TWEETING TO THE CHOIR: RELIGIOUS IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND NEGOTIATING POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY ON TWITTER

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TWEETING TO THE CHOIR: STANCE TAKING AND POSITIONING OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY ONLINE

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ABSTRACT

Social networking has emerged as a tool used by churches and religious leaders for their ministries and other purposes. That, coupled with the increasing media attention being paid to religious organizations with a large web presence (e.g. Westboro Baptist Church), warrants an examination into how religious institutions construct their identity through discourse in online settings. Past work has examined institutional religious discourse in traditional settings, such as church meetings (Lehtinen 2005; Keane 1997), and non-sacred settings, specifically religious broadcasts (Xanthopoulou 2010); however, religious discourse by institutions in newer online platforms, such as the popular micro-blogging and social networking site, Twitter, have not been examined.

I explore religious institutional identity construction within a data set of 1,071 tweets by pastors Mark Driscoll and Rick Warren, prominent Christian leaders within two distinct Christian movements. I analyze the use of pronouns and electronic features and their relationship to the strategies employed for stance taking and positioning by these two institutional representatives. In order to do this, my approach is grounded in scholarship concerning positioning theory (van Langenhove and Harré 1999), epistemic stance (Mushin 2001; Raymond and Heritage 2006), and footing (Goffman 1981), all of which lend to the manner in which religious authority is negotiated on Twitter.

My research finds that two distinct strategies for identity construction emerge from Driscoll’s and Warren’s tweets. Although both negotiate their moral and personal roles,
Driscoll’s affinity for exclusive *we* and electronic features, especially URLs, and Warren’s preference for text heavy tweets and the pronoun *you*, as well as retweets reveal how institutional goals are accomplished in computer mediated settings. As such, my work further expands academic knowledge concerning the discourse of religious institutions and their use of Twitter as a tool for institutional identity construction.
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to my husband, Andrew Long, who supported me throughout this process. And to my advisor, Dr. Heidi Hamilton, and everyone who helped along the way.

Many thanks,
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INTRODUCTION

In *Newsweek* magazine’s 2012 Easter issue, Andrew Sullivan gives a harsh critique of organized religion.¹ He cites numerous scandals associated with the Christian church and attributes its dwindling number of members to its political agenda. In this article he calls for a re-evaluation of the church’s priorities. He encourages the church to go back to simpler times, using the story of St. Francis of Assisi (a monk from the 12th century that dedicated his life to service) as an example of how spiritual life should be conducted. This article is just a glimpse into the church’s struggle to find itself in contemporary society. In the wake of the Catholic church’s sex scandals, Westborough Baptist Church’s controversial funeral protests, and negative depictions of Christianity in popular culture, the church is trying to understand how to move away from these images and become relevant and appealing in the 21st century. One place that this transformation is occurring is online. The use of social media by religious institutions has been a topic of discussion among numerous news outlets. The *Washington Post* recently wrote a piece on the use of social media by religious institutions, discussing new platforms designed to keep church goers in the loop.²

On an academic level, online communication and interaction has received increasing attention from linguistic and communication scholars. From scholarship praising new modes of interaction (see Crystal 2009) to those scrutinizing the manner in which media is changing the way people interact (see Baron 2008), the interest in the ever changing ways to communicate online continues to gather momentum. Its use by politicians, corporations, and medical institutions has sparked further interest in the use of online platforms for institutional purposes.

(see Bylund & Gueguen & D’Agostino & Li & Sonet 2010; Jansen & Zhang & Sobel & Chowdury 2009). As the use of these mediated settings by institutions begins to permeate our everyday lives and conversations, it becomes increasingly important to understand how this space is used to accomplish institutional goals. Although work on religious discourse has been examined in relation to mediated settings (see Xanthopoulou 2010; Young 2004; Dawson & Douglas 2004; Berger & Ezzy 2004; Lövheim 2003, 2004a, 2004b), it has yet to examine the use of newer forms of media, such as social networks, for accomplishing institutional goals. Twitter is a micro-blogging social networking site, which is unique in its communicative constraints and tagging system, and continues to gain popularity in terms of it use by the public, as well as by institutions. As such, the examination of its use by religious institutions is timely.

Consequently, this research examines how the values and structure of differing Christian movements, the seeker-sensitive and emergent church movement, shape the online identity of two religious representatives affiliated with these movements, Rick Warren and Mark Driscoll. Thus, my work focuses on two questions:

1. How do religious institutions use Twitter to construct their identity?

2. How does the way in which Mark Driscoll and Rick Warren negotiate positions of authority relate to the goals and constructs of their respective movements?

To answer these questions I examine the use of pronouns and electronic features on Twitter by Driscoll and Warren. In light of the integral role pronouns have in creating distinctions between positions of authority and the lay-membership, my research investigates the use of pronouns in terms for four categories, you, inclusive we, exclusive we/I, and third person pronouns. Additionally, work on Twitter has examined the use of electronic features as a means of connectivity (see Boyd & Golder & Lotan 2010; Honeycutt & Herring 2009), yet this work
does not investigate how electronic features (e.g. @tags, #tags, URLs, and retweets) are used as instruments for institutional identity construction. The examination of pronouns and electronic features yields two distinct strategies for identity construction: Driscoll’s relies on electronic features, while Warren prefers text heavy tweets. Also, the use of pronouns and electronic features allow the two religious representatives to accomplish their goal of distancing themselves from a negative Christian image while still operating within the constructs of their movements.

In order to understand how the use of these features relates to institutional goals and constructs I will, first, discuss the background of the seeker-sensitive and emergent church movements, as well as Rick Warren and Mark Driscoll’s relationship to these movements. Second, in order to contextualize this research I will review literature on religious discourse, computer-mediated-communication, and the theoretical framework on identity from which I operate. Next, I will explain the method of examination and results of the statistical analysis, which answers the question—how do religious institutions use Twitter to construct their identity? Lastly, I examine the relationship of these results through the lens of the previously discussed theoretical framework in order to fully answer the second question—how does the way in which Mark Driscoll and Rick Warren negotiate positions of authority relate to the goals and constructs of their respective movements? I will conclude with a summary of the findings, discussion for future direction of research, and the implications of this study.

**Background: The Seeker-sensitive, emergent church movement, and their institutional representatives.**

It is impossible to understand the seeker-sensitive and emergent movement without first discussing the type of negative image they are trying escape. As mentioned earlier, these
movements exist in the aftermath of Christian church scandal. As a result of these infamous scandals, the church is seen as hypocritical, judgmental, and detached from society. Unlike the Jesus movement of the late 1960s from which the Calvary Chapel denomination was born, the seeker-sensitive and emergent church movement did not birth a specific religious denomination, rather they re-evaluate how the Christian church responds to contemporary culture. In this way, these two movements are striving to move away from these negative images of the Christian church, but do so in different ways.

Sargeant describes the seeker-sensitive church by saying, “Unlike previous movements…that were associated with particular theology…The seeker church movement is distinguished by its emphasis on a particular methodology” (2000: 7). What Sargeant is describing is the seeker-sensitive church’s preoccupation with changing the external façade of the church and their desire to repackage traditional values, such as a pursuit for converts, and hierarchical structures to be more appealing to non-Christians. It is through contemporary forms of worship that the seeker movement reconciles the church with the demands of the 21st century. In this way, seeker churches are focused more on sociologically based business marketing models for the purpose of ministry and proselytizing (ibid.). Thus, the movement is less about changing the church’s perspective on theology or hierarchical structure, than it is focused on changing the way it approaches outreach to non-Christians. In this way, the church is outward focused, looking for new ways to make Christian concepts relevant to world in which it exists.

