] Twenge, 74.

[287] Twenge, 98.

[288] Gael Aitor, "Why Gen Z Is the Most Connected Generation but Also the Loneliest," *The San Diego Union Tribune*, July 24, 2020.

[289] Dreher, 31.

Pro-Flesh Doctrines, Anti-Flesh Instincts

The vision for sexuality has rapidly changed in the West. In the past forty years, "sex between young teens (those 16 or younger) became more accepted, with five times as many declaring it 'not wrong at all' in 2016 than in 1986."[290] Yet, finding connection through sexual activity is a massive taboo likened to a contagious virus. There is a fear of relationships that

> has spawned several intriguing slang terms… such as "catching feelings." That's what they call developing an emotional attachment to someone else—an evocative term with its implication that love is a disease one would rather not have.[291]

Avoidance of in-the-flesh encounters that might provide an antidote to the pain of loneliness is not limited to sexuality. Only about one in five iGeners attend church weekly or close to weekly, and only 9 percent of 19-year-old Gen Zers see faith as important to their life and attend church at least monthly.[292]

Joshua Schatzle, in his 2019 dissertation, "Expositing the Scriptures to Digitally Saturated Congregants," proposes that a key area for future research is "the current generation's radical attrition rate." In particular, he draws attention to how digital saturation has transformed humanity in general, but the next generation in particular, into being "less and less a 'conceptual' being and more and more a 'perceiving' one." Mankind "now feels his way rather than thinks his way, in and through the world."[293]

---

[290] Twenge, 207.

[291] Twenge, 218.

[292] "Gen Z Volume 2" (Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute, 2021), 19.

[293] Joshua D. Schatzle, "Expositing the Scriptures in Preaching to Digitally Saturated Congregants," electronic resource (St. Louis, Missouri, Covenant Theological Seminary, 2019), http://covenantlibrary.org/etd/2019/Schatzle Joshua DMin 2019.pdf, 127.

How can the church address digitized neodocetism in the next generation in an environment where show-business epistemology reigns? This is the purpose of the following study: to examine how Christian therapists, neuroscientists, and ethicists describe the impact of digitization on Generation Z's self-understanding of their bodies. In doing so, the therapists and ethicists will give vision to how pastors develop a healthy theology of the human body in their Gen Z congregants in the midst of this show-business epistemological environment.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to examine how Christian therapists and undergraduate professors describe the impact of digitization on Generation Z's self-understanding of their bodies. In doing so, the therapists and professors will establish how pastors can articulate a healthy theology of the human body for their Gen Z congregants. Therefore, a qualitative study was proposed to discover what Christian therapists and professors see happening in Gen Z and recommend best practices to ministerial leaders in this regard.

To examine these areas more closely, the following questions guided the qualitative research:

1. How do Christian therapists and professors describe Gen Z's self-understanding of their bodies?
    a. Gen Z's self-understanding the value of their bodies?
    b. Gen Z's self-understanding the nature of their bodies?
2. How do Christian therapists and professors describe the impact of digitization on Gen Z's views of their bodies?
3. How do Christian therapists and professors advise ministry leaders to minister to Gen Z concerning Gen Z Christians' views of their bodies?

Design of the Study

In order to gain rich, insightful answers to the above questions, a basic qualitative study was conducted. As an applied study, the ultimate goal was to improve the quality of practice among ecclesiological professionals.[294] Sharan B. Merriam, renowned epistemologist and research method expert, in her book *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, says "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed; that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world."[295] The research therefore sought the meaning that Christian experts attributed to digitization's effects on Gen Z.[296] Thus, the ethnographic research to understand how Gen Z individuals relate to themselves, to one another, and to their digitized society[297] was synthesized.

There are four primary characteristics of qualitative research: 1) a focus on process, understanding, and meaning; 2) a researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; 3) an inductive process; and 4) a richly descriptive product.[298] The "richly descriptive product" allowed the discovery process to narrow, laying lenses of analysis of bodily self-understanding in the iGen one over another.[299]

---

[294] Sharan B Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2016), 3.

[295] Merriam , 15.

[296] Merriam, 6.

[297] Merriam, 24.

[298] Merriam, 15.

[299] Merriam, 22.

Participant Sample Selection

This research required participants able to communicate in depth about digitization and Gen Z's understanding of what it means to be embodied. Purposeful sampling was used. "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned."[300] Therefore, the purposeful study sample consisted of a selection of people from the population of Christian therapists, neuroscientists, and ethicists who had published books and articles on at least one of three areas: theology of the body, digitization, or Gen Z or had done extensive time in-clinic with Generation Z.

Participants were chosen to provide variation in professional expertise so that trans-disciplinary analysis was possible. They also varied in gender, race, and denominational affiliation, which provided a spectrum of insight and application. The initial selection of participants represented youth ministers and counselors. The final study was conducted through personal interviews with six Christian experts by means of Zoom. They were invited to participate via an introductory email, followed by a personal phone call. All expressed interest and gave written informed consent to participate. The researcher has met IRB requirements, and the Human Rights Risk Level Assessment is "no risk" according to Seminary IRB guidelines. In addition, after an introductory email in which participants expressed general interest, each participant signed the "Participant Consent Form" below to respect and to protect the human rights of the participants.

---

[300] Merriam, 96

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

I agree to participate in the research which is being conducted by Seth Troutt to investigate Digitization, Neodocetism, and Gen Z for the Doctor of Ministry degree program at Covenant Theological Seminary. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary. I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that they can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, and/or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

1) The purpose of the research is to investigate the insight of therapists, ethicists, and neuroscientists on the impact of digitization on Gen Z's view of their bodies.

2) Potential benefits of the research may include contextual understanding of Gen Z's view of their bodies and best practices for ecclesiological professionals. *Though there are no direct benefits for participants, they may be encouraged by the experience of sharing their insight with an eager listener and learner.*

3) The research process will include interviewing a minimum of six therapists, neuroscientists, and undergraduate professors who will participate in recorded, live interviews that will be analyzed anonymously by means of a constant-comparative method.

4) Participants in this research will be interview for ninety minutes and will discuss various topics related to digitization, Generation Z, and how digitization affects Generation Z's understanding of their bodies.

5) Potential discomforts or stresses: only use of time. Those who cannot be interviewed in person will be interviewed by means of Zoom.

6) Potential risks: Minimal – the Human Rights Risk Level assessment is deemed "No Risk."

7) Any information that I provide will be held in strict confidence. At no time will my name be reported along with my responses. The data gathered for this research is confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent, unless otherwise required by law. Audiotapes or videotapes of interviews will be erased following the completion of the dissertation. By my signature, I am giving informed consent for the use of my responses in this research project.

8) Limits of Privacy: I understand that, by law, the researcher cannot keep information confidential if it involves abuse of a child or vulnerable adult or plans for a person to harm themselves or to hurt someone else.

9) The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the study.

Data Collection

This study utilized semi-structured interviews for primary data gathering. "Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them."[301] The semi-structured interview process allowed "is a mix of more or less structured questions" that allows for the questions to be "more flexibly worded" so that the researcher can draw out how participants define the world in "unique ways."[302]

---

[301] Merriam, 88.

[302] Merriam, 90.

Initial interview protocol categories were derived from the literature, but then a pilot round of interviews was conducted to evaluate the validity and productivity of the classification of data. Ultimately, descriptions were products of the constant-comparative method utilized throughout the interview process.

The researcher interviewed seven experts for ninety minutes each. Prior to each interview, participants were given copies of the goal and purpose of the study and were scheduled by means of email. The researcher recorded video and/or audio copies of the interview by means of Zoom and iPhone app software. Directly after each interview, the researcher wrote field notes with descriptive and reflective observations on the interview time.

The interview protocol contained the following questions:

1. In what context(s) do you interact with Generation Z?
2. How do you see Generation Z understanding their bodies?
3. What developmental affects do you see digitization having on Generation Z?
4. How do you see "digital ministry" or "digital communication" shaping Generation Z's understanding of what it means to be human as an embodied creature?
5. If you could speak to lead pastors, what counsel would you give as it relates to forming Generation Z congregants in a biblical view of their bodies?
6. If you could speak to youth or kids' ministry leaders, what counsel would you give as it relates to forming Generation Z congregants in a biblical view of their bodies?

7. What has COVID-19 taught you about Generation Z, their needs, and how they relate to digital technology and their bodies?

Data Analysis

As soon as possible and always the same day as each meeting, the researcher personally transcribed each interview using computer software to play back the digital recording on a computer and type out each transcript. The software allowed for accuracy of transcription and record keeping. When the interviews and observation notes were fully transcribed into computer files, they were coded and analyzed using the constant-comparison method to routinely analyze the data in between each interview and throughout the interview process. This method "involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences. Data are grouped together on a similar dimension. The dimension is tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category. The overall object of this analysis is to identify patterns in the data."[303]

The analysis focused on locating common theological, anthropological, and practical themes while paying special attention to points of tension or disagreement for deeper analysis. Where discrepancies appeared in later participants, additional follow-up questions were presented. In addition, for the purpose of coding the data, according to neo-calvinist theologies of technology and the human body, presupposed categories of creation, fall, redemption, and final restoration were used.

[303] Merriam, 30.

Researcher Position

"Since the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, data have been filtered through his or her particular theoretical position and biases,"[304] and thus awareness and explanation of the researcher's position is necessary.[305] The researcher is a pastor in a church where approximately 2,000 people from Generation Z attend each week. The researcher, born in 1990, is on the younger end of the Millennial generation, got a smart phone and social media accounts towards the end of adolescence, and thus is partially implicated in some of the discussion at hand. Personal investment will maximize the value of the qualitative study. Personal experience provides the researcher with emotional engagement that will facilitate more rich learning outcomes.[306]

The researcher is a neo-calvinist who grew up in a dispensational church with an otherworldly,[307] platonic vision of the hereafter.[308] The researcher holds that the world is at present structurally good and directionally disordered.[309] He sees this tension in his own use of technology, validated by that theological tension, and thus, the researcher expects to find ways in which digitization positively and negatively affects Generation Z. Though tension exists, the researcher believes the development of the natural world by humans is part of God's design for humanity and therefore is fundamentally good.

---

[304] Merriam, 264.

[305] Merriam, 249.

[306] Merriam, 80.

[307] Michael Williams, *This World Is Not My Home: The Origins and Development of Dispensationalism* (Fearn, U.K.: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 63.

[308] Hans Boersma and Andrew Louth, *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 390.

[309] Wolters, *Creation Regained,* Kindle 701.

Study Limitations

Due to limited resources and time, this study is limited by its sample size and sample scope. People in Generation Z were not interviewed, and further ethnographic research is needed to more concretely analyze this generation's understanding of its bodies. As stated in the previous section, participants were purposefully sampled, and therefore the results are not formally generalizable.[310] Participants were ethnically and denominationally diverse, and therefore some of the findings may extend beyond the researcher's context, though those who desire to appropriate the findings herein should test those findings in their particular contexts. As with all qualitative research of this kind, the reader bears the responsibility to determine what findings can appropriately be applied[311] in part or in full in their ecclesial contexts. Some of the findings may also have implications for general pedagogy.

[310] Merriam, 96.

[311] Merriam, 256.

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this study MISSING INFO.

Interviews were conducted making use of three different means: one video call, three phone calls, and three in-person interviews. The researcher took general notes during the interviews and analyzed recording transcripts after each interview looking for patterns and themes related to the study's three research questions:

1. How do Christian therapists and professors describe Gen Z's self-understanding of their bodies?
    a. Gen Z's self-understanding the value of their bodies?
    b. Gen Z's self-understanding the nature of their bodies?
2. How do Christian therapists and professors describe the impact of digitization on Gen Z's views of their bodies?
3. How do Christian therapists and professors advise ministry leaders to minister to Gen Z concerning Gen Z Christians' views of their bodies?

Introduction of Participants

The researcher selected seven therapists and professors to participate in this study. All names and identifiable participant information have been changed to protect identity. The researcher used purposeful sampling to select participants with strong insight into the

Research Questions while pursuing maximum variation[312] with regards to ethnicity, geography, specialty, and experience of both clinician/professor and clientele.

Participant #1 – Maria

Dr. Maria lives in a small town and teaches Christian Worldview online at one of the largest Christian colleges in the nation. Her research integrated neuroscientific insight with the spiritual-formative process. She has been teaching since the 1980s and pastoring since the 1990s.

Participant #2 - Sally

Sally is a licensed professional counselor and has worked with abused and neglected children for twenty years. Her youngest client at present is 2 years old and the oldest is 78. Her most common client and specialty are teens and children.

Participant #3 - Dan

Dan is a licensed clinical professional counselor with over twenty-five years of clinical experience. In his early years as a clinician, he worked almost exclusively with adolescents, and of late he sees about two Generation Z clients per week.

Participant #4 – Jim

Jim is a licensed professional counselor, an ordained pastor, and a certified sex therapist. About one third of his clientele is in Generation Z.

Participant #5 – Steve

---

[312] Sharan B Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2016), 97.

Steve is licensed associate counselor and ordained pastor. A younger millennial with three years of clinical experience, he works mostly with Gen Z boys.

Participant #6 – Dr. John

Dr. John is an educator with over twenty-five years of classroom experience teaching online and in person. Specializing in theology and worldview, he teaches full-time at a private Christian university while also teaching online courses for a variety of other graduate and undergraduate institutions.

Participant #7 – Craig

Craig is a licensed clinical social worker with over twenty-five years of clinical experience. About 25 percent of his clients have been adolescents.

Bodily Self-Concept

The first research question asked how Christian therapists and professors describe Gen Z's self-understanding of their bodies in relation to their nature and their value. The primary protocol question for this RQ was, "How do you see Generation Z understanding their bodies?" For those participants with decades of experience, questions included, "How do you see Gen Z understanding their bodies in contrast with prior generations?" and "What emerging trends do you see or experience in the counseling room or classroom related to Gen Z's self-concept as it relates to their bodies?"

The researcher noticed that participant answers could be summarized in one word: alienation. In particular, this alienation from their bodies fit into three major categories: alienation in and from family systems, authority, and alienation from self.

Alienation from Family Systems and Authority

When asked about Gen Z's bodily self-concept, participants defaulted to talking about sexual ethics and family systems. Without prompting, they made sense of Gen Z's bodily self-concept in light of their relationships to parents and broader nuclear-reproductive contexts; the realm of discussion drifted away from "self-concept" and towards a more pragmatic orientation. For example, Dr. Maria said, "I see so much brokenness, brokenness, brokenness." When asked to elaborate, she discussed the prevalence of single parent households and the complicated dynamics of the sexual trauma and sexual choices that color her students' sense of self. Pragmatics, sexuality, and family history made for a natural discussion than ontology, psychology, or theology.