In the same vein, the ministry of Rick Warren, one of the religious representatives being examined, is concerned with bringing the “seeker” non-Christian into the church. This is best demonstrated in his bestselling non-fiction work, A Purpose Driven Life. In this work he expounds on the feeling of purpose the Christian church gives, discussing how those looking for
a purpose in life will find one in the Christian church. Rick Warren is the executive pastor of Saddleback Christian Church located in Lake Forest, California, and has been a prominent voice in the political sphere. Examples of his activities in the political sphere include delivering the invocation at President Barack Obama’s inauguration and having speaking at different international summits. These ministries are a manifestation of the seeker movement’s outward focus inside of Warren’s church. His church’s affinity for contemporary forms of worship, such as the use of rock music during weekly services is consistent with the seeker’s movement’s aim to repackage Christian values.

In contrast to the seeker-sensitive movement’s focus on changing superficial aspects of the church, the emergent church is occupied with changing the internal structure of the church in order to reconcile their beliefs with the context of today’s society. Although there is a range of different denominations or traditions (e.g. reformed, evangelical, etc.) to which an emergent church can belong, what is most characteristic is their postmodern perspective on theology, outreach, and biblical interpretation (Gibbs & Bolger 2005). McCracken (2010:135-143) finds that this postmodern worldview manifests in seven tenets: rejection of modernism, an affinity for youth, dislike of traditional church hierarchies, a preference for open dialogue rather theological debates based on modernistic rationales, a preference for narrative and post-modern approaches to biblical interpretation rather than systematic approaches to theology, denial of binaries, such as the distinction between clergy and lay-member, and, finally an emphasis on praxis. What these tenets demonstrate is the emergent church’s aversion to highly hierarchical power structures, as well as the re-prioritizing of church values. This re-prioritizing is especially seen in its emphasis on praxis. What McCraken is referring to in the last tenet is the inward focus of the emergent church. It is concerned with the “micro” aspects of the church, such as the lay-
membership’s spirituality, rather than “macro” issues, such as political influence on religious-related policies.

This can be observed in the ministries that are most prominent for Mark Driscoll, the lead/executive pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle Washington. His leadership training and marriage ministry illustrate the inward focus of the emergent church. Rather than focusing on policy related issues like Warren, Driscoll is focused on how spirituality is practiced on a day-to-day level. His marriage ministry demonstrates the amount of attention that is paid to the building up of spirituality in lay-membership by Driscoll.

In sum, Rick Warren and Mark Driscoll represent two different movements, both of which endeavor to see the church continue to be relevant in the society in which they exist. This pursuit for relevance is seen in the seeker’s repackaging of the church and in the emergent church’s reorganization of the church. This can also be observed in Rick Warren’s outward focus on policy issues related to the church, and Driscoll’s inward focus on the spirituality of the membership. In spite of these differences, both movements are endeavoring to move away from older and more unattractive conceptions of the church, one of which is the judgmental, hypocritical persona of the Christian church that can be observed in mainstream media and popular culture. However, distancing themselves from this persona is done in distinctly different ways that correspond to the values and structures of their respective movements.
LITERATURE REVIEW

My inquiry into religious discourse on Twitter occurs at the intersection of communication and linguistic literature concerning institutional discourse, and computer-mediated-communication (CMC). In this section I discuss the body of academic literature pertaining to religious discourse and CMC that informs my research and the theoretical framework I use to examine identity. Much of the academic discussion pertaining to religious discourse has focused on religious ritual and religious socialization (Young 2004; Banquedano-Lopez 2008; Lehtinen 2005), but literature on religious discourse in social media settings is sparse. CMC scholarship has covered a plethora of social media topics including identity on Facebook specifically examining photographs and status updates (Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin 2008), as well as CMC resources in interactions, such as emoticons and electronic tagging systems (Dresner & Herring 2010; Honeycutt and Herring 2009). Further explication of this work will illustrate the need for its expansion in terms of Twitter’s use as an instrument for institutional discourse, as well as the examination of communicative resources on the platform for the purpose of signaling institutional identities. Such an investigation within the context of religious discourse is timely as the discussion of new media’s role in religious discourse is becoming important in online spaces as religious institutions begin to view it as the new frontier in evangelical missionary work.

This online missionary work, or “e-vangelism,” has been a focal point of discussion for religious institutions as they try to formulate internet strategies for proselytizing (see Careaga 1999). Thus, much work still needs to be done to understand how religious institutions utilize new media to accomplish institutional goals. In light of this, my examination aims to analyze the linguistic and communicative resources religious institutions utilize while constructing identity
on Twitter. The theoretical framework used to guide my discussion of identity allows me to explain how positions are negotiated (see van Langenhove & Harré 1999; Harré & Moghaddam 2003), epistemic authority is expressed (see Mushin 2001; Raymond & Heritage 2006) and tweets are framed in terms of speaker and hearer (Goffman 1981) by the seeker and emergent movement’s institutional representatives examined in this study, Warren and Driscoll. This, in turn, illustrates how these representatives position themselves, members of the church, and non-Christians through the strategies they employ online.

**Institutional Discourse**

The uniqueness of discourse in institutional settings lies in the constructs and frames in which members of the institution must operate, whether those constructs be medical, educational or in this case, religious. Agar (1985: 149) describes the study of institutional discourse in terms of the constraints that institutions impose on discourse: “The institution provides a limited number of ways to describe people, their problems and possible solutions.” This is to say that each institution or organization has a set of goals and agendas that must be met. Furthermore, those goals must be accomplished within the acceptable constructs found within the institution. Thus, the discourse found therein must yield to those constructs, while simultaneously accomplishing the goals of the institution.

Furthermore, research investigating institutional identity, such as the negotiation of professional identities, has examined the use of pronouns in the workplace (Dyer & Keller-Cohen 2000), as well as the use of narratives in institutional settings as a means of identity construction (Vasquez 2007; Linde 2009). For instance, Dyer and Keller-Cohen’s (2000) work found that the use of pronouns in personal narratives allowed university professors to position
themselves as experts, while the use of other referring terms in the evaluation of non-expert characters allowed the storytellers to distance themselves from those characters. This work points to the complexity of the identity construction process within institutional settings, and to the manner in which institutional representatives access their moral stance or their professional positions.

The literature on discourse in religious institutions can be understood in two categories. The first is academic work that focuses its attention on discourse in traditional religious settings, such as church services or catechism (Baquedano-Lopez 2008; Lehtinen 2005; Keane 1997; Borker 1986). Much of the work conducted in traditional religious settings has focused on cohesion, socialization, performance, and ritual. The second category of scholarship is work examining discourse in non-sacred settings, such as tv shows and in online settings (see Xanthopoulou 2010; Young 2004; Dawson & Douglas 2004; Berger & Ezzy 2004; Lövheim 2003, 2004a, 2004b). This scholarship has focused on the use of non-sacred spaces for specifically religious purposes, demonstrating how religious institutional goals are accomplished through different media, whether it be television or the internet.

For instance, Xanthopoulou (2010) compares sermons to televised interviews; demonstrating how the concept of deficiency and dependence on Christ, as well as a humble Christian identity is accomplished in question-answer sequences in televised interviews. Also, communication scholars have discussed how religious identity is constructed by teen wiccans in online forums (Berger & Ezzy 2004), showing how important non-sacred spaces are to lay-members of religious groups.

In addition, communication scholars have examined aspects of worship (e.g. prayer, etc.), as well as missionary outreach work done online (Campbell 2006). These studies have
demonstrated how religious organizations are adapting to the ever-changing technological environment in which they exist. Although investigations into religious identity on the internet have been conducted on forums managed by lay-members of a religious group (Berger & Ezzy 2004; Lövheim 2003, 2004a, 2004b), exploration into identity work of religious representatives on the institutional level needs further research.

Furthermore, research on religious discourse in non-traditional settings has yet to touch on religious discourse in newer platforms. Exploring this new frontier continues to gain importance, especially as popular social networking sites like Twitter become an instrument for institutional identity and branding. As social networking sites grow and continue to be used to manage our interactions with both friends and institutions, the importance of understanding how institutions interact with non-members and lay-members of those institutions in online environments becomes more essential. Therefore, my examination of religious discourse aims to elucidate how institutional identity is constructed on Twitter.

**Computer-Mediated Communication**

Much in the same way institutional values and goals constrain the discourse of the people within it, communication in mediated settings is constrained by the format to which it must adhere. Thus, much like water must take the shape of its container, communication over a medium must take the shape of the medium. The literature on computer-mediated-communication focuses on the manner in which language features that are unique to an online platform or community allow individuals to creatively craft messages that fit into the genre of a specific platform.
For instance, Dresner and Herring’s (2010) research explores how emoticons were used as indicators of the illocutionary force of a CMC message. More specifically, Dresner and Herring applied speech act theory to CMC messages from listservs and found that the emoticons served as indicators of illocutionary meaning, such as a 😞 (sad face) for an apology, or a ;) (winking face) to indicate a joke. Thus, in the case of this research it is apparent how CMC-specific features (e.g. emoticons) allow users to compensate for the medium’s obstacles, such as the absence of paralinguistic cues.

Emoticons are only one communicative resource that has emerged in CMC environments. Many of the resources available to users are specific to the platforms that they are utilizing. For instance, relationship statuses and the like button on Facebook, or the check-in mechanism on foursquare that allows users to alert others where they have been and with whom, are all unique to specific platforms and give users unique tools for communicating.

Furthermore, each of these communicative resources play a role in how one is perceived online, and what communicative resources one chooses relates to how one builds his or her identity on a particular platform. Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin (2008) touch on this when they discuss identity construction on Facebook. Although their research is initially concerned with deception online, their work also examines how Facebook users communicate their identity implicitly through the use of certain communicative resources.

More specifically, they found that identity construction was more often accomplished through implicit means (e.g. photographs, wall posts, etc.) than through explicit means (e.g. elaborately written “about me” sections). As a result, a Facebook user’s identity is not an individual characteristic, but rather something that is produced socially with others. Through posting tagged images of one’s friends, or adjusting one’s relationship status, individuals are able
to socially produce an identity that highlights their best attributes. For example, if I were to post an image of myself and friends at a local bar, I am able to convey that I have an active social life. This is then reaffirmed as my friends make comments, tag themselves, or hit the like button in regard to that image. Also, I am highlighting an aspect of my personality that I perceive as positive, while overshadowing aspects that might not blend with facets of my identity I am trying to place in the foreground.

As a result, this means of identity construction allows for a hyper-real identity that is centered on a user’s idea of his or her ideal self. This follows Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) discussion of the partialness principle of identity. This principle contends that “identity will always be partial, produced through contextually situated and ideologically informed configurations of self and other” (Bucholtz and Hall 2005:20). This means that only particular or partial parts of a person’s identity are revealed in a given social episode. This revelation is conditioned by the context, structure, and social ideology in which the episode exists.

The communicative resources available in online platforms play an integral role in the process of identity construction. Furthermore, much of the scholarship on identity construction online has paid much attention to the individual user and less attention to its use by institutional representatives (see Berger & Ezzy 2004; Lövheim 2003, 2004a, 2004b; Zhao et al 2008). My own examination is focused on the use of the resources available on Twitter as a means of signaling institutional identity. To understand how Twitter resources are utilized, I must first explain the make-up of the platform, as well as the literature pertaining to the function of its resources.
Twitter describes itself as “A real-time information network that connects you to the latest stories, ideas, opinions and news about what you find interesting.” This is to say that it is a social network for the purpose of micro-blogging, in which the user posts short, 140 character-or-less, messages or tweets that others can access. In light of this, certain aspects of the messages are typically truncated. This can be observed in the use of URL shrinkers such as tinyurl.com, which shortens URLs by generating a shorter link that redirects users to the original URL. In addition, this truncation can be seen in forms like “u” for “you.” These shortened forms illustrate the amount of crafting that must be done in order to abide by the 140-character limit.

In addition, the level of access between users differs. Access is described in terms of followership. To follow a person is to allow his or her tweets to appear on one’s feed, which is a collection of posts by other users. Followership among users can be reciprocal or non-reciprocal. Thus, unlike Facebook in which friendship or connections must be mutual, Twitter followership can be one-sided (e.g. Holly follows Vicky, but Vicky does not follow Holly) or in can be mutual (e.g. both Holly and Vicky follow each other). In addition, privacy settings can make posts public to all, available to only a particular set of people, or private.

Also, Twitter has conventions that are unique to the platform. This includes @tags (at tags), #tags (hash tags), and retweets. These communicative resources are utilized in different ways in order to respond or comment on the goings-on of the Twitter universe. Each of the conventions listed above allow users to comment and connect with other users, regardless of whether or not they follow a particular individual’s tweets. For instance, the use of @tags, which utilize the “@” symbol followed by an individual’s user name connects tweets to particular users. So, if one were to tweet, “@Vicky let’s hang out” then Vicky would be alerted to the fact that she was tagged, thus linking her to the tweet regardless of whether or not she follows the

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3 https://twitter.com/about
person who tagged her. Similarly, the use of #tags (the symbol “#” followed by a word or words) link tweets by topic. Thus, if one were to tweet, “I love #thecoololestmovieever” then users would be able to search or click on the #tag and see a collection of tweets that contain that particular #tag. In addition to the tagging system, retweets are unique to the platform. Retweets are the repetition of another individual’s tweet. The convention for retweeting varies. A retweet could be done by simply clicking the retweet button, using the convention “RT @tag,” or numerous other variations. In addition to retweets, @tags, and #tags, the use of URLs to link the tweets to photos, blog posts, or videos is a common practice, whose ubiquity on the platform is due in part to the character limitation imposed on users.

Much of the research concerning Twitter has focused on the functions of these conventions. For instance, Honeycutt and Herring (2009) investigate the use of @tags in terms of its distribution. They found that @tags that were present in the initial position of the tweet were utilized to indicate the addressee of the tweet, while @tags in the middle or final position indicated that those tagged are referees. Additionally, they found that @tags in the initial position were more likely to elicit a response from other Twitter users than @tags found in the middle or end of a tweet.

Although the repetition of someone else’s words is not new to the study of linguistics (see Tannen 1989; Clark & Gerrig 1990; Hamilton 1998), the exploration into its use on Twitter is still developing. Boyd, Golder, and Lotan’s (2010) research observes that there are varying degrees of alteration to the original tweet, as well as differing levels of author recognition (a retweet need not include an @tag or mention of original tweeter). In addition to the wide variety of forms, there is also a wide variety of functions of retweeting. One of the many functions that Boyd, Golder, and Lotan describe is making one’s presence known. This means that a particular
user may not be aware who follows him or her, and retweeting that user whilst using an @tag lets the user know that someone is paying attention to his or her tweets (ibid). What work by Honeycutt and Herring (2010), as well as by Boyd, Golder, and Lotan (2010) demonstrates is the tagging system’s importance for participating in the on-going Twitter conversation.

What can be understood from the literature concerning CMC is that the resources available to users on the internet are unique to their online environment, whether it is utilizing emoticons or the tagging system on Twitter. Furthermore, identity construction online is done primarily through implicit means (e.g. the use of URLs, video media, photographs, etc) rather than explicit means, such as a lengthy “about me” section. The work in this area is still developing, especially as the different platforms for interaction emerge, and as the current platforms continue to grow and change. Furthermore, work specifically focusing on Twitter has yet to touch on the connection of these communicative resources to institutional identity construction online, especially identity concerning the negotiation of institutional and personal roles.