Parents Are More Informed, More Afraid, and Less Connected

Steve highlighted the empty promises of the information age. "Growing up, my parents saw my grades four times per year; now the grades and apps are refreshed every hour." Has this made parents more effective? No. The same hyper-input reality that plagues Gen Zers plagues their parents, says Steve. Being overly informed facilitates elevated anxiety levels. Parents are bombarded, scared, and shamed by their digital technology, just like their children. Dr. Maria said, "Parents lacking assurance and commitment to Jesus leads to insecurity, which leads into abdication. Parents are afraid to talk to their kids." Steve highlighted how the cornerstone of parenting is modeling, but what is being modeled is digital over-exposure and fear-based avoidance.

Parents' unwillingness or inability to process their own emotions passes on shame and unnecessary dissonance to children. Sally noted how many therapists are advocating for "parents to not take away kids' phones because it feels like death" to the child and the

parent. Noting her disapproval of this logic, she highlighted the need for parents to overcome their own negative-emotion-avoidant tendencies if they are to effectively love their Gen Zers. Jim observed a similar trend: parents own an unhealthy relationship to their sexuality, genitalia, and/or sexual shame that colors conversations such that, from a young age, children learn that their sexuality is dirty and something they ought to be ashamed of. "Christian parents do not talk about body parts in a way," Jim said, "that communicates that they are beautiful and worthy of respect." Awkwardness in the parents facilitates alienation from the parents.

They Do Not Talk to Their Fathers

Ninety-eight percent of Sally's patients come from Christian households. She said, "I have many clients who say the best part of their week is therapy, because it's the only place where someone listens to them." Craig, in discussing general adolescent malaise, noted that part of what is making the present generation's experience of adolescence more difficult has to do with the fact that many parents "gave up when their children were 13."

John mentioned that, among his students, there is "an awareness of embodiedness and the weakness that comes along with that," in particular as it relates to "pornography and masturbation." He said, "My students understand there is a connection between their eyes and their hearts." However, proactive discipleship does not belong to the parents, but to the administrators, to address and lean into these issues of psycho-sexual development. Christian institutions are administratively, and at the curricula level, compensating for the parental abdication that Dr. Maria discussed. The eagerness of Gen Zers regarding meaningful discussion, where they are drawn out, points further to

parental abdication. Craig said of psycho-sexual development in Generation Z, “They are not talking about these things with their fathers.”

Absence of dialogue in the home teaches that all dissonance ought to be avoided. Steve observed, “Despite life formally getting easier and easier and easier, despite the general lack of what has been historically understood as ‘suffering,’ Gen Z reports substantially more trauma than past generations. All dissonance is interpreted and experienced as suffering.” Sally discussed how this pain-avoidant parenting trend plays out in other arenas. In particular, she mentioned the trend in which teens struggle emotionally at school, so, parents, believing themselves to be loving, pull the kids out of school and home school. She said, “I know it gets hard. I care that it’s hard, but we need to push and move Gen Zers through their emotional obstacles,” rather than simply remove the obstacles. At present, “teens cannot tolerate distress, and parents don’t know how to help them with their bodies once they start to feel out of sorts,” she said. Low tolerance for emotional pain in parents facilitates unhealthy coddling of the adolescent. Similarly, Craig said, “Parents do not know what they are doing.”

Unfulfilled desires are also dissonant experiences; thus, there is an avoidance impulse and an indulgence impulse simultaneously. Craig discussed premature sexual development and sexual activity: “I have moms tell me about their 12-year-old daughters performing oral sex on 14- or 13-year-old boys. This is utterly commonplace across all demographics.” When adolescents do not process through their emotions and desires with their parents, and, when parents implicitly model the “avoid and indulge” cycle, adolescents struggle to delay gratification or manifest grit. The alienation Gen Zers are experiencing only begins with the parents. Dr. Maria said, “We cannot separate the

reality that Gen Z is the most atheistic generation to date from their poor relationships with authorities and parents that is projected onto God."

Alienation from Authorities

Participants also noted how Gen Zers communicate more frequently with their peers than past generations, highlighting their own personal experience of feeling alienated from current adolescents. This alienation has contributed to less communication between generations and authority figures, with a loss of the wisdom that resides therein. John noticed how the tendency to seek out wisdom from authority has substantially subsided even between the Millennials and Generation Z. Craig said:

> I'll have parents who bring kids in, and they'd say, "What happened to Johnny? He changed. He was obedient and cheerful. All of a sudden he is sullen, and he ignores us and doesn't want to take any guidance from us." I say, "No, Johnny didn't change; who he listens to and pays attention to changed."

This peer-dependence does not bode well, because their peers are fools, observed the participants. Craig saw how damaging this reality is: "Kids' self-definition and every horrible distortion imaginable, including their self-esteem, is dependent on their peers. That is devastating." Sally noted how a healthy individuation process in adolescence involves an increase in peers as processing centers, yet, ideally, this is accompanied by an ongoing connection too parents and other wise authorities. There is a lot at stake. Craig observed a trend: "If a boy does not develop a moral compass, a 'true North, by the age of 14, he won't obey [parents or authorities] out of fear anymore, and he'll do whatever he wants." When developing kids depend on other developing kids for wisdom, guidance, and self-triangulation, whilst alienated from authorities, the ability to self-regulate drops

morally and emotionally. Alienation from healthy authority thus contributes to alienation from the Self.

Alienation from Self

The biblical body is united to and can stand for the whole person.[313] Yet, as Jim observed, for Generation Z, there is a 'superficial' scope of the body: it is "all about looks -- in the mirror, perception of the mirror." This reduction of the embodied self to an image divorced from emotions exacerbates the emotion-avoidant tendencies described previously. Sally said, "There is a hard time 'dropping and settling in' to emotions." Because emotions have to do with bodily effect, disassociation from what lies below the surface (superficiality) goes hand-in-hand with disassociation from emotional process. Craig described this phenomenon as a pseudo-borderline personality disorder:

> I'm realizing there is not as much of a person there as there used to be. Almost as though they are developing personality disorder features, like the borderline does not have a sense of self; it is just falling and falling trying to get a hold of something because there isn't enough of an internal structure for self-esteem or confidence or self-talk or anything. They feel empty, they feel cut off, they do not have an internal life of self-reflection, of meditation, of prayer, they don't have a self.

For Craig, this observation lines up with the frenzied and insecure attachment that many Gen Zers have with their bodies. Gen Zers are image-focused and at the same time "don't have a self." They communicate with their peers incredibly frequently, and they "feel cut off." They self-define, and they do not have a sense of self. The typical adolescent process of self-reflection has been replaced with just "trying to get a hold of something." There is insecure attachment to a psychologized, idealized, and superficialized self. When

---

[313] Romans 12:1.

asked, “If you asked your clients what they believe about the nature of their bodies in relation to their self, what would they say?” Sally responded, “They all would probably say, ‘I don’t know.’”

Sally added, “All we presently have is the ‘body positivity,’ which is only about acceptance and doesn’t have much to do with taking care of their body and its needs.” Body positivity on its own does not bring an ontology or a responsibility, just an affirmation: receive it as it is. Body positivity is disconnected from a *telos*, which participants observed contributes to Gen Z’s overall confusion and dismay relating to their embodied selves.

Summary of Gen Z’s Bodily Self-Concept

The single word describing what therapists and professors see in Gen Z’s experience in the body is alienation. They are alienated form themselves, lacking ability to process their emotions with accuracy and proficiency. They are alienated from their parents, which is not atypical of adolescents in general, but, as Craig noticed, “This is the worst it has ever been.” Beyond their parents, they are alienated from wisdom and authority in general, as the structures of homes are increasingly privatized and siloed.

With regards to the value and nature of their bodies, the high degree of alienation does not lend itself to reflection or process. Where there does exist verbalizable thought about value, their bodies exist for others to critique or consume. Where there does exist verbalizable thought about nature, there is either shameful dissonance or agnosticism.

Digitization's Effect on Bodily Self-Concept

The second research question asked how Christian therapists and professors describe the impact of digitization on Gen Z's understanding of and experience in their bodies. The interview protocol included questions such as: "What developmental effects do you see digitization having on Generation Z?" and "How do you see 'digital ministry' or 'digital connection' shaping Generation Z's understanding of what it means to be human as an embodied creature?"

Significantly, Gen Z's bodily affect is inseparable from and the sociological phenomena of digitization. Before being prompted to discuss digital affect, the participants incorporated smartphone use as the preeminent variable in considering Gen Z's self-concept.

The participants shared three major categories of insight connected to bodies and phones. First, they mentioned the benefits. Second, they noted that Gen Z is overstimulated. And third, they explained that Gen Z lives with the pressure of running their own unending public relationships campaign.

Benefits

The participants acknowledged ways that digital technology, smart phones in particular, can be used for good. Such comments were usually a caveat offered on the front end of a manifesto listing the harm facilitated by digital technologies.

Jim and John mentioned particular benefits. Jim mentioned apps for mental health that teach meditation, journaling, apps that help teens process through breakups, and apps that walk teens through the process of quitting pornography. He said about 50 percent of his clients begin adolescence addicted to pornography. John mentioned the human need

for real leisure and entertainment. He discussed apps like Cahoot that can facilitate participation in households and classrooms. He said, “You can use your device to interact meaningfully with others. It doesn’t have to be about being awkward and off on your own.” Jim noted that, for those teens who come from non-supportive or antagonistic households, the ability to connect with and be validated by others while dealing with various depressions and dysphorias can be a tremendous gift.

Both highlighted the need to train teens on how to use smartphones for good and which apps are constructive and destructive. John said, “The phone is a discipleship tool.” He is *a priori* theologically resistant to rejecting a category of technology. Jim, who overall had the most to say in terms of the possible benefits, nonetheless estimated that only 15-20 percent of his clients might use their phones constructively. In contrast, Steve said, “I see close to 0 percent healthy phone use in my clients.”

An Overstimulated Generation

The nervous system was not meant to be activated with the frequency that many Gen Zers presently deal with. This overstimulation is contributing to unhealthy anxious-avoidance, exhaustion, and shortened attention spans.

Anxious Avoidance

Steve observed how the present “go to the phone” impulse connects with some of the five core psychological survival strategies that humans have:

> There is attach, cry, fight, flight, freeze, and collapse. Flight often has to do with numbing behaviors and addictions. That is where these screens come into play. Screens are obviously bad when they are used in flight response; for example, now, at stoplights, Gen Zers have their phones out

> because they can't handle thoughts and feelings about their marriage or their financial situation.

Gen Z's inability to process dissonance well leads to flight or escape behaviors. Phones accomplish neurochemically what addiction in other addictive behaviors does. Sally said, "Why do they go to the phone so fast? Because it immediately helps. That dopamine hit helps you numb out and avoid, and you don't have to connect to your body and your nervous system." Rather than dealing with or sitting in a dissonant emotional state, even if just silence at a traffic stop, knee-jerk phone use leads to disengaging and avoidant patterns.

This is an ex-carnational process; therapists described getting "in your head" and thus "out of your body" as what happens when one goes to their phone as a coping mechanism. Sally said, "You go from an embodied experience to getting up in your head and swipe, laugh, zone out, you get to disengage from your body." Looking at the lives of others, memes, or inflammatory political content is easier than dealing with the real issues as they present themselves.

Boredom feels like suffering when one has been entertained unendingly. When there is constant stimulation, constant dopamine pings, and constant floods of new, algorithmically designed content, silence becomes dysphoric. So, a constant return to the stimuli contributes to an over-functioning nervous system and anxiety. Sally said, "The amount of anxiety has to do with how there is no entrance into 'rest and digest' when you are constantly stimulated. There is 'I'm bored,' and then the phone is immediately pulled up." Boredom, silence, meditation, and physical activity are natural ways the mind and body process and filter information from one's environment.

Steve similarly said, “There are almost unfathomable amounts of input with almost no possible way to output it. Gen Z is incredibly sedentary, which eliminates basic forms of output.” Unprocessed and avoided inputs contribute to chronic anxiety. Chronic anxiety contributes to physical inactivity, which contributes to entertainment needs, which contributes to overstimulation, which contributes to anxiety. It is a cycle.

Developmentally, the implications could be devastating. Sally said, “There is constant stimuli. No calming and setting in with the nervous system. The synapses are always firing. We do not know what is going to happen. This is the first generation that has been constantly stimulated.” Participants pointed to the exhaustion that this sleepless, anxious-avoidant cycle creates in humanity as a whole, but in Gen Zers in particular.

Exhaustion as Overstimulation

One key reality to digitization is the difficult work that meaningful connection mediated by digital technologies requires. While pseudo-intimacy is easy online, participants described being truly attentive and present to someone through programs like FaceTime, Zoom, or Instagram is “exhausting.” Sally observed that it is “so much work to stay engaged in the process and is extra-draining to co-regulate.” Bodily presence facilitates neuroception, the process by which humans “feel felt” by others. Participants explained that people’s bodies experience this in-person presence as “real” connection with another human. Co-regulation has to do with being emotionally connected to another person’s emotional process; without the in-the-room effect of neuroception, that connection takes more work to manifest and still does not manifest as strongly.

Sally limits the scope of her practice when connecting digitally. She said, “There are certain topics and traumas I just won’t talk about on the internet because there is

increased risk associated with tele-heath, because care and regulation are so much worse online." The inhibited connection, in many circumstances, is better than no connection, but connecting digitally is limited and tiring for Gen Zers and therapists alike.

Shortened Attention Spans as Overstimulation

The dopamine hits mentioned by Sally foster addiction or addiction-like behaviors. Steve associated addictions as being about unhealthy prioritization and therefore sees it as helpful to describe social media use and smartphones as addictive. Gen Zers are addicted to checking on the phone in their pocket so they unhealthily prioritize looking at their phones throughout the day. John noted how "big tech" designs phones and apps to be as addictive as possible. John said he likes to ask Gen Zers, "How free is your freedom? How are you subjecting yourself to big tech's manipulation of you?" He continues, "One little emotional hit to another does not make a soul well."

The constant interruption that stems from tech use is contributing to the epidemic of shortening attention spans. Professors are being told by administrators to accommodate these shorter attention spans. Maria said, "I've been told to do more videos rather than assign reading. General appetite and ability to read has decreased. General ability to follow directions has decreased." John lamented this in saying, "Reading is part of what makes us human. The shortened attention spans are destroying our ability to read and think deeply, making us less human." Overstimulation sprouting from multiple screens with multiple sounds going on at the same time in the same room scratches the dopamine itch, but it does not make for deep thinkers or feelers. Sally said, "We must shift in attention span and attention focus. Nothing holds Gen Zers attention in the same way. There is no expectation, like in past generations, that they would sit in front of a radio

and be attentive and still." Depth of focus and processing have been inhibited by dopamine-giving notifications.

A Generation of Public Relations Professionals

Steve used new language that summarizes part of how digitization is shaping Gen Z's bodily self-concept. He said, "They have to be their own PR people. When you are constantly running PR for yourself, there is no space or time for real emotions, there is just self-branding." The individuation process has historically been a time when adolescents become hyper-aware of the perceptions of others, especially their peers. But, with advent of the smartphone and the social media that came along with it, the drive to construct public self-images that earn the approval of a nebulous, global community of other anxious adolescents has grown even more intense.