In conclusion, the literature on institutional and religious discourse reflects how the constructs found therein shape the discourse of the members in specific institutions. Furthermore this literature has shown the many facets that have been examined within the field of institutional discourse, from lay-professional interactions to institutional identity. Also, the study of religious discourse has delved into its use of language in non-sacred spaces, specifically looking to mediated environments. From this it apparent that further research must be done to explore how religious representatives utilize social media to build their identity.

Also, what can be gathered from the discussion concerning CMC is that the communicative resources used online are unique to the platforms in which they are found. More
importantly, the resources available on Twitter have only been examined in terms of connectivity, as seen in Honeycutt and Herring’s work on @tags. What has not been examined on Twitter is how these resources (@tags, #tags, retweets, and URLs) are used as tools for positioning and identity construction.

**Theoretical Framework: Positioning, epistemicity, and footing**

In addition to scholarship exploring institutional discourse and CMC, my examination of identity construction is grounded in theoretical work on positioning theory, epistemicity, and footing. This theoretical background guides the discussion of how roles of authority are negotiated on Twitter. In brief, positioning theory is concerned with the roles that people occupy within a given context, epistemicity relates to the relationship between an individual and the information being discussed, while footing is focused on the different levels of participation in an interaction. Each of these concepts inform how the use of @tags, retweets, #tags, URLs, and pronouns are used to negotiate several different aspects of the participants’ Twitter identities, and as a result, construct a dynamic and complex online identity.

*Positioning*

In the broadest sense, positioning theory explicates the intricate web of positions that one must navigate in order to negotiate the roles in an interaction. Van Langenhove and Harré (1999) assert that each individual occupies positions, which are fluid, meaning that an individual can move through different positions throughout an interaction, or even occupy several positions simultaneously. The manner in which one is positioned is dependent on a mutually determining triad. In this triad the storyline of the interaction and the force of that storyline influence the
position that is occupied (see Figure 1). Much like the game of chess where particular pieces have prescribed ways of moving, particular positions have an inventory of acceptable actions (Harré & Moghaddam 2003). These actions provide the social force that drives the storyline of an interaction (ibid). These acts are meaningful within the boundaries of the storyline in which it exists, and the storyline can be described as a social episode that is continually unfolding as the interaction progresses (ibid). As individuals interact, new aspects of the plot are revealed, and consequently, the positions of the participants evolve.

Figure 1.

*Mutually determining triad (from van Langenhove & Harre 1999:18)*

Furthermore, there is a plethora of different modes of positioning. The particular mode that this examination is primarily concerned with is that of moral and personal positioning (van Langenhove & Harré 1999:18). Moral refers to positioning oneself in occupational roles or positions of authority. In the case of this study, it refers to the role of pastor or religious leader. Meanwhile, personal positions have to do with occupying roles related to one’s personal relationship with others, such as friend, sister, or in this case fellow lay-member of the church. Occupying these roles can be done intentionally or tacitly, and it can be done by all parties in an interaction (:22). This is to say that I can either position myself or another person can determine what position I occupy, depending on the action that takes place in the interaction.
Positioning that is done intentionally can be further broken down into the categories: deliberate and forceful (26). If one is employing a deliberate positioning strategy, then he or she is expressing his or her identity while emphasizing his or her agency in the positioning that is taking place. This can be observed in autobiographical narratives, where the storyteller is purposefully positioning themselves and participants are aware that the portrait being created is done so by the storyteller. Meanwhile, forceful positioning indicates a lack of agency while one is intentionally positioned. This can be observed in institutional environments, such as the use of occupational titles. To address someone as doctor is to force them to occupy that moral role, and doing so lets the individual know that he or she is expected to respond in that capacity. In this way, deliberate positioning strategies can be accomplished through performative means, while forced positioning can be undertaken through accountive means (see Table 1).

Table 1.

*Types of intentional Positioning (adapted from van Langenhove and Harre 1999:24)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performative positioning</th>
<th>Accountive Positioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-positioning</td>
<td>Deliberate self-positioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Positioning</td>
<td>Deliberate positioning of others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Epistemicity

My discussion on epistemicity is focused on how individuals position themselves in relation to information being discussed, and how they express their authority to discuss that information. Mushin (2001) asserts that evidential meaning is more than simply an indication of
the source of information; it has to do with the speaker’s expression of the sources’ soundness and his or her relationship to the information within a given context. She discusses a speaker’s relationship to information in terms of epistemological stance types that exist on a continuum of subjectivity. Stance types on this continuum can evoke or efface the conceptualizer as the source of information to varying degrees. For instance, personal experience is closest to the subjective side of continuum, pointing to the speaker as the source of information. Meanwhile, inferential, reportive, imaginative, and factual stance types distance the speaker from the information being discussed (see Figure 2). Mushin uses these stance types to illustrate a disparity between the actual source of information and how a speaker frames his or her relationship to the source of information. As a result, the choice of epistemological stance strategy is the result of a combination of factors; as Mushin comments, “Choice of epistemological stance, and the linguistic strategies used to express it, also rely on the speaker’s rhetorical purpose, the extent in which they want to claim authority and their immediate interactive goals” (2001: 83). Thus, the actual source information, the speaker’s assessment of that source, interactional setting and the speaker’s assessment of the interaction, as well as cultural conventions all affect the how one expresses his or her epistemological stance. In short, this work demonstrates that there are numerous ways epistemological stances are manifested, and these stances are dependent on contextual factors in addition to the goals of an interaction.

Figure 2.
Building on the discussion of epistemicity, Raymond and Heritage (2006) discuss how epistemic rights are negotiated in conversations. The phrase epistemic rights refers to the way an individual expresses his or her authority to comment on information in an interaction. Heritage and Raymond’s research showed that individuals upgrade or downgrade through utilizing epistemic resources, such as unmarked declaratives and tag questions. Furthermore, this negotiation of epistemic authority was done discursively, which they discuss using the terms *first-position* and *second-position*. These terms describe how expressions of epistemic rights are organized sequentially in an interaction.

Mushin (2001) and Raymond and Heritage’s (2006) work illustrates that source of information, as well as the speaker’s evaluation of its soundness, can manifest in an utterance in several different ways. For Raymond and Heritage (2006) it was evident in the way unmarked declaratives and tag questions were organized in an interaction, allowing the individuals in the interaction to upgrade or downgrade the way they expressed their right to access the discussion of particular information. For Mushin, it is expressed in the way a speaker expresses subjectivity or objectivity.

**Footing**

Furthermore, how individuals position themselves and others is closely related to the types of people present in an interaction. Goffman (1981) asserts that there are more than simply speaker and hearer participants in a conversation. He expounds on the different facets of the participant roles of speaker and hearer and what they lend to the process of the framing of an utterance. In terms of hearer, participant roles are viewed in relation to an individual’s ratification as part of the approved and acknowledged audience. These roles include: the addressee, auditor, overhearer, and eavesdropper. To explain, addressee is the person at whom an
utterance is directed. This participant is known, ratified, and addressed. The auditor is known to be a part of the conversation and ratified as a listener, but is not the addressee of an utterance. The overhearer is a participant whom the speaker is aware of, but is not a ratified listener of the conversation. Finally, the eavesdropper is a participant that the speaker is unaware of, and is an unratted listener. In this way an utterance is framed in relation to the speaker’s perception of who his or her audience is.

A part of this framing process is the type of ownership the speaker wants to express over an utterance. In order to explain this, Goffman describes three speaker roles: the principal, author, and animator. The principal is responsible for what is being said. The author is the person who crafted the utterance, while the animator is the person who is speaking the words. Although a speaker can occupy the roles of principal, author, and animator, participants or characters referred to in an interaction can be depicted in these roles. For instance, if I were to quote a line from a movie, I may be the principal and the animator of that quote, but I am not the author. Therefore, a speaker can possess any combination of these roles, depending how an utterance is framed and what he or she is endeavoring to accomplish.

In light of Goffman’s work, it is apparent that the process of crafting messages is complex in that the speaker, or in this case the typist, is aware that many different kinds of individuals may have access to what is being said. The effects of this gradation of listenership are compounded on social media due to the public nature of tweets and the awareness of an ambiguous potential audience. This can be observed in Gershon’s (2010:165-196) discussion of the perception of public and private spheres online, in which she explains how internet users perceive multiple spheres of publics that are often in competition, and must meet their interactional goals while still meeting the expectations and needs of their ambiguous, competing
audience members. Also, in mediated settings the concepts of principal, author, and animator become increasingly important as the medium begins to play a role in animating the words of individuals or obscuring the authorship of the words being displayed on the medium.

My approach to the analysis of my data is guided by the theoretical work discussed in this section. The examination of positioning, epistemicity and footing as it relates to negotiating institutional roles is necessary for understanding how dynamic, multifaceted identities are constructed on Twitter. The discussion of this theoretical work speaks to how linguistic and communicative resources are used as tools in the process of constructing an online persona, whether it is the use of pronouns to position one’s self in relation to different audience members or electronic features used to animate a user’s own voice or the voice of others.

In sum, positioning theory describes how one moves through positions in order to assert who he or she is in an interaction, while epistemicity illuminates the relationship between authority and information, and how that relationship is expressed in an interaction. Finally, Goffman’s work on footing demonstrates how speakers frame utterances in terms of the principal, author, and animator, in order to accomplish interactive goals over different levels and gradations of audience listenership. These works are central to the qualitative analysis of my data in terms of identity, and the explanation of how identity construction is accomplished in 140 characters or less and within the constructs of religious institutions.
METHODOLOGY

The Participants

The two institutional representatives, Rick Warren and Mark Driscoll, examined in this work were chosen because of their affiliations with the Emergent and Seeker movement, respectively. Both are pastors of large congregations with weekly church attendance reaching upwards of 2,000 people, are prominent leaders in their respective movements, while also being involved in Christian ministry on a public level. Choosing religious representatives with public ministries is essential to my investigation of identity on Twitter due to the significant role social media presence plays in the efficacy of their ministries.

Description of the Data

My investigation into religious discourse utilizes a corpus that contains tweets posted between September 30, 2011, and January 5, 2012. Originally, this corpus contained 1,099 tweets. After eliminating tweets that were posted in a language other than English, the dataset has a total of 1,071 tweets, 605 tweets from Rick Warren and 466 tweets from Mark Driscoll. For the purpose of understanding identity construction in terms of positioning theory and epistemic stance taking, this inquiry is concerned with both electronic features and pronoun use.

Analysis Procedure

Academic literature on Twitter demonstrates the importance of tagging and the use of retweets in this particular online environment (see Honeycutt & Herring 2010; Boyd & Golder & Lotan 2010; Huang & Thorton & Efthimiadis 2010). Additionally, the use of URLs to link users

4 http://marshill.com/2008/08/13/the-measure-of-mars-hill
to photos, blog posts, articles, or videos aid users in crafting short messages that fit the 140-character limitation. For these reasons, the data was coded for the use of the following electronic features: #tags, @tags, URLs, and retweets. More specifically, each tweet was coded for the use of any of the aforementioned electronic features and then again for their use individually.

Also, Dyer and Keller-Cohen (2000) pointed to the important role pronouns played in expressing expert or authoritative roles. In light of this, pronouns were coded to examine identity construction in terms of the positioning of the self and other. Pronouns were coded according to four categories, you, inclusive we, exclusive we and I, and finally, third person pronouns such as, they, he/she. The you category includes both plural and singular forms, as well as possessive forms such as, your. Inclusive we refers to forms of we used to address the audience as a whole. An example of would be if I said, “We make a great team.” In contrast, exclusive we and I refers to forms of we that exclude particular types of audience members, as well as I which focuses on the speaker rather than audience members. An example of we that would fit into this category would be: “We analysts must stick together.” The use of we in this sentence precludes any audience member that is not an analyst. Finally, third person pronouns include forms such as they, them, him, or her. Since reported speech is meant to describe what was said in a different time or place and are not necessarily the words of the speaker, any pronouns found in reported speech, including retweets, were not counted among these.

In order to compare the usage of these features between the two participants, the Fisher’s Exact Test was used. Fisher’s Exact Test is a test of statistical significance for comparing categorical data that exactly measures the deviation from the null hypothesis, rather than using a regression to approximate the deviation as in other tests like the Chi-Squared Test (Fisher [1954] 1970). Because of the exact deviation measurement, Fisher’s Exact Test is better suited for
measuring data with small sample sizes (ibid). Fisher’s Exact Test is therefore the best test for the data, because, while the full dataset I collected contains a large amount of tweets, some of the sub-categories being juxtaposed contain comparatively small samples.
RESULTS

The quantitative results point to two distinct strategies: one in which Rick Warren prefers text heavy tweets and the use of you, and the other showing Driscoll’s propensity to use electronic features, especially URLs, as well as his preference for the use of exclusive we/I. These strategies answer the first research question—how do religious institutions use Twitter to build identity.

Electronic features

The first comparative dimension this study examined was the use of electronic features in a tweet, as opposed to using words or text. Out of Rick Warren’s 605 tweets, electronic features were only present in 196 tweets or 32% of the tweets; meanwhile, out of Mark Driscoll’s 466 tweets, 328 or 70% contained electronic features. Furthermore, Fisher’s Exact Test showed that the difference in the use of electronic features was statistically significant (p < .0001).

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Total No. of Tweets</th>
<th>No. of Tweets with Electronic Features</th>
<th>No. of Tweets with @tags</th>
<th>No. of Tweets with #Tags</th>
<th>No. of Tweets with URLs</th>
<th>No. of Tweets with Retweets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rick Warren</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Driscoll</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p_value</td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;.0001</td>
<td>&lt;.0001</td>
<td>.497</td>
<td>&lt;.0001</td>
<td>&lt;.0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For a more nuanced understanding of the participants’ usage of electronic features, the features were broken down by type: @tags, #tags, retweets, and URLs. The data shows that while Mark Driscoll uses electronic features more in general (70% versus 32%), Rick Warren used two particular features more (@tags and retweets), while Mark Driscoll relied heavily on one feature, URLs. In Rick Warren’s tweets @tags occurred in 17% of the tweets, #tags occurred in 6%, URLs occurred in 18%, and retweets occurred in 8% of the tweets. In Mark Driscoll’s tweets, URLs occurred in 313 tweets out of 466 tweets; accounting for 95% of tweets that contained electronic features and 67% of all tweets. In addition, @tags occurred in 7% of all tweets, #tags occurred in 5% of all tweets, and retweets occurred in 1% of all tweets. Three of the four features, @tags, URLs, and retweets, exhibited a statistically significant difference
according to Fisher’s Exact Test (p < .0001 for each feature), while #tag usage was not statistically different (p = .50).

Graph 2.