Constructed Selves

"They do not have a self," Craig said. "Their self is a construct based on stimulation they are receiving from that device." Gen Zers have fabricated, projected, and managed selves. Their bodies are not ensouled or temples; they are, as Steve observed, "the embodiment of their social media posts." The body contains the stuff that creates digital identities. This cycle is unstoppable as long as a preeminent identity-shaper is a self-projection onto the internet. Self-awareness is not possible, says Sally, "unless they have had practices where they really put the phone away, and they have to listen to their bodily cues."

The Approval Binary

Multiple participants observed the increased pressure of needing to fit with their peers at all times and in all places. Smartphones have made it possible for adolescents to instantly know when they are not included, rejected, or don't have the equipment needed for approval. Steve said, "Being an embodied human is being your true self, but now, with the present tech and the speed of the tech, we've gone from your body to being your true self to being your approved self." Gen Z experiences their bodies as lists of digitally approved and digitally unapproved components. This, for Steve, reorients the entire arena of self-concept.

He argues, "The foundation of our self-concept is now rejection verses approval, in verses out." Gen Zers are asking themselves, "What parts of me are socially (i.e. digitally) acceptable and how can I accentuate and project them and which parts of me are socially (i.e. digitally) unacceptable, and how can I hide or reframe them?" This dynamic is not limited to bodies but begins with bodies and bleeds quickly into areas of worldview and emotion.

Branding one's body with a worldview or faith commitment is part of the PR campaign in pursuit of as broad an appeal as possible. Signaling identification with a group, either by putting "it's a relationship not a religion" or "LGBTQ ALLY" in one's bio on a social media account or posting a black square to signal support of Black Lives Matter, for Steve, has everything to do with the chronic, selfish PR campaign Gen Zers are running for themselves. This approved-versus- not-approved dynamic "creates a significant legalistic culture" observed Steve, "in and out of the church." Legalism, which here as to do with strictly staying in line with a group's codes, signals, or image,

reproduces itself because Gen Zers want to remain approved and can do so when the lines are clearly drawn. This approval binary creates "an inability to hold the space" that makes room for grey areas or tension, such as, as Steve observed, "that we are simultaneously sinners and justified… thus, there is a constant perception and fear of rejection" that plagues Gen Z. The desire to connect crossing the fear of rejection facilitates interesting patterns for coping with insecurity related to oversharing.

Oversharing: Emotional Disclosures

Craig shared a shift he has made in his ordinary line of questioning when doing intake with adolescents. He shares:

> This is how bad it is. I don't even ask, "So do you spend time on some social media at night?" Instead I ask, "How many people do you talk to in a month at 3am in the morning that you are trying to talk out of suicide?" I ask how many, how often?

Gen Zers will log into any variety of apps and develop "falsely intimate relationships." Craig said, "The personal disclosures that are made are something that, in my generation, are things that would have taken much longer to occur. They are immediately discussing their family, personal lives, and their sexual preferences." This sharing is born out of an attempt to be seen, to be connected. A Gen Zer will think, "This is going well, I'm making all the right and effective disclosures, I'm putting myself out there," but then "The next thing you know, the other person ghosts them so now they are on some media at 3am talking about how they are suicidal." Craig said:

> This present generation thinks being a good friend is: "This is what you do: you stay on the phone, you stay on the chat, and you talk them out of suicide at 3 in the morning. That is what a good friend is. I will need that at some point, too, because I don't think very highly of myself. Who knows, maybe I'll roll the dice socially, and I'll be suicidal next month."

Gen Zers will make significant bids for connection via digital means, in part, because the absence of neuroception makes for a less intense encounter. This is the richest form of connection that many Gen Zers have had: suicide watch at 3am. This messiah complex contributes to the phone addiction. Steve said, “One teen client I had, which felt representative, described a trauma as not being allowed to have her phone in her room at night.” When parents take away their phones, Gen Zers may experience it as sentencing one of their friends to death.

Adolescents make risky disclosures digitally more easily because they can post something without having to deal with the facial expressions, winces, or feel the awkward silences after the weighty sentence lands. Dr. Maria said, “Sitting with someone face-to-face is more intense than online disclosures.” There is an unhealthy inhibition that digital devices produce. Craig said of sexually but not mentally developed adolescents, “On the outside, they are looking like an adult, and yet, with all the electronic devices, the conversations they are having, what they are doing, what they are engaging in, but psychologically and socially they are children.” Adolescents can parrot what they have seen others do online and what they have experienced in the home, so they might think themselves competent to engage in these adult behaviors, but they still lack the internal infrastructure that facilitates wisdom.

Oversharing: Dick Picks

Letting oneself be seen emotionally is closely related to letting oneself be seen physically. Participants documented the phenomena of “sending nudes” amongst Gen Zers. Craig saw this trend escalate significantly in the last five years. He said, “We have witnessed the erasure of the concept of privacy. Girls will talk about getting dick picks

like it is nothing. The first time I started to hear this, my head almost fell off. This was previously unimaginable." Multiple participants drew attention to how their own daughters had been solicited for nude selfies on multiple occasions or had been on the receiving end of unsolicited dick picks. The breadth of this trend in Gen Z was shocking to all participants. Doug noticed a significant duality, a divorce: "This is pleasure seeking without presence seeking."

Participants noticed this trend highlighting two substantial tensions within the Gen Zers' worldview. First, privacy from parents simultaneously exists alongside the destruction of privacy with peers. And second, absolute bodily insecurity ("don't look at me!") alongside absolute bodily narcissism ("look at me!").

Privacy Dualities

Craig said, "On the one hand you have the emphasis on the body and the perfect male or female shape and thus the shame about not having the perfect body. But at the same time, they are sending pornographic pictures of themselves to each other." Dr. John said, "There is a skewed wall between the private and the public. What is shared is strange. Openly and instantly." It is not that the wall does not exist, but it is that the wall is now skewed and strange; things that were previously private are now public, and things that were public are now private. Craig observes, "On the one hand, kids have more privacy than ever from their parents, and on the other, they have no privacy because their business is just splashed everywhere." Gen Zers talk less to their parents and more to the world than past generations. Home, where things used to be had in common, now exists as a place of privacy. The home is privatized. Craig argues that there has been a "privatization of life in the home – everyone is in their own silos, doing their own thing."

Adolescents will send pictures of their genitalia to one another but will avoid conversations with their parents in the other room. Sexual development manifesting in healthy and unhealthy ways in adolescents is not new, but new technologies, said Craig, make it such that "parents can't put breaks on this as well as they used to." Gen Zers are left to their own devices in making sense of their bodies and how they relate to other bodies.

Bodily Confidence Dualities

Craig said, teens boys will say, "'I want to gain some muscle mass' and then immediately and defensively, 'Yea, but not too much!' What they are saying is "I really want to gain a lot of muscle mass, but I don't want to admit it. There are always one or two of those in my caseload." Multiple participants drew attention to the Adonis Complex, a particular form of body dysmorphia that has to do with a lack of muscle. The Adonis Complex has also been called muscle dysmorphia. Participants noted how the female body dysmorphia that can contribute to anorexia nervosa has been given significant attention in the past, but the recent uptick in boys hating their lack of musculature is significant. Craig observed how "cultural icons of the past – Muhammad Ali, for example, wasn't chiseled to the same degree we see today all over the media. Now everybody on TV and most of the celebrities are shredded." There has been a change in what constitutes "normal."

This change in the constitution of normal, said Sally, has everything to do with the globalizing force of media in general and social media in particular. She observed how the notion of "fitting in" has evolved:

> with social media, people are trying to fit into a global community, a global sense of who I am. There is an entire world of people you are having to consider when answering the question, "What am I supposed to look like." You used to compete with people in your school in the social hierarchy; now you're trying to figure out where you stand with everyone, everywhere.

The individuation used to be inherently local; Steve described it, pre-digitization, as being "incubatory and familial." In a peer group with 100 boys, perhaps five might have "six-pack abs." On a global scale, using a 5 percent ratio, closer to 20,000,000 might have "six-pack abs." If social media algorithms elevate and highlight the persons in that 20,000,000, in contrast with the billions of others, it would be easy to assume "everyone has a six pack." Muhammad Ali would not "fit in" by those metrics.

"Ranking" and "competing" with local, analog persons is also more balanced. Sally noted how one can clearly see strength and struggle when interacting with people nearby, whereas on digital platforms, those struggles are projected onto the platform, curated, and fit into one's brand.

Adolescent boys and girls in particular are being harmed by this image-centric and globalized sense of self. It is leading to a "repudiation of development itself," says Craig. He elaborated:

> Teens do not understand physical development itself, so they judge themselves to be inadequate. This is getting worse because of all the images that are available. Fourteen-year-olds will look at themselves and say, "I will never" – there are a lot of "I will never's." They say, "My shape is wrong. I don't have these assets." They don't understand that pubescence and physical development are on the way. They resign themselves, "This is just the way I am, and other people are just better." They don't understand or care that other kids just develop at different ages. With almost every teen client I see, this type of thinking comes out within five or six weeks. They physically compare themselves to more developed kids and, even more destructively, adults. Decades ago, I'd hear, "I want to be in better shape." Now it is soul-crushing, esteem-destroying feedback because of all the comparisons that are being made between all people all the time.

The goal is not health; it is sexiness, desirability, and reproductive maturity. Bodies are reduced to images that conjure desire. Social media algorithms bombard adolescents with images of persons they ought to desire and desire to look like. Sally said, "Sexualized material has always been around, but now it is eternally at your fingertips. Even if it isn't sexually explicit per se, there is a constant bombardment with sexualized materials" that shapes their sense of self in general and bodily self-concept in particular.

The global-instead-of-local trend affects bodies as well as what adolescents put on their bodies. Sally said, "I hear teen girls say, 'But this is what people wear.' I respond: 'What about the real people in your actual life (school, office, church)?' The feeds and algorithms are selling a version of what is normal that doesn't connect with local, embodied realty." This disconnect confuses Gen Zers. Jim said, "They are living their life in dissonance, and they are searching for constancy, and, for the most part, they are only seeing one path to that: participation." They hate their bodies, but they need their bodies to be desired, so they solicit their bodies with images. Craig said, "I see a bimodal distribution at any time. On the one hand: horrible self-esteem and terrible disgust because they don't have the equipment they want. On the other hand: narcissism. They do not want to be seen, and they must be seen. This duality produces fragility in unmediated social encounters."

Comparison as Thief

Adults are prone to minimizing the power that comparison has over adolescents and developing persons. Improperly processed and internalized comparison, by the self or by others, can have a hold on one's psychology for decades. Chris shared a story about a 33-year-old, successful fitness model he used to counsel who was deeply insecure about

her body. She was so beautiful, he said, that "she would come into the waiting room, and people would just stop talking. Even children and old women would just stop and watch her walk in and walk up to the desk." That beauty was on the outside, but on the inside, said Chris, she was just a nine-year-old girl plagued by the purposefully malicious words of her mother who demeaned her when she misbehaved in elementary school. Her mother would regularly compare her to her cousin who was "prettier than her." This woman had a completely distorted view of herself on the basis of one person's fruitless comparison and destructive opinion, though it was a powerful person, a parent. Craig warned adults:

> This is one of the dangers for youth leaders, when they look out and see these kids who are winsome, attractive, and smart – they project confidence, but on the inside, they are comparing themselves with everyone else. They aren't gonna show it, they aren't gonna show it, they are going project confidence instead, until they break down.

Adults cannot underestimate the cumulative force of comparison and criticism made possible by social media. Multiple participants made clear the real developmental danger that digitized and therefore ubiquitous comparison bodes for Gen Zers who live and die by the sword of the approval of peers on the internet.

Clunky Conversations

When a large part of socialization has taken place by way of digital means, in-person social experiences are anxiety-inducing. The inability to edit or filter in ordinary conversations leaves one feeling exposed. Similarly, the inability to receive communication and then process it alone without being watched is a vulnerable experience for all people, but even more so for the digitally socialized. Sally has seen that "normal conversation isn't as 'flowy.'" She sees this clunkiness as related to how digitization has oriented communication toward self-presentation. "In an Instagram

world, I'm always telling you about me." This interaction contrasts with rich, in-person communication driven by curiosity. Digitally socialized adolescents do not need to be curious because their peers are already making weighty and vulnerable disclosures about themselves online. In person, people tend to need to be more drawn out more because, as Dr. Maria said, "It is more intense." That intensity is experienced as dissonance, which adolescence are being conditioned to avoid.

Each participant highlighted the difficulty that Gen Zers have with sustained eye contact. Eye contact is an intimate and intense experience and does not happen digitally; FaceTime and Zoom calls do not replicate the experience of eye contact. Multiple participants discussed how phones serve as security blankets for dissonant, in-person experiences. Sally mentioned how "teens sit around together and sit on their phones." This scene occurs especially when the opposite sex is present, people with whom they have increased anxiety in conversations. The intensity of in-person conversation is something Gen Zers can barely handle. Craig cautiously, slowly chose his words to emulate how he has to speak with his clients: "I am so cautious. I am so tentative. I move so slowly with such tiny, tiny incremental steps so as not to just bruise the teenage boys lately. They just are destroyed at the slightest touch." Conversational fragility is related to lack of coping skills in general.

Absence of Coping Skills

John has noticed an infant-like separation anxiety they experience when away from their phones, because phones are the primary coping mechanism. Sally said:

> When I ask teenagers about coping skills, the answer is my phone, my phone, my phone. When probed further, sometimes they'll talk about

> friends. Ninety-eight percent of adolescents say their phone is their primary source, and it is always the first thing they say.

Connection with others is a healthy coping mechanism, but adolescents now view their phones as that connection. Sally added, “Almost always what we are seeing is that technology is used to distract, not connect.” This level of distraction has never been so immediately available. Past generations might escape into a newspaper or a book, but “even that required emotional, imaginative engagement” and devoted presence in a way that is not required with screens. Sally said, “We are conditioned by algorithms and phones to escape from dissonant feelings; this certainly has connection to gender, temptation, and sexuality.”

The lack of coping skills contributes to what Steve explained is “clinically called ‘shortsightedness.’ Everything is so quick and fast and instant, there is an inability to make space for emotions and resist the dopamine hits. Ordering on Amazon, swiping right for dating etc. etc.” Healthiness is not reinforced, and patterns are “all about reinforcement,” says Craig. He continued, “Marketers, advertisers, the people who are making money on all of this discovered that they can attach an IV drip and give little dopamine hits whenever there are interactions, a little bit of high, a little dose all the time.” The tech promotes shortsightedness because shortsightedness is profitable.

Multiple participants mentioned how suggesting less tech use to Gen Zers is like suggesting less alcohol to an alcoholic. Craig said, “I’ll ask them, ‘Do you ever just turn it off?’ and they look at me like I’ve lost my mind, like that was the strangest question I’ve heard in a month.” Distancing oneself from tech is unfathomable. It would mean alienation from friends, destructive and shallow though the relationships may be, and alienation from their preeminent source of comfort. Steve said, “Because of the inability

to process emotions and the shortsightedness, there is an inability to make deep, meaningful relationships or rich connections." Participants reported that Gen Z, in spite of being the most technically and digitally connected generation in history, is more isolated and suicidal than past generations.

Craig discussed how high the stakes are on basic conversations for Gen Zers. They regularly say or feel like, "If [this conversation/interaction] doesn't go well, I don't even think I want to live." This is not simply a matter of developmental idealism; it is dangerous. He added:

> They are entering a world that requires a high degree of emotional intimacy, of caution, of boundaries, and they don't know how to regulate it. If they have depression already preexisting or a predisposition because of family history, they are immediately in danger and already vulnerable.

The maturity required to balance the targeted, monetized, and thus addictive trap of digital technologies is absent in adolescents in general and those with underlying comorbidities in their family systems or person histories. Handing these young persons unregulated cell phones is like handing them heroine needles.

Many participants were intentional in confessing their high view of creation and technology as fundamentally good. They also caveated their anecdotes and conclusions as coming from a position of living "with the detritus of this stuff." Yet, throughout the interviews participants overwhelmingly voiced a spirit of grief when they considered the results of what their generation had created and given to Gen Zers. Craig said, "Once a week I say to someone, 'If I could just erase all of this stuff -- text-messaging and cell phones – I'd just erase it.' I deal with the consequences of it up close, and it is horrible. The degree of alienation I see kids have from their parents or communities is unparalleled

in history and is getting worse." Nonetheless, these technologies are not going away, which is why the best practices that emerged from the interviews ought to be considered.

Summary of Digitization's Effect on Bodily Self-Concept

Generation Z is tired and anxious from having to live as their own PR managers. They see their bodies as tools for digital content and are therefore reduced to the embodiments of their social media posts. The bombardment of sexualized, comparative images shapes personal expectations in such a way that Gen Zers repudiate development and loathe their own bodies. This dissonant experience drives them deeper into dopamine-seeking smartphone overuse in such a way that their emotional processes are choked off and disaffected. Gen Zers get "out of their bodies" and "into their heads" in the pursuit of chronic entertainment and approval. The entirety of this effect is summarized well by Doug: "This generation faces a hyper-extension of disconnection between the mind and the body. Ever since the Enlightenment, this has been a problem, but this generation is facing worse than all previous ones."

Recommendations for Ministerial Best Practice

The third research question asked how Christian therapists and professors advise ministry leaders to minister to Gen Z regarding their views of their bodies. Baseline interview protocol included questions like, "If you could speak to lead pastors or youth pastors, what counsel would you give as it relates to forming Generation Z congregants in a biblical view of their bodies?"

Insight offered by participants was broad. First, they considered the costs and benefits of "online church" and advocated strongly for a breadth of in-person

experiences. Participants addressed the need to create device-free, immersive environments, to provide a variety of trainings for both Gen Zers and parents, and, ultimately, to teach a biblical theology of the body in the context of a warm, multigenerational church culture.

Immersive Environments

Online church is a non-immersive experience. Yet, it has the same appeal as social media in that connects to Gen Zers. Jim said, it is "so convenient but so disconnected. It is free, anachronistic, and you can skip over parts you don't like. In particular, you can skip the music and get straight to the sermon." The ability to pick and choose both time and content carries with it a large appeal and broadens the ability to multitask or passively participate. Multiple participants noted the anonymity of digital church as an appeal to those who are socially anxious. Yet, every participant was fundamentally skeptical about the value of online church with regards to moving or transforming people.

John had the most to say about the most effective ways of engaging people online. He discussed what he'd seen as effective when teaching people online. He sends personalized videos to people, he requires students to send video posts to one another, he gives out his cell phone to facilitate synchronic connection, and he gives written feedback with their names. Yet, of online church, he still said, "I doubt how effective we will be in changing people when they are just listening and watching. If we want to treat the church like everything else, then let's make an app for that." He saw a fundamental incongruity between the church's goals and a digital platform's inherent pedagogical bent.

Other participants were even more direct and pessimistic about online church. Doug said, “Digital media could be a doorway to entice into more connection. Creating a ministry through digital ministry should not be a goal.” Sally similarly conceived of a church’s digital presence as, at best, a form of marketing. She said, “The best thing you can do online is tell people to connect offline.” Doug went a step further in encouraging church to follow the path of Christ: “there was the Word before it became flesh, but it did eventually become embodied.”

Whole-Body Worship

Participants regularly connected this embodied presence to the music experience in churches. Steve compared online church to taking vitamin supplements. He said:

> I’m not a huge fan of video therapy for the same reason I’m not a huge fan of video church. Neuroception is the thing you feel when you’re within six feet of someone. When you are in church in person, and you feel the subwoofers, and you hear the imperfections in the EQ of the mic, when you multiply neuroception by hundreds of people, it has a real effect. The in-person church cannot be replaced.

Physiological engagement in worship, which in part could be described as the neuroceptive effect, is substantially hindered or possibly eliminated when one “goes” to church online.

Sally went a step further: it is not just presence in the room, but it is a certain participatory presence in worship gatherings that connects people to God and their bodies. She said:

> more charismatic churches and their whole-body worship practices are teaching things about bodies that our more conservative churches are not teaching or are only teaching in content but not process. Our bodies, not our minds, are the temples of the LORD.

Churches can say the body matters to God, but if the medium is incongruent with the message, congregants may not internalize the message. Maria also highlighted the experiential necessity of in-the-room-music experiences, but she emphasized the corporate nature of the environments. She elaborated, “Music is the best conduit for legitimate experiences with God. This is beyond personal, but something unique happens in the corporate worship experience. This was a primary means designed by God to change us.” Whole-bodied, subwoofer-in-the-chest, corporate experiences animated by the Spirit via music reinforces a biblical view of the body in a digitized age, they said.

Device-Free Environments

The presence of these environments is not all that is needed; participants also pointed to a key absence that churches ought to pursue. Sally said, “My number one recommendation for ministry leaders: at any getaways or camps -- ditch the phones.” When churches take kids away, really take them away.

Craig said, “I’d ask them to meet with parents and explain that our youth program is moving towards a device-free experience. We need to break the kids from the dopamine hit cycles. We need free space; it is crucial. They cannot know who they are and what is important to them in their lives if we can’t get those phones out of their hands. They can’t know. They just can’t know.” Craig made the same point. “I’d have churches really invest in week-long, device free retreats. They don’t want to do it. It’s their drug habit, and you’re taking it away.” Adolescents need to experience their ordinary social anxieties and bodily dysphorias and not have their phones to escape to. Steve said, “We spend more time avoiding triggers with our phones than dealing with our problems. Triggers are good things -- it is an alarm system in our body that is telling us

something important. Interrogating our triggers is the path into self-awareness." Sally concurred, "Unless they have had practices where they really put the phone away and they have to listen to their bodily cues rather than chronically escape, they will not have self-awareness, and they will not see how much their phones truly affect them." On these device-free retreats, Craig said that biblical training on meditation and how to be mindful lets them experience moments as they ought to be experienced. "There are nowhere near enough venues for this stuff," he said. Sally explicitly connected mindfulness to the enjoyment of creation. "We need to teach people to stop, be still, enjoy God in creation."

Multiple therapists noted how the empty promises of their phones will be revealed once real distance from them is achieved. In John's school, he explained, "We've over time changed the culture — phones are not an issue because the embodied experience we deliver is something like what they don't have anywhere else."

Training and Development

Participants emphasized how creating environments that disconnect Gen Zers from smartphones will be most effective, or perhaps will only be effective, when they are reinforced in various ways through training that equips parents and Gen Zers to healthily inhabit non-ecclesial spaces. These trainings ought to include fasting, emotional processing, vocational development, and parenting.

A Spiritual Discipline: Fasting

The majority of the participants highlighted the need for all people to pursue time away from media in general and personal smart phones in particular. Sally said, "The classic spiritual disciplines are being backed up by neuroscientific research. We must

learn to fast from our phones." Craig was more specific in his recommendation, "We need phone-free days, weekly, at home." Participants with children at home all discussed the regular boundaries they put on their phones in the evenings as a nightly detox. Steve said, "The most important parenting and discipleship we do is modeling. Are we modeling healthy boundaries with our electronic devices?" Adults must practice fasting not only for their own sake but for the sake of the Gen Zers who need to see that a limited relationship with technologies is possible. Craig said, "Parents are not limiting their own access to digital media enough."

Emotional Training

A majority of participants exhorted pastors to not speak beyond their expertise and experience regarding emotions. Most pastors, they said, would be wise to bring in trained therapists or counselors to equip their congregants to break the cycle of device overuse by addressing underlying emotional dysfunction. Many recommend grief counseling or at least training in how to grieve for all young people, as the depth and breadth of the brokenness in their lives must be processed, and, the majority of the time, it is not being processed well. Being sinned against is a universal experience and being harassed, abused, and exploited is becoming more common in the digital age.

One therapist said, "My daughter has been solicited for nudes four times. Sometimes from boys at church. You cannot protect them from that, but you can give them the tools to help them facilitate the right responses." Churches can partner with therapists and counselors to give tools that Gen Zers can use when they experience "both little t and big T traumas," as Sally described them. These traumas are "events which trigger the nervous system to go into fight, flight, or freeze response." If they are not

equipped to process their emotions, their phones, or possibly other addictions, will remain their only safety mechanisms, and they will lead discarnate lives. Healthy emotional processing, as Sally said, like "various grounding techniques, root you in a particular place and a particular body. They do the opposite of what digital distractions do." Sitting in and dealing with negative emotions is a vital part of healthy, bodily presence in the midst of a world corrupted by sin.

Parenting Training

Parents need training on how to lead their children to engage with digital technology in healthy ways. Craig said, "Parents hardly know at all what they are doing. They sound whiney, helpless, really whiney and really helpless, and are non-authoritative in their parenting." Parents seem afraid to parent. Steve, also concerned about parental abdication, said, "Parents are refusing to be the regulators, and the kids are unable. For some reason with technology, parents are terrible at being regulators. It must be regulated." Gen Zers are over-prioritizing their devices, and parents are not prepared to be the regulators they need to be. Steve makes strong recommendations to the parents of his clients:

> If you let a teen, who is developmentally still figuring out their identity apart from mom and dad, regulate their own screen time, the empirical evidence is that it is cancer to the teen's development. This is parental shortsightedness. The World Health Organization recommends that children under 5 should be less than an hour per day and that teenagers should have less than three hours per day.

Framing the conversation exclusively in terms of regulation might be overly negative. Craig said that parents can "offer the teens a more compelling way for living their lives"

than sitting on their phones all day. Parents can be "confident about what they are saying and sense that they aren't simply grabbing their phones out of their kids' hands."

The initial experience of boundary setting with phones can be extremely painful for both parents and adolescents. Sally warned:

> Some therapists are advising parents to not take away kids' phones because it feels like death to the child. I just don't agree. It is dramatic and difficult. Kids have to deal with that. Phones will be a part of their life. Helping them put the proper boundaries in place needs to happen. Teens throw full on fits, saying they will kill themselves if you take their phones away. That is a hard spot. When you take them to the mental hospital, do you know what they will do? Take their phone away.

Parents must be prepared to process their own anxiety when they are, in love, causing such dissonance in their children. Sally said, "When your kids do threaten to kill themselves, take them to the mental hospital every time. Kids must learn that threats of suicide are not how we will attempt to have our will be done, nor will they be outright dismissed." Parental training should not begin with teens and digital technology if churches want to raise up children with a healthy relationship with their bodies.

Jim discussed how, far before adolescence, parents accidentally teach their children that their bodies are "dirty" and "negative." He said, "Christians are worse at this than other groups." He sees it manifest all the way into marriage. "When our constant message about sex is 'don't do it,' so many married couples have a hard time even consummating their marriage because they see sexuality as being dirty." Jim added that parents must deal with their own sexual shame and embarrassment if they are going to talk to their kids "the way the Apostle Paul talked about genitals: that they are creation, beautiful, and worthy of respect, to be treated delicately."

Vocational Training

Some participants broadened their perspective on a healthy view of the body to include work and vocation. Maria discussed the command to "subdue and have dominion" in Genesis and how "churches need more training on how to train people for life." Productivity, for Maria, related to bodily health and unproductivity related to a wide variety of mental and emotional problems with it, not always being clear which was the cause, and which was the effect.

Craig lamented how hyper-entertained kids "literally don't have the free time to create and dream and imagine and envision the future." Thus, they have a "very unrealistic ideas about what life is and how careers work. It is fantasy world living." At best, Craig observed, "Many kids are career-driven in order to prove something to their parents…there is not a realistic appraisal of their own capabilities and giftings." Training on how to develop oneself towards vocational productivity is an often overlooked aspect of biblical bodily health.

Warm and Multigenerational Churches

The participants emphasized church culture, not merely church content, as being necessary for developing healthy bodily self-concept in Generation Z. Participants saw this happening in two key ways: an incredible assumption of brokenness combined with patient, curious, and wise mentors.

Grace in Sync with Reality

Generation Z contains and has been parented by persons who are emotionally, ontologically, and spiritually confused. Craig said, in regular preaching:

> Assume that many of your Gen Z congregants have entertained suicide. Assume they have hidden addictions. Assume they are listening to peers far more than they should. Assume there is much more pain, especially in the kids that look put together. Assume there is a degree of alienation with their parents. Assume that their identity is derivative of the attitudes of immature people. If you talk that way, you'll be in sync with reality.

When people in pulpits and pews presume that congregants and guests are suffering, hospitality and gentleness will naturally exude from those who are "connected to God as Father," said Maria. Steve said churches must work to cultivate a "culture of acceptance that puts flesh on and models God's love for sinners and sufferers. Are Gen Zers allowed to be "in" without having it together?" In particular, Steve added, it is often not the preaching that is experienced as non-gracious and pushing people away, but the smaller, culture-setting moments that play out in churches.

> We preach the gospel, but then we also say, "You have to do it our way or you're not for real. If you don't do what we want, then your faith must be in crisis, and 'we'll pray for you." Gen Zers are unable to navigate the cognitive dissonance. "You have God's approval, but if you want our approval you have to ____ in level _____." The way the church makes announcements and pitch next steps is vital to creating gracious culture.

Often, participants noted, Gen Zers are less concerned with whether God accepts them or not than whether the people in the church accept them in their broken, unkept spiritual state. Feeling accepted, being necessarily subjective, is difficult to describe.

Jim noted that many Gen Zers come into churches expecting judgment, shame, and disappointment. If leaders can "develop an air of neutrality" when in-the-flesh disclosures are initially made, Gen Zers will experience hospitality. Connecting with others face-to-face will be intense, emphasized Maria, but this intensity is what broken young people most need: people who will listen to their stories.