![Electronic Features by Sub-Category](image)

**Pronouns**

Pronoun usage was split into the use of *you*, inclusive *we*, exclusive *we* and *I*, and third-person pronouns. Rick Warren used 569 pronouns in the all tweets in the data set. Out of Rick Warren’s tokens 46% (262) were *you*, 7% (40) inclusive *we*, 37% (208) exclusive *we* and *I*, and 10% (59) were third-person pronouns. Meanwhile, Mark Driscoll used 203 pronouns in all
tweets, and out of those tokens 29% (59) were you, 6% (12) inclusive we, 52% (106) exclusive we and I, and 13% (26) were third-person pronouns. These numbers show, first, that Rick Warren is more apt to use pronouns in general and, second, that both Warren and Driscoll tend to use you and exclusive we/I more than the other two categories. However, each has a different preference; Mark Driscoll using exclusive we more than Rick Warren, and Rick Warren using more you tokens than Mark Driscoll. These preferences are confirmed when compared using Fisher’s Exact Test. A statistically significant difference was found between Mark Driscoll and Rick Warren’s use of you (p < .0001) and exclusive we/I (p = .0001), and no significance was found in the other two categories.

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>No. of Tokens</th>
<th>No. of You</th>
<th>No. of Inclusive We</th>
<th>No. of Exclusive We/I</th>
<th>No. of 3rd person pronouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rick Warren</td>
<td>569</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Driscoll</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P value</td>
<td>&lt;.0001</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.0001</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Graph 3.

Pronouns

- % you
  - Rick Warren: 46%
  - Mark Driscoll: 29%
- % Inclusive we
  - Rick Warren: 7%
  - Mark Driscoll: 6%
- % Exclusive we/I
  - Rick Warren: 37%
  - Mark Driscoll: 52%
- % Third person
  - Rick Warren: 10%
  - Mark Driscoll: 13%
DISCUSSION

The quantitative results show how pronouns and electronic features are utilized in different ways by Warren and Driscoll. Work on institutional discourse has pointed to the use of pronouns for the purpose of constructing expert and novice roles (see Dyer & Keller-Cohen 2000; Vasquez 2008), while CMC literature has demonstrated the use of electronic features for creating meaning in interactions online (see Dresner & Herring 2010; Zhao et al 2008).

Although the results from the quantitative analysis explain what features are preferred by each participant, they do not explain how those features are utilized in negotiating roles. Examining the use of these electronic features and pronouns through the lens of positioning theory, epistemicity, and footing demonstrates how they are used to create a multifaceted identity that balances moral and personal roles in order convey an online persona that is a combination of benevolent, Christian, pastor, friend, and confidant, while also being able fit within the parameters of their institution’s constructs. This works toward answering the second research question—How does the way in which Mark Driscoll and Rick Warren negotiate positions of authority relate to the goals and constructs of their respective movements?

These disparate ways of using electronic features and pronouns are a reflection of the seeker and emergent movement’s ongoing endeavors to reconcile the Christian church with the demands of the 21st century culture, as well as their desire to move away from negative perceptions of the Christian church at large. For the seeker church, Warren adapting to the contemporary society comes by repackaging the church’s hierarchical system and ideals in contemporary forms of worship. This repackaging is demonstrated in the use of linguistic and communicative strategies to express an aversion to a stuffy, judgmental Christian persona. Driscoll and the emergent church approach reconciliation differently—by dissolving traditional
church hierarchies and focusing on the internal workings of the church, all of which are reflected in how pronouns and electronic features are used to construct identity.

Thus, in examining these features through the lens of footing, positioning theory, and epistemological stance, I examine the different strategies employed by both representatives in order to build an identity that is relatable to contemporary society. This examination explicates how Warren and Driscoll’s strategies relate to their institutional goal and the constructs of their movements in terms of their use of inward facing or outward facing electronic features and pronouns, as well as the way Warren uses retweets and Driscoll uses URLs to frame their tweets in order to display or deemphasize hierarchical structures.

**General Discussion of Electronic Features**

The drastic difference between Warren and Driscoll’s use of electronic features (electronic features were used in 32% of Warren’s tweets and 70% in Driscoll’s tweets) is an illustration of the distinct strategies employed by each participant. While Warren’s tweets are text heavy, relying on actual words to convey his point, Driscoll’s tweets tend to be shorter and heavily rely on electronic features to express his thoughts and opinions. This is illustrated the following tweets.