Patient, Curious, and Wise Mentors

Circles, tables, and couches are where the worship services eventually take congregants. John argued, “For people to really be transformed, they need to be understood, appreciated, and respected. You can’t microwave that; you can’t do it over Zoom. It takes tremendous time for people really to change. They need redemptive presence for a long time.” Formation in the digital age takes significant analog investment. Participants noted that this need for presence is not new, but it is more countercultural than it has been in the past. Speaking of Gen Zers, Sally said, “You need someone to sit there with you, and feel with you, and hope for you, and love you. Phones do not do this. I know what will happen when I’m on my phone. It will make me feel better right away. But that never delivers long-term.” Gen Z’s peers are on their phones, but it is being with the wiser, older persons who will be present to them as they process that does in fact, deliver long term.

Summary of Ecclesial Recommendations

Gen Z needs training on how to disconnect from their phones and connect with older generations. Similarly, parents of Gen Zers need training on how to disconnect from their phones and connect with their own emotional states if they are to parent children who are present in their bodies. If churches facilitate rich, in-person worship experiences, train up Gen Zers into a vocational vision, and cultivate a hospitable church culture, they will be doing the work of ministry that the next generation most needs.

Summary of Findings

This chapter examined how Christian therapists and professors describe the impact of digitization on Generation Z's self-understanding of their bodies. Participants described how Gen Zers are alienated, confused, obsessed, and paradoxically avoidant in relationship to their bodies and the bodies of others.

The participants also provided vision for how ecclesial leaders could develop a healthy theology of the human body in their Gen Z congregants. They cast vision for rich, fleshy relationships and worship experiences supplemented with emotional, vocational and parental training.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine how Christian therapists and professors describe the impact of digitization on Generation Z's self-understanding of their bodies. In doing so, they provided vision for how pastors can develop a healthy theology of the human body in their Gen Z congregants.

The following questions guided the qualitative research:

4. How do Christian therapists and professors describe Gen Z's self-understanding of their bodies?
    a. Gen Z's self-understanding the value of their bodies?
    b. Gen Z's self-understanding the nature of their bodies?
5. How do Christian therapists and professors describe the impact of digitization on Gen Z's views of their bodies?
6. How do Christian therapists and professors advise ministry leaders to minister to Gen Z concerning Gen Z Christians' views of their bodies?

Summary of the Study and Findings

This study reviewed relevant literature in the areas of theology of the body, theology of technology, Generation Z, and the bodily effect of digitization. Then the study analyzed interview data from seven therapists and professors who work with Generation Z on a regular basis.

The literature review highlighted the centrality of the human body to biblical personhood while tracing the roots of anti-body dualism from its ancient roots in Plato

and Descartes into modern transhumanism and postmodern Queer Theory. Contrary to the dualists, Herman Bavinck said, "The body is not a prison, but a marvelous piece of art from the hand of God Almighty, and just as constitutive for the essence of humanity as the soul." [314] As we look to the future of how humanity will understand their bodies, we must consider Jacques Ellul's "technological imperative,"[315] which views tech-as-progress through a "dictatorship of technology,"[316] and promises liberation via digital media on personal devices.

The literature demonstrates the negative effects on psychosocial development from the overuse and/or disordered use of these devices. The overuse is endemic. Average screen time is seven hours for adolescents, not including homework or school use.[317] This statistic is remarkable considering the WHO recommends less than three hours per day. Suicidality increases markedly when screen time increases past a mere three hours over time.[318] This effect is not simply an occurrence of the "over-promise, under-deliver" phenomena; this is bait-and-switch.

What we are witnessing in the digital, queer, and transhumanist revolution is the possibility and hope of the actualization of Cartesian dualism: "I think therefore I am." The person is reduced to their cognition. Bodies are containers of the person. The

---

[314] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 2.284. Also, Job 10:8-12; Ps. 8; 139:13-17; Eccles 12:2-7; Is. 64:8.

[315] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson, extensive underlining ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 14..

[316] Ellul, 434.

[317] Victoria Rideout and Michael B. Robb, "The Common Sense Consensus: Media Use by Teens and Tweens" (San Francisco: Common Sense Media, 2019).

[318] Sarah M. Coyne et al., "Suicide Risk in Emerging Adulthood: Associations with Screen Time over 10 Years," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, February 2, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-020-01389-6.

cognition is then projected onto a body that is one aspect of an externally constructed identity. The self is first psychologized, then digitized. The Digital-Nicene creed reverberates beyond the Silicon-Mecca: we now look forward to the uploading of our thoughts and to life therein in the world to come. This world is tech-religious, full of rites (attaining a smartphone, upgrading a device) and rituals (notifications, selfies, alarms, calendars, bathroom break texting) into which Generation Z is baptized and formed.

The literature illustrated how understanding Generation Z is impossible apart from understanding digitization. Sociologist Jean Twenge has argued for a renaming the group "iGen" to highlight this reality.[319] They have grown up with a "bond to the internet."[320] The adults in their lives have had smartphones as an extension of their bodies throughout the duration of their development.[321] While being more "connected" to their friends than any previous generation by means of digital technology, adolescents who physically spend time with friends daily has dropped by half in just fifteen years.[322] This decrease occurred before the COVID-19 pandemic.

After conducting the literature review, this question remained: how is this digitized and dualistic reality playing out in Generation Z, and what ought church leaders do about it? If digitization is contributing to an entire generation losing contact with its

---

[319] Jean M. Twenge, *IGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy--and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What That Means for the Rest of Us*, reprint ed. (New York: Atria Books, 2018), 9.

[320] Anthony Turner, "Generation Z: Technology and Social Interest," *The Journal of Individual Psychology* 71, no. 2 (2015): 103–13, https://doi.org/10.1353/jip.2015.0021.

[321] Matthew Kitchen, "Smartphones Transformed Everything. Now, There's More Disruption to Come.," *Wall Street Journal*, September 9, 2020, https://www.wsj.com/articles/smartphones-transformed-everything-now-theres-more-disruption-to-come-11599681809.

[322] Twenge, 76.

natural framework,[323] what ecclesiastical structures, environments, or trainings can equip Generation Z to live in line with creational, bodily reality? Ministry leaders ought to consider broad implications that will shape the contours of general ministry practice and particular means of implementation that, both in process and in content, resist the spirit of the age.

Implications for Ministry Practice

In 2003, Michael Frost argued that the acceptance of an overly developed dualism is one of the primary problems within the evangelical church,[324] and notably, he published this conclusion before the explosion of digitization and social media -- four years before the first iPhone. Church leaders equip the body of Christ for work,[325] teaching obedience to all that God has commanded,[326] and now our context is dualistic, digitized, and disconnected. Generation Z is full of neodocetistic people; they are constructed, fragile, and fragmented persons who appear to one another by means of pixels and not the flesh. They know only how they appear to be, what their projected, digitized, and unstable self is. Thus, as Craig said, their psychologies resemble borderline personality disorder. They lack a concrete sense of self.

Christian leaders aspire to enable Gen Zers to live lives congruent with creational, bodily reality. While queer theory and transhumanism are gaining steam in the dominant

---

[323] Ellul, 428.

[324]Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub., 2003), 18ff.

[325] Ephesians 4:12.

[326] Matthew 28:20.

secular culture, Christian leaders can trace the history of overly developed dualism back to Plato, showing again, there is nothing new under the sun.[327]

The literature review and study strongly pointed out that digitization contributes to overly developed dualistic instincts in Generation Z. These instincts reduce their sense of self to their cognition, promote dissociative instincts with regards to their bodily processes, and dislodge them from their surroundings, all the while fragmenting their sense of self. The findings also addressed the processes that facilitate those outcomes. Considering these disconnected relational and emotional processes can reform and enhance ministerial corrective practices in congregations.

What follows are four broad applications for shaping the totality of ministry practice given current sociological and anthropological currents. Churches need to teach a robust theology of the body, train parents, cultivate compelling countercultures, and train up Gen Zers directly. After some general contours for ministry practice are discussed, suggestions for practical implementation then follow.

Robust Theology of the Body

The preeminent context for what follows is the Sunday pulpit. Without exception, the first thing that research participants mentioned when asked about the body was sexual ethics. This response caused me to reflect on the discourse within the Reformed community related to "theology of the body" and how most, even all, is related to sexuality. The research highlighted that evangelicals need to broaden their discourse surrounding their bodily theologies because limiting discussions of the body to sexuality

---

[327] Ecclesiastes 1:9.

alone is to buy into the sexualizing of the self that began with Freud and is being exacerbated by digital media. Five categories consitute a robust theology of the body.

1. Teach the "uncomfortable" texts.

There is a plurality of texts in the Old and New Testaments that speaks graphically about bodily reality. Topics such as ejaculation,[328] penis size,[329] menstruation,[330] and coitus[331] are not off the table for the biblical authors. Either every word of scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching and training in righteousness or not.[332] If church leaders avoid these texts, what will form the worldviews of their listeners? When church leaders blush and squirm when discussing bodies and bodily functions, they reinforce the idea that bodies are shameful and undesirable, creating rich soil for dualistic instincts while reinforcing Butlerian "biology-as-oppressive" schools of thought.[333]

With regards to sexuality, fundamentalists squirm at the idea of pleasure, and progressives remain skeptical regarding the inherent connection of sex and procreation. Evangelicals must teach both realities. The triune God, the only being who possesses aseity, creates life out of love. So also, the martial act of love was designed to create life. God designed procreation to happen via many astonishing mechanisms, but he chose that

---

[328] Leviticus 15:16.

[329] Ezekiel 23:20.

[330] Leviticus 15:19.

[331] 1 Corinthians 7:3.

[332] 2 Timothy 3:16.

[333] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2011), 5.

humanity reproduce itself in a manner that images him. The pleasing, connecting, and climactic sex act is the divinely ordained means of further filling the earth with the *imago dei*. This covenantal, intimate process is not a contest or a performance to be recounted in locker rooms or paraded about as evidence of masculinity or femininity. Neither should the pursuit of creational pleasures, including but certainly not limited to sexuality, be seen inherently as acts or desires of "the sinful flesh." To imply all desire is lust and all pleasure is worldliness is to perpetuate the gnostic heresies.

Sex it not merely pleasing; it is procreative. In a culture that increasingly sees fatherhood and motherhood as purely optional, Christians see parenthood as the normative pattern set by God in creation. There are and ought to be exceptions to the norms; Christians must preserve and uphold vocations of singleness and childlessness for varieties of reasons. Nonetheless, creational norms must be upheld. A biblical view of the body resists the "opt-in" culture that reduces children to commodities in favor of an "opt-out" culture in which children are seen as blessings, not curses or interruptions. This perspective unfolds with biological and theological congruence. The further the telos of bodily processes are divorced from bodily processes, the more the telos of the body itself will be dismissed and undermined.

2. Teach about Docetism and Neodocetism.

Church leaders are to equip the body to not be taken captive by worldly philosophies relying on human tradition and the spirits of the age.[334] Pulpits, tables, and lecterns ought to highlight the history and influence of overly developed dualism. In the

[334] Colossians 2:8.

way of Christ, leaders ought to say, "You have heard it by cultural prophet Lady Gaga that hearts and minds matter more than bodies, but Jesus says unto you that this is not true!" Similarly, leaders ought to expose the false messiah of digital technology, latent and explicit, in the Musks, Bezoses, and Gates of our day who are laying the foundation for their idealized, uploaded, transhumanist civilization. These visions are incompatible with the biblical telos for both humanity and technology.

3. Teach about the cultural mandate.

Church leaders must broaden their discussions related to theology of the body to include vocation and non-procreative production. To subdue and exercise dominion and "extend the boundaries of the garden"[335] through the "exercise of physical power"[336] is bound up with the procreative dimension of the creation mandate.[337] Rather than critiquing the liberal story and then leaving a vacuum, church leaders must impart "a new motivation for science and technology... an orientation to the unfolding of creation as disclosure of its potentials, a historical process that began in a garden and will end in a city."[338] That is truly ambitious! Craig and Maria noticed how the lack of vocational vision and development contributes to bodily malaise. Especially in adolescence, a positive vision for how God can work through the body to subdue the earth is dignifying.

---

[335] G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, ed. D. A.Editor Carson, vol. 17, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; Apollos, 2004), 81-82.

[336] Abraham Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, ed. John H. Kok, 1st ed. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Kindle 2444.

[337] Genesis 1:26.

[338] Egbert Schuurman, *The Gospel and Globalization: Exploring the Religious Roots of a Globalized World*, ed. Michael W. Goheen and Erin Glanville (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2009), 208-9.

4. Teach about emotions.

The literature and the participants highlighted how digital device overuse often triggers flight responses to painful or negative emotional stimuli. Rather than processing, sitting in, or dealing with the difficult and uncomfortable emotion, the phone offers an escape with a pleasant dopamine hit. Sally described the experience as "getting out of your body." This body-avoidant device overuse must be addressed by putting emotions, both painful and pleasant, in the context of the biblical story. Why did God create us with embodied, emotional processes in the first place? Emotions cannot be sin, because Jesus experienced emotions in the flesh.[339] Negative emotions are holy emanations coming from lament for a suffering and disordered world. A Buddhist-like extinguishing of desire through ending attachments is not the incarnational vision in the scriptures. Going through life experiencing highs and lows is Davidic, Pauline, and, most importantly, Christlike. When the accepted expectation is for only positive emotions, then the means will justify the ends when it comes to eliminating tense, dissonant, or painful emotions.

5. Teach about eschatology.

Creational life in the already-and-not-yet is ontologically, not just psychologically, tense. The body is good, and the body is broken. The biblical doctrine of sin and its cosmic implications account for the full variety of exciting and disappointing experiences of life in the body. Overly positive views of the body relate with over-realized eschatologies, and overly negative views of the body relate simultaneously to gnostic dualism and under-realized conceptions of the kingdom in the current moment in

[339] John 11:35, Matthew 9:36.

world history. Healthy eschatological doctrine will not minimize tension, but it will enable congregants to feel sane and be sober as they live as saints, sinners, and sufferers.

Train Parents and Guardians

Resisting the spirit of the age in Generation Z begins with the adults. Clergy and parents must own the ways they have been co-opted by digitation and have adopted neodocetic instincts and escapist tendencies. We are inviting the next generation to follow us as we follow Jesus; therefore, we must follow him. While the literature review brought out issues only related to parenting with regards to privacy, each participant, without prompt, discussed parenting and implications of parental health on the adolescent's bodily self-concept. A key theme was the alienation that Gen Zers experience with regards to their parents. I should not have been surprised at the strength of the association, but I was. Parents and guardians are immeasurably powerful in the development of bodily self-concept. Rather than outsourcing sexual and anatomical education to the state, Christian parents and guardians must take responsibility to address these issues with their children. Rather than outsourcing parenting development to hospitals, daycares, and Instagram influencers, churches must disciple parents. Below are three recommendations to consider when training parents.

1. Train parents to be healthy themselves.

I cannot go to a park or coffee shop without seeing a parent paying more attention to their phone than their children. Much of the obsession regarding adolescents and their phones is misplaced; they are the identified patients embedded in systems of dysfunction. Parents cannot expect to parent their children beyond their own boundaries and

purposeful relationship with technology. Can parents be present in creational life without digital distractions? Can parents put their phones to sleep at 7 p.m. without suffering from a fear of missing out? Can parents resist the social pressures of oversharing and hyper-documenting their own lives and the lives of their children? Parents tend to be overly concerned about their children when it comes to technology and under-concerned with themselves when it comes to tech use. Church leaders must reorient parents to look in their mirrors first and magnifying glasses second. Healthy parents have a better shot at rearing healthy kids than non-healthy parents.

Many parents dread the day when they will have "the talk" with their children. Their own awkwardness surrounding the topic teaches adolescents and kids that sex and sex organs are shameful. Jim discussed how, even from a young age, parenting discomfort with their own sexuality and their children's sexuality damages their developing sense of connection to their bodies. Paul taught that our non-public parts of the body are honorable and beautiful.[340] Until parents repent and align their bodily self-concept with a biblical bodily self-concept, their squeamishness will reinforce a Cartesian worldview that pushes bodily reality into the shameful shadows.

Multiple participants drew attention to parents' inability or unwillingness to regulate the digital device use of their adolescents. The parents give up, give in, and then outsource their parenting to Big Tech. The inability of parents to handle their own anxiety in the presence of their teen's heightened emotionality contributes to this dynamic. When the parent is in an elevated, anxious, or unregulated state, making wise decisions for the wellbeing of the adolescent is difficult, especially when the adolescent is

---

[340] 1 Corinthians 12:23.

the immediate cause of the disorientation. Thinking soberly about and during a teen's tantrums and threats is critical to parenting, but parents are inhibited from doing this if they cannot properly manage their own emotional lives.

2. Train parents to be regulators.

Church leaders ought to educate parents on developmentally appropriate use of digital devices for adolescents. Programs like Bark, which Sally mentioned, can regulate screen time and screen content the same as how parents and guardians regulate seat belts, alcohol consumption, or other addictive and destructive behaviors. Normalizing parents-as-tech-regulators, especially in early adolescence, is vital to psychosocial development. Discerning age-appropriate media consumption is a communal process that ought to be informed by clinical research. Churches can learn from organizations like "Wait Until 8th" which promotes connecting parents who support one another in their pledge to not get their child a smart phone until eighth grade. Clinical education and cohort-model support systems will be critical to healthy digital-boundary setting.

3. Train parents to engage in earthy, device-free life with their children.

Time spent enjoying bodily life with children is irreplaceable. As children age, the physicality of the on-the-floor toddler playing should not simply go away but ought to be replaced by other more mature forms of physical play and relationship that facilitate affectionate bodily connection with children. Things like team sports, hiking, pottery, affectionate hugs, or hands-on home projects maintain creational, bodily connection in a constantly digitized and outsourced world. One of the participants, Dr. Maria, discussed how activities like this are easier in towns with more green spaces, but bodily enjoyment

of creation in community is vital to the cultivation of a biblical body self-concept, she said. If parents and guardians do not teach Gen Zers to enjoy their bodies in healthy ways, they will learn to enjoy their bodies in unhealthy ways.

Cultivate Compelling Countercultures

In the literature review, Mark Regnerus' research noted the gap between theology and obedience as more severe among Christians who attend church infrequently and are not immersed in a Christian community resistant to the spirit of the age.[341] Craig and John argued that it is the responsibility of church leaders and parents to offer a "more compelling" way to live than the idolatrous majority culture that bows to tech-as-messiah. J.H. Bavinck said, "Culture is religion made visible; it is religion actualized in the innumerable relations of daily life."[342] In the midst of a dualistic culture that flinches to reduce humans to psychological process, actualizing beliefs into compelling countercultures is critical to both witness and discipleship. The following are implications for youth ministries and worship gatherings.

1. Cultivate bodily participation in worship.

Our bodies are temples, not merely our minds.[343] Similarly, in worship we offer our bodies, our whole person, not merely our minds.[344] Multiple participants noted the

---

[341] Mark Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 194.

[342] J. H. Bavinck, *Introduction To The Science of Missions* (Nutley, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 1960), 173.

[343] 1 Corinthians 6:19.

[344] Romans 12:1.

physicality of the worship experience as reinforcing a bodily self-concept congruent with scripture. Steve discussed how the neuroceptive connection emanates all-the-more-strongly when in the presence of a large crowd and how "feeling the subwoofer in one's chest" contributes to the embodied and formative power of the gathering. Sally noted how the charismatic traditions emphasize, explicitly or implicitly, movement in worship. The scriptures exhort God's people to raise hands, dance, kneel, sing, greet, shout, and weep -- all examples of things we do with our bodies. Worship is not limited to the Sunday gathering, but it begins there; training congregants to worship in the assembly with their bodies is critical to the formation of healthy bodily self-conception.

2. Cultivate communal practices of monastic withdrawal from Big Tech.

Many participants discussed monastic-like spiritual disciplines for withdrawing from digital devices. Daily, weekly, and annual rhythms to disconnect from the devices designed to foster addiction is necessary to maintain sobriety. Regularly breaking habits for using attention-destroying, body-escaping tech-addictions is crucial to our faith in the Digital Age. Daily, digital devices should "go to bed" an hour before humans do. Weekly, there should be Sabbatarian instincts developed around resting from our personal devices for 18 to 24 hours. Annually, multiple day- or weeklong fasts from the digitized world should be carved into the calendar. The higher the cost, the higher the benefit to spiritual and psychosocial well-being.

3. Cultivate environments of intergenerational curiosity and vulnerability.

One of the problems digitization creates is an echo chamber, in which, for the purposes of this study, foolish adolescents are listening to other adolescents to the

exclusion of other generations. Rather than throwing up hands and lamenting "kids these days," adults in the church, not just the parents and guardians, ought to build relationships with adolescents in which the adult supplies vulnerability and curiosity first. In an age of curated, digitized identities, real, grace-empowered vulnerability is rare. These multigenerational connections will work only if the adults are truly curious and are not using their curiosity to earn the right to pontificate. Connection to preceding generations brings wisdom and perspective to life's trials and temptations, which are simply manifesting differently in Generation Z. Adolescents connecting other parents and/or aging believers can dislodge the body-as-commodity-to-consume narrative that covers our cultural moment with malaise.

4. Cultivate communities where lament is meaningfully and regularly practiced.

Inability to process pain is a large part of what drives device overuse. Much of the whining on social media is the product of adolescents not knowing how to handle suffering or believing that their suffering makes them special, as though suffering has not been endemic since Genesis 3. The Psalms of disorientation and lament, along with other Old Testament texts, take to the sovereign one their disappointment, difficulty, and despair. Communities that encourage only positivity are simply not biblical; if the church does not become a place where suffering can be wept over and lamented, then adolescents will continue to flock to social media in search of reprieve.

5. Cultivate spaces that model healthy tech use, not simplistic avoidance.

Dr. John discussed the necessity of using devices for redemptive purposes such as discipleship and rich, connecting leisure. Other participants gave nod to the possibility of

healthy tech use, though the overwhelming majority of the adolescents they work with are unable to use the technology in healthy ways. Constant, distracted meme-watching entertainment is not redemptive leisure, but limited, purposeful gaming with friends and family can be. Celebrating the real blessings of digital devices lets us enjoy the beauty and goodness of God's creation. Especially for those Gen Zers who come from terrible family systems, devices may be lifelines to connect with loving adults. Communities that can handle and discuss the tension of the Wolterian categories of "structurally good" and "directionally disordered" as they apply to digitized media will enable Gen Zers to live in creational reality.

Directly Train Gen Zers

So far, recommended practices for church leaders have not directly addressed how to address congregants from Generation Z. This sequence is on purpose; adolescents are followers by godly design. What follows could be given to Generation Z congregants by parents, youth workers, or other ecclesial leaders. The recommended context for disseminating the training below is homes and youth groups.

1. Expose the folly of youthfulness.

Craig discussed how one of his intake questions asks Gen Zers, "In a month, how many of your friends do you talk out of committing suicide around 3am?" Gen Zers must see themselves not as the answer to their friends' problems. Sober recognition of the folly of youth will enable them to disconnect from their devices without feeling like they are sentencing their friends to suicide in the wee hours of the morning. Saying that adolescents are foolish is not to shame particular Gen Zers but to acknowledge that

wisdom comes with age. The expectation to project an adult-like identity by virtue of overexposure to adult themes and realities on the internet robs them of the process of psychological development.

The Apostle Paul is okay with children acting like children;[345] counseling other adolescents through mental health struggles is not a responsibility for childhood. Gen Zers need to allow themselves to be children until they are not. The impatience of youth fosters over-responsibility, premature responsibility, and, what Craig described as the repudiation of the developmental process.

2. Teach and model the wisdom of avoiding devices until or beyond eighth grade.

Gen Zers must be taught about the over-promise, under-deliver reality of smartphones and other personal digital devices. The pain of not having what many of their friends have in adolescence is acute, but parents and churches must work together to help adolescents see the blessing that comes from not being hyper-connected. Mentors, parents, and other adults can lead with vulnerability in this arena, confessing how often they fall into algorithm traps that keep them scrolling rather than engaging with what God has placed right in front of them. I am seeing more adults moving from smartphones back to flip phones because of those distracting dopamine hits. Also, they want to walk the path they are asking their adolescents to walk. Eighth grade is not a magic age, but eighth grade or 14 years old was recommended by multiple participants as enabling adolescents to go through the onset of puberty without chronic internet or friend access.

---

[345] 1 Corinthians 13:11.

3. Educate on God's design for and the impact of the Fall on pubescence.

Why did God create puberty? Why design such an uncomfortable and disorienting process? God loves developmental processes. The literature review demonstrated how God creates things in seed form with in-folded possibility that then unfolds over time. God is patiently bringing the cosmos towards its telos as he works in history.

These developmental processes do not exclude our bodies. All growth requires pain; part of what makes pubescence difficult is that it is often the first season of dissonance, though it will certainly not be the last. The tension of pubescence prepares adolescents for the seasons of dissonance, difficulty, and disappointment to come. If Gen Zers persist in their repudiation of development, they will simply grow up to be impatient and over-functioning adults.

God allows the stress of pubescence to be made substantially harder by the presence of sin. Why are many adolescents fully sexually developed between 12 and 15, but their prefrontal cortex, which functions to inhibit foolishness, does not fully develop until between 22 and 25? Upwards of ten years of fully functioning genitals without fully functioning brains! Though God intends to use this season to prepare Gen Zers for other difficulties, sin over and in the cosmos is intensifying these incongruities and the temptations that result. Though many desires are disordered by sin, unquenched desires, holy or unholy, are still a form of suffering.

4. Acknowledge the unprecedented difficulty of adolescence in the current era.

It was previously customary for grandparents and parents to joke with their children how they had to walk uphill both ways in the snow to get to school or work. Now, I see the opposite phenomena playing out: parents and guardians are anxious about

how difficult it must be to grow up being bombarded by digital media. The truth is, millennials, Gen Xers, and Boomers do not know what is like to go through adolescence with digital devices and 5G internet. This is not to say that other eras did not have other difficulties foreign to Gen Zers, but it is to say that the present difficulties are unprecedented. Christians are overcomers; Gen Zers who want to follow Jesus have an unprecedented task ahead of them regarding developing emotional and spiritual health in a digitized world, and we must validate this challenge for them.

5. Cast vision for the congruence of an identify in Christ.

Lastly, but most importantly, church leaders must teach Gen Zers about the goodness of union with Christ. In Christ we are not fragmented, unstable, social constructs. Instead we are included by sheer grace; there is no earning, no projecting, no being used, no posturing, and no filtering that can assure us of our Father's acceptance. We are grafted into a family of sinners, and there is no need to pretend that we are not who we are. We are no longer on trial; we are righteous, washed in the blood of the lamb; we are justified sinners. Our redemption creates the possibility of congruity across the board in our lives. I do not have to change who I am depending where or with whom I am because God Most High, whose opinion carries all the weight, has spoken the final word once and for all in Jesus. In Christ, we can rest from the work of earning the approval of God and anxiously clamoring for the acceptance of our peers. They are the fools; the LORD founded the earth in wisdom.[346] This self-awareness is liberating for the tech addict, the approval addict, and the neo-borderline who lacks self-knowledge; even when

[346] Proverbs 3:19.

I do not know myself, God knows me and has known me from the foundation of the world.[347]

Means of Implementation

There are five primary ways to implement the above research: church-wide challenges, liturgical moments, sermon series, training events, parenting cohorts, and anti-media media campaigns.

Church-Wide Challenges or Campaigns

What follows is a plan for the inculcation of the above implications. Even though the majority of the research involved Generation Z, the emphasis on parents and other adult models or mentors reinforced this issue as a whole-church issue, not a youth group issue. Thus, a comprehensive campaign for multiple levels of congregational life ought to play out over the course of ten weeks; research shows it takes about sixty-six days to acquire new rhythms and habits.[348] The campaign should be branded, involve a commitment or challenge, and include regular encouragement in addition to weekly, ordinary church gatherings.

The Branding

The campaign ought to be branded corporately and comprehensively, to resist the individualizing and de-specializing effects of digitization. Our individual bodies are part

---

[347] Eph. 1:4.

[348] Gary Keller and Jay Papasan, *The ONE Thing: The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results* (Austin, TX: Bard Press, 2012), 51.

of a larger whole; that whole is not the networked mind that the transhumanists envision. It is the body of Christ. An example of how to frame a campaign would be "Healthy Body/Healthy Bodies." A healthy body is made up of healthy bodies. We do not pursue bodily health so that we can post inspirational things on Instagram; we do so because we want to love our neighbors in general and more specifically love our brothers and sisters in Christ. Similarly, we do not pursue or encourage others to pursue bodily identities congruent with our biological sex so we can leverage our children as pawns in a culture war; we do so to love our neighbors.

Instead of simply framing the campaign narrowly and in terms of emotional health (the immanent cause of smart phone overuse), the campaign ought to be framed in terms of comprehensive bodily health, because separating emotional, physical, and spiritual health into hermetically sealed categories runs counter to the wholeness of the biblical body, and neuroscientific insights validate that reality. Neuroscientist Lisa Barrett has argued that "the best thing you can do to improve your emotional health is improve your physical health: get enough sleep, exercise vigorously and eat well."[349] Separating bodily reality into constituent parts is part of the problem we must resist. Thus, a multi-pronged, holistic program would be the goal.

The Challenge

Many health challenges include before and after pictures, crash diets, or otherwise non-sustainable patterns of living. In contrast, challenges in this campaign will be

[349] Lisa Barret and Andréa Maria Cecil, "*Exercise: The Key to Superaging," The CrossFit Journal*, May 13, 2017, 10:01, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jE8Arf_MyPU.

sustainability oriented. An ecclesial leader would challenge a contingent of the congregation or the congregation as whole to "take the challenge" which might look something like this:

For the next ten weeks, I will:

1. Drink alcohol or eat desserts only in moderation and on special occasions.
2. Eat a full serving of vegetables at least once per day.
3. Exercise for a minimum of 30 minutes per day five days per week.
4. Put my phone (and other screens) to bed at 7pm, not wake it up until 7am, and have them on for only one hour on Saturdays.
5. Journal about painful and pleasant memories for ten minutes each evening.
6. Read or watch local news only twice per week and fast entirely from global or national news media.