**Example 1.**

```
@RickWarren: Sin may be private but it's never just personal. I ALWAYS hurt others when I sin, even with secret sins.

(Posted on 10/06/2011)
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Example 2.

@PastorMark: Jesus is the answer for our sins
http://youtu.be/SR9yTmkKBDY
(Posted on 10/08/2011)

In example 1, Rick Warren exclusively utilizes words to explicate his point, which is that sin affects everyone. Warren uses 104 characters to make this point, almost exhausting his entire 140-character limitation. In contrast, Driscoll only uses 53 characters in example 2, and of those 53 characters 24 are found in the URL. Thus, the majority of what he is trying to convey—that Jesus is necessary for the forgiveness of sin—is accomplished by using a URL that links users to a Youtube video that depicts Driscoll giving a sermon on the subject of sin and forgiveness.

A closer examination of the electronic features tells a more detailed story. When the electronic features are scrutinized individually, it is apparent that Warren uses particular electronic features more. Specifically, he uses @tags (17%) and retweets (8%) significantly more than Driscoll (@tags used in 7% of tweets and retweets used in 1% of tweets). Meanwhile, Driscoll is exponentially out-pacing Warren in his use of URLs, which occur in 67% of Driscoll’s tweets. This feature occurs in a scant 18% of Warren’s tweets. Academic work on @tags and retweets (Honeycutt & Herring 2010; Boyd et al 2010) discuss how these particular features are used to reach out to other users, allowing them to demonstrate listenership and relationships with other users. In this sense, @tags and retweets are very much “outward facing,” used to make and solidify relationships, as well as connect and expand the network and reach of a tweet in the Twitterverse. On a different level, Driscoll’s use of URLs to depict sermons or
other goings-on of the church is “inward facing,” only dealing with matters having to do with the internal aspects of the church.

This is in line with both of their institutions. As discussed in the introduction, Rick Warren and seeker churches are outward focused—having ministries dedicated to issues outside of the church, but related to religious dogma. An example of this would be Warren’s public ministries in the political sphere. In contrast, the emergent church’s emphasis on praxis is focused on the internal workings and spirituality of the church, focusing on “micro” level aspects of the church. This is illustrated in Driscoll’s ministries including marriage and Christian sexuality, as well as the training of clergy members. Thus, Warren and Driscoll’s affinity for particular features is a reflection of the outward and inward focus of their respective movements.

**Pronouns**

Dyer and Keller-Cohen’s (2000) work demonstrates how pronouns play an integral role in the way individuals access moral positions in institutional interactions. In the case of their study, pronouns were used to highlight a dichotomy between expert and novice in workplace narratives. In the case of Rick Warren and Mark Driscoll, their use of pronouns on Twitter explains how they express or deemphasize their moral position while also displaying a benevolent, non-judgmental, and accepting persona. In the data there is a significant difference in the use of you (p value <.0001) and exclusive we/I (p value = .0001) between the two participants. Out of all pronouns used by Warren 46% were you, while Driscoll used you only 29% of the time. The use of exclusive we/I accounted for 52% of Driscoll’s and 37% of Warren’s pronouns.
At first glance, it may seem as if both are creating dichotomies similar to Dyer and Keller-Cohen’s work. However, a closer examination of the pronoun use also reveals that Warren’s use of you is primarily for the purpose of creating distance between him and a judgmental Christian persona. This allows him to manage his alignment with Christians, non-Christians, and a negative image of the Christian church. Meanwhile, in Driscoll’s tweets exclusive we is primarily used to discuss uncomfortable or potentially confrontational subjects. These topics have the potential to portray him in a negative light in that they may render Driscoll as accusatory or judgmental. As such, Driscoll is using exclusive we to target particular categories of audience members, yet also allows him to mitigate any condemnatory appearance he may be displaying by putting the addressee and himself on equal footing.

This discussion of the use of pronouns expounds on Warren’s use of you, and how its use is a reflection of the constructs of the seeker-sensitive movement, specifically its outward focus and hierarchy. Driscoll’s use of exclusive we endeavors to accomplish the same goal as Warren, yet does so within his institutional constrains, specifically the emergent church’s inward focus and dislike of clergy and lay-member distinctions.

In the following tweet, Rick Warren is discussing the proper Christian response to “bad” Christians and non-Christians. In commenting on the behavior of particular types of Christian characters he is able to position himself away from a judgmental, hypocritical Christian persona.

Example 3.

@RickWarren: If u fear the disapproval of pharisees &their guilt by association tactics, people you could reach will die without Christ.

(Posted on October 6, 2011)
In this tweet Warren encourages members of the Christian church to be wary of judgmental, hypocritical Christians, and to consider the negative ramifications that such Christian characters have on relationships between Christians and non-Christians. By criticizing this pharisaical Christians character Warren works toward distancing himself from Christianity’s negative image. While his pronoun use, specifically the use of you, reflects the seeker movement’s outward focus and adherence to church hierarchies.

In utilizing the plural you he expresses a distinction between himself from his fellow Christians. This distinction points to his position of religious authority. It assumes that he has right to issue a suggestion on how Christians manage their relationships with others. This authority is bolstered in his use of the word Pharisee, which is a biblical reference used to describe corrupt, hypocritical religious leaders. In using characters from the Bible he imbues himself with religious authority from a sacred, religious text and is demonstration of his pastoral duty of biblical study.

On another level, he is repackaging the way Christianity approaches proselytizing. Although he continues to see non-Christians as objects for outreach, which can be observed in his statement, “People you could reach will die without Christ,” his harsh criticism of hypocritical Christians mitigates the severity of portraying non-Christians as objects for conversion. In this sense, although non-Christians are objects for conversion, they are not the most sinful villain being described in this tweet. Judgmental, hypocritical Christians are depicted as the most villainous, which is seen in the use of term Pharisee. This becomes even more salient when he describes their actions as “their guilt by association tactics,” implying that this type Christian is manipulative and crafty.
This emphasis on the pharisaical Christians is a demonstration of the seeker movement’s endeavors to repackage Christian ideals to make them more palatable to non-Christians. It is also a reflection of the movement’s outward focus. To emphasize the alienation of non-Christians by the church in terms of the actions of “bad” Christians is to put the church at fault for the absence of “salvation” for non-Christians. In this way, Warren attempts to shift away from the church’s existing negative image, while also trying to appeal to non-Christians by expressing his acceptance of them.

Additionally, this tweet is shaped by Warren’s knowledge that any number of individuals, Christians and non-Christians alike, may access this tweet. In terms of Goffman’s discussion of speaker roles, non-Christians are overhearers of this tweet. In this way, Warren’s use of you and description of Pharisees is pointed outward, yet continues to reinforce his loyalty to religious power structures. In other words, knowing that non-Christians can access this tweet, Warren strategically aligns himself in a position of power with Christians, seen in his use of you to address church membership. He also criticizes the judgmental Christian, and distances himself from the negative persona of the Christian church by using the terms they and Pharisee to refer to “bad” Christians. In doing so, he is simultaneously pointing to his acceptance of non-Christians, who may be reading his tweet, and to his position of authority.

In sum, the use of you allows Rick Warren to express his pastoral authority, and instruct church members how to manage relationships with non-Christians. In spite of his expression of his moral position, he continues to endeavor to distance himself from an extremely negative image of Christians. In doing this he aims to convey to non-Christians that he is a different kind of religious leader: one that loves accepts, and cares for them.
In contrast to Warren, who in example 3 uses you to make a point about outreach to non-Christians, Driscoll’s use of exclusive we is an extension of his approach to institutional hierarchies within the Christian church. Although in many ways the use of exclusive we can be seen as a way to emphasize an us versus them dichotomy, Driscoll’s use of exclusive we to discuss topics that can be perceived as confrontational is way for him express his aversion for a clergy-layman distinction. This in turn, puts him on equal footing with the audience members he is targeting.

In the tweet below Driscoll is discussing the proper mindset of pastors; asking them to examine their motivation for being religious leaders.

Example 4.

@PastorMark: We pastors need to keep asking if we truly love people or just love crowds.

(Posted on October 20, 2011)

Mark Driscoll utilizes the exclusive we to address pastors or members of the clergy. He also uses the terms people and crowds to refer to church members. In this instance, he is deliberately positioning himself in his pastoral role by using we to put himself on equal footing with other pastors. Although he positions himself in alignment with other pastors, he distinguishes himself from the type of pastors that are motivated by the power to influence crowds. This can be observed in his statement, “If we truly love people or just crowds.” In this instance he endeavors to point out a distinction between two disparate perspectives on leadership: one emphasizes the leader’s obligation to serve members of the church and the other
emphasizes authority and power. In doing this, Driscoll is implying that although his position as a pastor has the potential for expressing authority and power, he chooses to “love people” and be in service to the members of the church. Thus, although he is accessing his moral position by aligning himself with other pastors, he is balancing that position of power with the persona of a caring pastor who is in service to his church. This strategy is consistent with his emergent church background. It is a testament to the emergent church’s dislike of traditional hierarchical structures. It emphasizes service rather than power and focuses inward, at changing the spiritual conduct within the church.

Both Warren’s and Driscoll’s strategies are concerned with portraying Christians as relatable. In Warren’s case he does this by distancing himself with a pharisaical Christian persona, while Driscoll uses exclusive we to target specific audience members, put himself on equal footing with his addressees, and emphasize service rather than the power of his pastoral position. Their choice of strategies reflect their differing constructs. Warren is repackaging the binary between Christians and non-Christians. Driscoll is concentrating on changing the church’s perspective concerning pastoral leadership; moving away from the pastoral position as one of authority and instead focusing inward at how leaders serve the membership of the church.

Retweeting and URLs: deliberate and forceful positioning of self and other