The point of the challenge is to live as we know we ought and experience the benefits so that the habits reinforce themselves. Placing limits on digital technology in the context of pursuing overall health helps participants move beyond demonizing Big Tech or shaming themselves for device use and instead defines boundaries as a means of love. After pitching the challenge, those who want to take the "healthy body healthy bodies" challenge could fill out a card or an online form so that an ecclesial leader can serve those taking the challenge with accountability and encouragement.

The Encouragements

People who enroll in the challenge would receive weekly or bi-weekly exhortations to maintain motivation and serve as educational-formational devotions. These videos or emails could include things like:

- Testimonials or interviews from elders or church staff also participating in the challenge. What are the obstacles they are encountering? What are they learning about themselves? How are they seeing God at work?
- Biblical teaching about fasting and feasting.
- Biblical teaching about sleep and medical teaching about how screen use affects sleep or how sleep affects overall well-being.
- Teaching about device overuse and approval-seeking behavior on social media.
- Teaching how engineered and processed, calorie-dense foods affect well-being.
- Biblical teaching about Sabbath.
- Biblical teaching about the human body.
- Pastoral or themed prayer prompts or invitations to prayer gatherings.

These weekly or semi-weekly communications by email or text would be designed to maintain engagement and create a supplementary discipleship stream. Overall the, goal of a challenge like this is not meant to be merely a detox but also a break from the lordship of tech, placing it in its rightful place in service of human flourishing.

Liturgical Moments

Educational moments during or about liturgy are preeminent culture-making tools. Most Christians know they ought to worship God with their bodies but connecting to the function of liturgy can feel unfamiliar and uncomfortable. One of the goals mentioned was to broaden the discourse far beyond LGBTQ issues and create a culture in

which worship anchors a theology of the body conversation. How do we use our bodies in worship gatherings?

1. Singing[350]
2. Sitting or standing[351]
3. Smelling[352]
4. Seeing[353]
5. Bowing or Kneeling[354]
6. Raising Hands[355]
7. Clapping[356]
8. Giving[357]
9. Greeting[358]
10. Thinking[359]

Reformed leaders in particular ought to push against the prevailing gnostic, mind-centric participation in worship and instead propagate a body-centric vision for congregants.

These educational moments could happen mid-week in crafted social media posts or mid-gathering during or between songs. Exhortations might sound like this: "Romans 12:1 teaches us that we worship our Lord not merely with our minds, but with our bodies. God created our diaphragm to draw air into our lungs not simply so we could stay alive,

---

[350] Psalm 7:17.

[351] Psalm 1:1.

[352] Exodus 30:1ff.

[353] Psalm 34:8, 2 Chronicles 3:5-7.

[354] Psalm 95:6.

[355] Psalm 63:4, 1 Timothy 2:8.

[356] Psalm 47:1.

[357] Deuteronomy 15:7-8.

[358] 2 Corinthians 13:12.

[359] Psalm 26:2, Psalm 119:52.

but so we could praise him. God created our vocal cords not merely so we could speak with one another but so we could praise him. Let's praise God for giving us the capacity to praise him."

Regular exhortations that normalize talking about bodies in non-sexual ways can begin creating a counterculture opposite to our media culture where bodies are sexualized and dismissed. Entrepreneur and author Seth Godin has argued that the most powerful force in culture change is creating beliefs about norms. "People like us do things like this."[360] Major interventions (like sermon series and training events) will not have the staying power if they are not undergirded by a culture that values and appreciates bodies.

Sermon Series

Sermon series or standalone sermons that directly address ways the church has been co-opted into unbiblical theologies and ontologies are sometimes necessary. Sequential exposition in the pulpit has tremendous formative value, but systematic instruction, sometimes called "topical preaching," is an important way to address underlying issues. Referencing secular spokespersons like Lady Gaga and religious spokespersons like Dan Via, ecclesial leaders ought to help congregants see the socio-historical currents shaping theirs and their neighbors' assumed anthropologies. These sermons would be not merely about apologetics but also about healing the wounds of oppressive idols and ideologies within the congregation.

---

[360] Seth Godin, "People like Us (Do Things like This)," 2015, https://seths.blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/2017-people-like-us.pdf.

A sermon series might be titled, “Countercultural Bodies” and be five weeks long, including sermons like:

1. Cultures and Cults: How We Make and Approach Cultures
2. Darwin, Descartes, and Tim LaHaye: Our Assumptions About Bodies
3. Ensouled, Incarnate, and Resurrected: Adam, Jesus, and God’s People
4. Fruitful, Multiply, Subdue, and Dominion: Four Words That Make Sense of Our Bodies
5. Jesus Loves Your Body and How You Can To: Wisdom for Life in the Body

The first sermon would frame an overall approach to ethics and culture, the role of common grace (i.e. biology and evidence-based medicine and not merely exegesis to shape our understanding of our bodies) and an understanding of antithesis as it relates to cultural idolatry and its accompanying oppressive ontologies.

The second sermon would tell the story of Western culture with a focus on how beliefs about bodies and their relation to personhood have developed over time. The goal of the sermon would be to highlight how the congregation is tempted to buy into various forms of dualistic sentiments. Conservative congregations may assume a sexual ethic incongruent with dualism, but more liberal congregations may assume theologies of work, food, and health incongruent with dualism.

The third sermon would explicitly answer the second one. In contrast to the stories shaping our cultural imaginations, what story does the Bible tell about our bodies? Following the arc of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration, the preacher will highlight the structural goods and directional disorders in this eschatological moment.

The fourth sermon will move from ontology to teleology and will invite the congregation to consider bodily vocations. Bodies are fundamentally creative and productive. What would it look like if the congregation put work, sex, and rest in the context of a bodily vocation?

The fifth sermon will arrive in a place of wisdom. Best practices with regards to sabbath, sleep, feasting, fasting, feeding, exercise, sex, digital media use, and emotional health will be offered. This sermon would also launch the challenge mentioned above.

Ideally, these Sunday sermons would be reinforced in youth group environments. In churches like mine in which student ministries happen on Wednesday nights, the recapitulation and reinforcement would serve the formative process. The content may be the same, but language would be contextualized differently for adolescents. Teens learn about world history and biology in school; they can handle it in church. The synchronic instruction of parents and adolescents makes the content more likely to be discussed in the home and therefore be remembered, wrestled with, and applied.

Dinner and Training Events

Midweek training events facilitate a culture-creating environment in addition to worship gatherings. The form or process of these events can be more conductive to some discipleship goals than worship gatherings in themselves. Round tables, dinner, panel discussions, table discussions, and question and response time give participants a taste of what ecclesial leaders are asking them to do: submit to Jesus with applied wisdom in relationships. Eating in circles within the church is an ideal countercultural environment in which to discuss dualism, digitization, and their despacializing and discarnating

effects, and purposeful process, not just content, provides traction for a formative counterculture. In a post-pandemic world, a common question leading up to the event will be: “Is it being livestreamed?” or “Will it be recorded?” and the answer is “no” and “no.” Being present, in person, eating and drinking is the *sine qua non* of the evening.

Dinner and training events could happen monthly, quarterly, or semi-annually. A typical flow for one of these evenings might look like this:

6:00 p.m. Dinner and Table Discussion

6:30 p.m. Expert Lecture

6:50 p.m. Table Discussion About Lecture

7:00 p.m. Panel Discussion

7:45 p.m. Question and Response for Panel

8:15 p.m. Table Discussion

8:30 p.m. Dismissal

Initial table discussions ought to be family of origin related. Questions to ask include, “In the household in which you grew up, how were new technologies treated? What new technologies were mainstreamed while you were a teenager?” or “In the household in which you grew up, how did ‘the sex talk’ happen? Did your parents/guardians break the ice on sex or did your friends?” Discussions about family of origin promote differentiation by rooting persons in their personal histories while simultaneously highlighting the possibly of setting new trajectories.

The expert lecture is the main draw for the evening, TED-style talk. Nutritionists, medical doctors, therapists, and tech professionals could present compelling stories based on their research and experience, or they could be interviewed, depending on their

capacity to be naturally interesting. A pastor or ministry leader from the church staff could serve as the presenter, but an outside guest would be better, with a pastor from the church serving as "host." The host has a greater impact in how they frame the evening, explain why the expert was invited, and facilitate the panel discussion afterward. The lecture ought to serve as prolegomena to the panel, and the panel ought to present wisdom for application of the lecture.

Panelists should be ordinary church members who are more faithful than they are famous. Panelists do not need formal training as much as they need to have wisdom and winsomeness, not as polished public speakers, but as people who have processed and chosen countercultural practice emblematic of the kingdom of God. The ultimate question is, "Who from within our congregation is excelling in the area we are discussing tonight?" Though the expert lecture will draw the people in, the panel discussion will present the most practical information.

A variety of topics for dinner and training events would equip people for faithful living in light of digitization. One idea would be an evening titled "Big Tech and the Christian Life," in which someone lectures on the financial, algorithmic, and political forces that energize digital media companies and facilitate tech and social media overuse. The panel could have someone who does not use social media at all and another person who uses social media regularly and healthily. Another way of framing similar evenings would be "Parenting in the Digital Age," which would highlight the effect that digitization has on adolescents and the role that parents play as regulators for their children and teens. Panelists could be a college student who was the last in their friend group to get a smart phone or a parent who has been thoughtfully engaging the issue with

their teens for some time. A third way of framing a similar evening would be "Liberation and Digitization," in which the preeminent lens would be the oppressive nature of false Gods and the "over-promise, under-deliver" nature of idolatry. The panelists would include "conversion stories" of persons who were looking to digital tech as some form of messiah and now use tech responsibly within a biblical world view.

In addition to forming faithful digitized disciples, dinner and training events explicitly teaching about our bodies would relate to faithful living in light of neodocetism. Kinesiologists, physical therapists, athletes, mothers, handicapped persons, nutritionists, coaches, and hair stylists could all serve as lecturers or panelists as Christians explore faithful life in the body.

Evenings branded along the lines of: "Our Bodies: Creators and Connectors," "Resilient Bodies; Resilient Minds," or "Mothers, Their Bodies, and Our Pornographic Age" would be avenues in which different dimensions of our dualistic and sexualized culture are exposed and reframed in light of the biblical story. Resilience and developing resilience topics, though not explicitly related to tech usage, would include therapists or neuroscientists speaking on grounding techniques, lamenting, healthy vulnerability, and sitting in negative emotions so that the flight/freeze cycles used by digital technologies to ensnare users are broken. Stories on the seemingly miraculous feats of the human body and mind like childbirth, deadlifting 1,000 pounds, and architectural design awards would be told alongside stories of broken bones, emotional trauma, and the anxieties of aging. Pastoral reflection on the gifts the body and the curses of sin would help congregants rightfully inhabit the creation-and-fall tension inherent to our moment in cosmic history.

Parenting Cohorts

Parents and guardians need to be discipled in their roles as educators and regulators. Students naturally are organized into cohorts by grade, but often parents are left to their own devices when it comes to finding wisdom and encouragement in their ever-complex and ever-important task. Churches ought to form parenting cohorts to manage the threats of digitization and neodocetism exacerbated by unregulated smartphone use. Adolescents will experience regulation of their smartphone use as isolating and possibly oppressive; having peers and their guardians having peers journeying together towards a healthy relationship with technology is vital.

Parenting cohorts should be formed as early as third or fourth grade to support and challenge each other for ten years. Websites like https://www.waituntil8th.org and books like *The Tech Wise Family* could serve as starting points for content, but relationships that facilitate resilience are the key. Pastors, elders, or other ecclesial leaders ought to cast vision for the reality and beauty of weakness and the need for support and wisdom in the task of parenting. A church culture that norms healthy resistance to Silicon Valley's demands is increasingly necessary to the task of birthing and strengthening healthy disciples.

Anti-Media Media

One of the participants said, "The best thing you can do online is tell people to connect offline." Posts, podcasts, and pictures that undermine, interrupt, and awaken scrollers and listeners so that they put away the digitized medium and engage with their in-person world are simple ways to repurpose interactions with online media.

Ecclesial leaders would do well to ask themselves, "When I am scrolling through social media, what type of post would encourage me to connect with others in a more meaningful way?" An Instagram post that says things like, "Is this scrolling doing for you what you want it to?" or "Close this app and make a phone call instead" or "What are you avoiding by being on this app?" would call out mindless consumption of media.

Educational posts on social media sites would set up congregants as successful users of media. Examples might include how to disable various notifications, how to turn off the ability to see one's "likes" on Facebook or Instagram, and how addictive dopamine cycles function. Short, anecdotal testimonies on strategic limits to smart phone use and the benefits of those limits would inspire incremental changes.

Summary

Ordinary discipleship in the work, way, and person of Jesus remains the central task of shepherding in light of digitization and neodocetism. Targeted contextualizations of the church's mission in response to sociological realities are ultimately the pursuit of congruence with the incarnation of the Son of God. Process and content must be created to birth and strengthen healthy countercultural disciples since digitization is formally about process, and neodocetism is formally about content. Shared meals, media interruptions, cohort-based support, and theological formation in the context of worship will entrust Generation Z with the whole counsel of God.[361]

[361] Acts 20:27.

Recommendations for Further Research

First, further ethnographic research is needed to analyze Generation Z's understanding of their bodies in light of digitization. The angle of this study was to listen to the listeners: therapists and undergraduate professors. Research should examine churches or parachurch organizations that are fruitfully engaging and discipling Generation Z.

Second, research ought to be conducted on the social and psychological consequences of withholding personal smart phones during adolescence when most of one's peers, globally speaking, spend a large portion of their lives connected digitally.

Third, longitudinal research ought to be done on the efficacy of the interventions suggested above. Do trainings on lament and negative emotions have a measurable effect on adolescent screen time? Would the data suggest that device detoxes and sabbaths create a stronger sense of self? Does teaching on the use of the body in worship reinforce biblical self-concept through adolescence?

Fourth, research that examines how church size affects outcomes related to bodily self-concept. Larger churches have more resources to provide the immersive, social-neuroceptive experiences described above, since neuroception between 1,000 persons is more intense than between ten persons. Smaller churches tend to limit the ability of an adolescent to hide in a crowd and avoid multigenerational relationships. Larger churches have more financial resources to do trainings and retreats.

Fifth, ethnographic research should examine the difference in bodily self-concept between parts of the world that are Christianized but not digitized and parts of the world where the "technological imperative" has taken root. For example, how does bodily self-

concept in the parts of Ethiopia, Kenya, and Lancaster, PA, compare with Japan, San Francisco, or Miami?

Sixth, given the parallels that emerged in the research between digitized persons and those with borderline personality disorders, research ought to be done on effective ministry with borderlines. The cross-application of ministry wisdom could be significant.

Seventh, most of the participants in this study, though not all, work substantially with, to use Craig's term, the derelicts of Generation Z. Much of the unhealthy effects discussed are likely to be more acute than in the general population. What about the rest of Generation Z? Studies interviewing parents and Gen Zers from healthy families and situations ought to be conducted.

Participants were purposefully sampled, and therefore the results are not formally generalizable.[362] Participants were ethnically, denominationally, and generationally diverse, and therefore some of the findings may extend beyond the researcher's context, though those who desire to appropriate the findings should test those findings in their particular contexts. As with all qualitative research of this kind, the reader bears the responsibility to determine what findings can appropriately be applied in part or in full in their ecclesial contexts.[363]

---

[362] Sharan B Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2016), 96.

[363] Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 256.

Bibliography

Aitor, Gael. "Why Gen Z Is the Most Connected Generation but Also the Loneliest." *The San Diego Union Tribune*, July 24, 2020. https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/opinion/commentary/story/2020-07-24/hello-genz-pandemic-mental-health.

Anderson, Monica, and Jingjing Jiang. "Teens, Social Media & Technology 2018." *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech* (blog), Pew Research, May 31, 2018. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/.

Augustine. *The Literal Meaning of Genesis,* Translated by John Hammond Taylor. New York: Paulist Press, 1982.

Bail, Christopher A., Lisa P. Argyle, Taylor W. Brown, John P. Bumpus, Haohan Chen, M. B. Fallin Hunzaker, Jaemin Lee, Marcus Mann, Friedolin Merhout, and Alexander Volfovsky. "Exposure to Opposing Views on Social Media Can Increase Political Polarization." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115, no. 37 (September 11, 2018): 9216–21. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1804840115.

Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute. *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs, and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation*, 2018.

Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics 14 Volume Set*. London: T&T Clark, 1975.

Bartholomew, Craig G., and Michael W. Goheen. *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*. Reprinted. Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2004.

Bavinck, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics*. 4 vols. Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.

Bavinck, J.H. *Introduction to the Science of Missions*. Nutley, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 1960.

Beale, G. K. *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*. Edited by D. A. Carson. Vol. 17. New Studies in Biblical Theology. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; Apollos, 2004.

Bess, Michael. *Make Way for the Superhumans: How the Science of Bio Enhancement Is Transforming Our World, and How We Need to Deal with It*. London: Icon Books Ltd., 2017.

Biber, David. “Attraction to Physical Activity of Generation Z - A Mixed Methodological Approach.” Master's thesis, Georgia Southern University, 2013. https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/27.

Blosnich, John R. “Prevalence of Gender Identity Disorder and Suicide Risk Among Transgender Veterans Utilizing Veterans Health Administration Care.” *American Journal of Public Health* 103, no. 10 (October 2013): 27–32.

Boersma, Hans, and Andrew Louth. *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018.

Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *BDB Hebr-Eng Lexicon*. Reprint ed. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub., 1996.

———. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody, MA: Snowball Publishing, 2011.

Brown, Paul Gordon. “College Students, Social Media, Digital Identities, and the Digitized Self.” Ph.D. diss., Boston College, 2016. https://www.proquest.com/docview/1776598125/FFB9327825EC4423PQ/1

Brown, Jeannine K., and Nicholas Perrin. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Edited by Joel B. Green. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013.

Brueggemann, Walter, and Davis Hankins. *The Prophetic Imagination: 40th Anniversary Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

———. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, 1990.

Chesterton, Gilbert K. *Orthodoxy.* New York: John Lane Company, 1909.

Cooper, Rodney L. *Holman New Testament Commentary - Mark*. Nashville: Holman Reference, 2000.

Coyne, Sarah M., Jeffrey L. Hurst, W. Justin Dyer, Quintin Hunt, Emily Schvanaveldt, Sara Brown, and Gavin Jones. “Suicide Risk in Emerging Adulthood: Associations with Screen Time over 10 Years.” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, February 2, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-020-01389-6.

Crouch, Andy. *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017.

Davis, Katie. “Friendship 2.0: Adolescents’ Experiences of Belonging and Self-Disclosure Online.” *Journal of Adolescence* 35, no. 6 (December 2012): 1527–36. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2012.02.013.

Davis, Katie, Linda Charmaraman, and Emily Weinstein. “Introduction to Special Issue: Adolescent and Emerging Adult Development in an Age of Social Media.” *Journal of Adolescent Research* 35, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 3–15. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558419886392.

Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy,* Translated by Donald A. Cress. 4th ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999.

Doriani, Daniel M. *The New Man: Becoming a Man After God’s Heart*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2015.

Dreher, Rod. *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*. New York: Sentinel, 2020.

Ehrenreich, Samuel E., Kurt J. Beron, Kaitlyn Burnell, Diana J. Meter, and Marion K. Underwood. “How Adolescents Use Text Messaging Through Their High School Years.” *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 30, no. 2 (2020): 521–40. https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12541.

Ellul, Jacques. *The Technological Society*. Translated by John Wilkinson. Extensive underlining ed.. New York: Vintage Books, 1964.

Elwell, Walter A., and Barry J. Beitzel. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1988.

Ey, Lesley-Anne. “The Influence of Music Media on Gender Role and Self-Identity: Perceptions of Children Aged 6 and 10 Years.” *Children Australia; Melbourne* 39, no. 3 (September 2014): 147–60. http://dx.doi.org.search.covenantseminary.edu/10.1017/cha.2014.17.

Fitzmyer, S.J., Joseph A. *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 33. Anchor Yale Bible. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Reissue edition. Visalia, CA: Vintage, 2012.

Frame, John. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013.

Francis, Pope. *Amoris Laetitia: On Love in the Family*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2016.

Frost, Michael. *Incarnate: The Body of Christ in an Age of Disengagement*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014.

Frost, Michael, and Alan Hirsch. *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub, 2003.

"Gen Z Volume 2." Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute, 2021.

Gentry, Peter J., and Stephen J. Wellum. *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*. 2nd ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018.

Godin, Seth. "People like Us (Do Things like This)," 2015. https://seths.blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/2017-people-like-us.pdf.

Halberstam, J. Jack. *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2013.

Hamilton, Alex. "Transhumanism: Morphological Freedom Is Individual Liberty." *Medium*, July 30, 2015. https://medium.com/wirehead/transhumanism-morphological-freedom-is-individual-liberty-b51ea31de129.

Harari, Yuval Noah. *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. New York: Harper, 2017.

———. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. New York: Harper, 2015.

Harrison, Kristen. "Scope of Self: Toward a Model of Television's Effects on Self-Complexity in Adolescence." *Communication Theory* 16, no. 2 (2006): 251–79. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2006.00270.x.

Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethic*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2013.

Holcomb, Justin S. *Know the Heretics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2014.

Huang, Lixiao, Jose Picart, and Douglas GIllan. "Toward a Generalized Model of Human Emotional Attachment." *Theoretical Issues in Ergonomics Science*, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1080/1463922X.2020.1790690.

Jones, Nona. *From Social Media to Social Ministry: A Guide to Digital Discipleship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020.

Kapic. *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012.

Keel, Othmar. *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*. Winona Lake, ID: Eisenbrauns, 1997.

Keller, Gary, and Jay Papasan. *The ONE Thing: The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results*. Austin, TX: Bard Press, 2012.

Kim, Jay Y. *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in the Digital Age*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020.

Kitchen, Matthew. "Smartphones Transformed Everything. Now, There's More Disruption to Come." *Wall Street Journal*, September 9, 2020. https://www.wsj.com/articles/smartphones-transformed-everything-now-theres-more-disruption-to-come-11599681809.

Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, 2 Volume Set*. Study guide ed. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2002.

Kuyper, Abraham. *A Centennial Reader*. Edited by James D. Bratt. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.

———. *Common Grace*. Edited by Nelson D. Kloosterman. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015.

———. *On the Church*. Edited by Ad de Bruijne. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016.

———. *Pro Rege*. Edited by John H. Kok. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016.

Lee, Y. and Y.C. Sun. "Using Instant Messaging to Enhance the Interpersonal Relationships of Taiwanese Adolescents: Evidence from Quantile Regression Analysis." *Adolescence* 44, no. 173 (Spring 2009): 199–208.

Leproult, R., G. Copinschi, O. Buxton, and E. Van Cauter. "Sleep Loss Results in an Elevation of Cortisol Levels the Next Evening." *Sleep* 20, no. 10 (October 1997): 865–70.

"LGBT Data & Demographics." *The Williams Institute*. Accessed March 3, 2021. https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/visualization/lgbt-stats/?topic=LGBT#demographic.

Long, Thomas G. *The Witness of Preaching.* 3rd ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016.

Marano, Hara Estroff. *A Nation of Wimps: The High Cost of Invasive Parenting*. New York: Crown Archetype, 2008.

McGrath, Alister E. *A Fine-Tuned Universe The Quest for God in Science and Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

McLuhan, Marshall. *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010.

Merriam, Sharan B. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2009.

Mesch, Gustavo, and Ilan Talmud. "The Quality of Online and Offline Relationships: The Role of Multiplexity and Duration of Social Relationships." *Information Society* 22, no. 3 (July 2006): 137–48.

Mohler, Albert, and Joshua Mitchel. "Identity Politics and the Spirit of the Age: A Conversation with Political Theorist Joshua Mitchel." *Thinking in Public*, February 24, 2021, https://albertmohler.com/2021/02/24/joshua-mitchell.

Murphy, Nancey. *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Murray, Douglas. *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race, and Identity*. London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019.

Musk, Elon. "Engineering with the Brain." *Neuralink*, 2020. https://neuralink.com/applications/.

Naughton, John. *From Gutenberg to Zuckerberg: What You Really Need to Know About the Internet.* London: Quercus, 2012.

Newbigin, Lesslie. *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986.

Newport, Cal. *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World*. New York: Penguin, 2019.

O'Donovan, Oliver. *Begotten or Made? Human Procreation and Medical Technique*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.

O'Sullivan, Lucia F. "Linking Online Sexual Activities to Health Outcomes Among Teens." *New Directions for Child & Adolescent Development* 2014, no. 144 (Summer 2014): 37–51. https://doi.org/10.1002/cad.20059.

Paik, Eun-Mi. "Educational Ministry for the Formation of Self-Identity in the Information Age: From the Wisdom of Feminist and Process Thoughts." *한국기독교신학논총 (Korea Journal of Christian Studies)* 42 (December 2005): 223–42.

Pearcey, Nancy R. *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018.

Peterson, Eugene H. *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008.

Pluckrose, Helen, and James Lindsay. *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody*. Durham, NC: Pitchstone Publishing, 2020.

"Porn Survey Reveals Extent of UK Teenagers' Viewing Habits." *The Guardian*, January 31, 2020. http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/jan/31/porn-survey-uk-teenagers-viewing-habits-bbfc.

Postman, Neil. "Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change." Denver: March 28, 1998.

———. *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. New York: Vintage, 1993.

Postman, Neil, and Andrew Postman. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. Anniversary ed. New York: Penguin Books, 2005.

"QUEERS READ THIS," leaflet distributed at NYC Pride March, June 1990. http://www.qrd.org/qrd/misc/text/queers.read.this.

Raphael. *The School of Athens*. 1509-1511. Fresco, 500 cm × 770 cm. Stanza della Segnatura. Apostolic Palace, Vatican City.

Regnerus, Mark. *The Future of Christian Marriage*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Reinke, Tony, and John Piper. *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*. Illustrated ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017.

Rideout, Victoria, and Michael B. Robb. "The Common Sense Consensus: Media Use by Teens and Tweens." San Francisco: Common Sense Media, 2019.

Saturday Night Live. *SNL Digital Short: Threw It on the Ground - SNL*, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=RTgBfRTABs4.

Schatzle, Joshua D. "Expositing the Scriptures in Preaching to Digitally Saturated Congregants." D. Min. diss., Covenant Theological Seminary, 2019. http://covenantlibrary.org/etd/2019/Schatzle_Joshua_DMin_2019.pdf.

Schreiner, Thomas R. *King in His Beauty, The: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013.

Schuurman, Egbert. *The Gospel and Globalization: Exploring the Religious Roots of a Globalized World*. Edited by Michael W. Goheen and Erin Glanville. Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2009.

Seneca, Lucius Annaeus. *Letters from a Stoic*. Translated by Robin Campbell. Reprint ed. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1969.

Shatzer, Jacob. *Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today's Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019.

"Smartphone Penetration in the US 2010-2021." *Statista.* April 8, 2020. Accessed March 3, 2021. https://www.statista.com/statistics/201183/forecast-of-smartphone-penetration-in-the-us/.

Smith, James K. A. *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014.

Tarnas, Richard. *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1993.

Tellier, Pierre-Paul, Riittakerttu Kaltiala-Heino, Marja Työläjärvi, and Nina Lindberg. "Gender Dysphoria in Adolescent Population: A 5-Year Replication Study." *Clinical Child Psychology & Psychiatry* 24, no. 2 (April 2019): 379–87. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104519838593.

Trueman, Carl R. "On Cars, Vows, and the Slow Death of the Church." *Reformation21* (blog), March 12, 2012. https://www.reformation21.org/mos/postcards-from-palookaville/on-cars-vows-and-the-slow-death-of-the-church.

———. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020.

Turner, Anthony. "Generation Z: Technology and Social Interest." *The Journal of Individual Psychology* 71, no. 2 (2015): 103–13. https://doi.org/10.1353/jip.2015.0021.

Twenge, Jean M. *IGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy--and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What That Means for the Rest of Us*. New York: Atria Books, 2018.

Wakefield, Lily. "Overwhelming Majority of Generation Z Transgender People Remain Closeted and Have Only Come out Online." *PinkNews*, July 1, 2020. https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2020/07/01/transgender-trans-gen-z-queer-tinder-dating-internet-sex-education-orientation-coming-out/

Walsh, Shari P., Katherine Marie White, and Ross Young. "Needing to Connect: The Effect of Self and Others on Young People's Involvement with Their Mobile Phones." *Australian Journal of Psychology* 62, no. 4 (December 2010): 194–203. https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530903567229.

Wang, Wei, Guoying Qian, Xingchao Wang, Lei Li, Qian Hu, Jing Chen, and Suo Jiang. "Mobile Social Media Use and Self-Identity among Chinese Adolescents: The Mediating Effect of Friendship Quality and the Moderating Role of Gender." *Current Psychology: Research and Reviews* (August 2019): 1–9. http://dx.doi.org.search.covenantseminary.edu/10.1007/s12144-019-00397-5.

Williams, Michael D. *This World Is Not My Home: The Origins and Development of Dispensationalism*. Fearn, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2003.

Wolters, Albert M. *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005.

Wright, N. T. *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. New York: HarperOne, 2008.

Yang, Chia-chen, and B. Bradford Brown. "Online Self-Presentation on Facebook and Self Development During the College Transition." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence; New York* 45, no. 2 (February 2016): 402–16. http://dx.doi.org.search.covenantseminary.edu/10.1007/s10964-015-0385-y.