The discussion of pronouns is an illustration of how religious representatives from differing movements accomplish the same goal within their constructs by utilizing disparate strategies. In addition to the constraints imposed on discourse by the constructs of an institution, language in a mediated communication environment must adhere to a particular format. As previously discussed, Twitter poses a unique set of limitations, from the 140-character constraint
to the way users can connect and access the tweets of others. However, there is an element of creativity that is cultivated when limitations are introduced. If a social networking site, in this case Twitter, is a container of discourse, then linguistic and communicative strategies are the fluid individuals put into these containers, able to transform to meet the needs of the user and the platform. Online environments provide a unique set of communicative resources in the form of electronic features. In this discussion of electronic features from Twitter, I will be focusing on retweeting and URLs (specifically URLs linking users to video content). Each serves a unique role in expressing authority and deliberately or forcefully positioning the self and/or others.

The act of retweeting is unique in its ubiquity on this platform and its varieties of functions (see Boyd & Golder & Lotan 2010). Also, its ability to link users together in their discussion of interests and ideas is important in bolstering the social interaction piece of this social media platform. Therefore, the act of retweeting is important in the exploration of identity construction on Twitter, especially in light of the platform’s linguistic limitations.

With regard to the comparison between Rick Warren and Mark Driscoll’s use of retweets, Rick Warren’s preference for retweets demonstrates its importance to his online identity. Although it only occurred in 8% of Rick Warren’s tweets, they accounted for 25% (49 of 196) of tweets that contained electronic features. In contrast, Mark Driscoll only used them in 1% of his tweets and in 1.8% (6 of 328) of the electronic features that he used. Therefore, Warren used retweets at a significantly higher rate than Driscoll. In light of this, I contend that Warren’s use of retweets greatly contributes to his endeavors to construct an identity that balances his moral position with his aim to appear relatable to others, and using retweets allows him to accomplish this while continually reflecting his values as religious leader of the seeker-sensitive movement.
In the following excerpt, Rick Warren is responding to a tweet made by darrinpatrick by agreeing with him, @tagging him, and then retweeting his original tweet. Darrinpatrick’s Twitter profile describes him as, “The husband of a beautiful woman, the father of 4 great kids, pastor of The Journey and author of Church planter & For the City.” Like Warren, he holds a position of authority in the church, and as such Rick Warren’s choice to retweet him allows him to negotiate his moral position and position himself away from a judgmental Christian identity.

Example 5.

@RickWarren: YES! @darrinpatrick If u aren’t in relationship with drunks, sexually broken wounded by religion, u aren’t following Jesus!(Posted October 20, 2011)

Since the primary substance of this tweet was originally posted by darrinpatrick, this retweet is Warren’s reaction to a previous tweet. As previously discussed, Raymond and Heritage (2006) discussed how epistemic rights are upgraded or downgraded in the first-position and second-position. In this tweet, Rick Warren downgrades his epistemic authority in the second position by agreeing with darrinpatrick. This is done when he agrees by saying, “YES!” using all caps, an emphatic form. In retweeting darrinpatrick he is yielding to his epistemic authority to discuss proper Christian behavior. Thus, he allows darrinpatrick to assume a largely moral role, while diluting his authoritative role by agreeing with him. Additionally, darrinpatrick’s original tweet is an unmarked declarative, demonstrating his strong epistemic stance in the first position. In this sense, the identities that are being constructed in these tweets

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5 https://twitter.com/#!/darrinpatrick
are done so discursively. Darrinpatrick’s original tweet displayed his authoritative role through presenting the information being discussed as pure fact, as seen in the unmarked declarative. Rick Warren uses this to discursively construct his own identity, and by doing little to upgrade his stance in his response of, “YES!” he not only agrees with darrinpatrick’s discussion of proper Christian behavior, he also agrees that he has the right to comment on such affairs.

Therefore, the act of reposting a tweet and agreeing with it allows Rick Warren to deliberately position himself in relation to darrinpatrick. Conversely, he forcefully positions darrinpatrick in concert with himself through retweeting him. Thus, although he downgrades his epistemic authority, he is still pointing to his moral position through aligning himself with another pastor.

On a different level, Rick Warren is also positioning Christians and non-Christians through this tweet. Although his main followership comprises members of Saddleback Church and members of the Christian church, he is also positioning the overhearers of this tweet, non-Christians. In retweeting the words, “If u arent in relationship with drunks, sexually broken wounded by religion, u arent following Jesus,” he positions himself in alignment with non-Christians. Although Rick Warren may not be the author of the words or their animator, he is the principal. This allows him to make a statement that might be offensive to some Christians, yet relinquishes the responsibility of its potential offensiveness by attributing it to someone else. In this way he, negotiates his position as pastor, ordinary person, and Christian.

By retweeting, Warren downgrades his epistemic rights to talk about moral Christian behavior, because he attributes the actual words to someone else. Furthermore, he positions himself as a benevolent Christian by agreeing with darrinpatrick and positions darrinpatrick in
alignment with Warren by retweeting him. This gives him the opportunity to negotiate his position of authority, and his position as a benevolent, caring Christian.

Just as retweeting is part of Warren’s strategy for identity construction, Driscoll’s use of URLs contributes to the way he moves away from a negative Christian image. Sharing URLs with other users is an important aspect of social media. It provides a unique communicative resource in that allows users to share articles, video, and blog posts in order to accomplish interactional goals. An example of this is Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin’s work (2010) in which Facebook users relied on links to pictures and other outside resources in order to discursively construct their identity with their Facebook friends. Their use on Twitter is even more integral to the interactions found therein, especially because of the 140-character limit. Despite the limited linguistic resources available to users, they can communicate interests, ideas, desires, and beliefs through posting a URL that links other users to blogs, articles, videos, or pictures. For Mark Driscoll, URLs occurred in 313 out of 466 tweets (67%). In comparison, Rick Warren used URLs in 106 out of 605 or 18% of tweets. This feature plays a significant role in allowing Mark Driscoll to negotiate his role as pastor and fellow Christian, as well as his ability to shape a desirable and culturally relevant identity on Twitter.

URLs offer users the opportunity to align or disalign themselves with others or others’ ideas, which subsequently affects how roles are negotiated. In my research, I contend that they are used to negotiate moral and personal roles. This negotiation, of course, depends on what users choose to depict in the URLs. In this section, I am discussing the use of URLs to show video content. These videos show him in his pastoral position giving a sermon. Bakhtin’s (1986) discussion of double voicing explains how the use of previously existing texts in new situations allows a speaker to use two voices, the voice in the current interaction and the voice from the
text’s original context. By using URL links to display video content of his own sermons he is permutating what was said in his sermons and what he is currently discussing on Twitter.

Additionally, double voicing can be uni- or varidirectional (Bakhtin 1984:193). The term unidirectional suggests agreement; an individual is working in concert with what was originally said to bolster what he or she is currently saying. In contrast, the term varidirectional suggests disagreement. An example of this type of double voicing is seen in parody. In the case of Driscoll’s use of sermon videos, he is making a personal comment that agrees with was said by him while he was in his pastoral position. URLs to video content allow him display both his personal and pastoral position, and in doing so he frames his tweet in a way that allows him to forcefully position himself in a role of religious authority.

In the following excerpt, Mark Driscoll is discussing the concept of grace. Specifically, he is asserting that good works are not used to please God, rather they are byproduct of God’s love for people. At the end of his tweet, he posts a URL that connects users to a Youtube video that displays him giving a sermon concerning the same topic. Although the tweet was posted on Twitter on January 4, 2012, the video was posted on youtube on January 3, 2012 by the user MHCSeattle (Mars Hill Church).

Example 6.

@PastorMark: We don’t labor so that God will love us. We labor because he does. Youtu.be/tsV4q9BUYZU

(Posted on January 4, 2012)
Mark Driscoll negotiates his role as pastor and lay-member through the use of inclusive *we* and a URL connecting others to a Youtube video. Each of these features serves a distinct function in negotiating these roles. They express an identity that is both leader and compatriot, pastor and friend. Through the use of inclusive pronouns, he expresses his connection with others, while also utilizing online video to point to his moral role. Specifically, he uses the pronouns *we, us,* and *we* again. By utilizing these pronouns, he attempts to step back from his role of pastor, putting himself, members of his church, and his Twitter followers on equal footing and deliberately positioning himself and his audience in alignment.

Simultaneously, he demonstrates his strong epistemic stance by utilizing two unmarked declaratives when he says, “We don’t labor so that God will love us. We labor because he does.” Although he is aligning himself with his followers and church members he is still pointing to his authority as a pastor by taking a strong epistemic stance. By utilizing two unmarked declaratives he is accessing an epistemic stance that demonstrates his belief that the information being said is factual. This is further emphasized in his use of a Youtube video that depicts a sermon in which he discusses a biblical passage supporting that statement. Thus, the unmarked declaratives coupled with the Youtube video allow him to upgrade his epistemic stance by distancing the information from his personal role. As previously discussed, Mushin (2001) speaks of a continuum of subjectivity where an individual either emphasizes his or her personal connection to the source of information or does the opposite and distances his or her personal relationship with the information. Driscoll distances his personal role by using factual statements or unmarked declaratives. This is further emphasized in the URL in that he lets the medium, a non-human actor, to present his words, which makes them appear objective.
Furthermore, by utilizing a Youtube video that depicts him in his pastoral role, he forcefully positions himself as a church leader. He is utilizing a complex positioning strategy in which he forcefully positions himself in his moral role through the video, and attempts conceal his agency in this positioning by allowing the medium to do the positioning work for him. To expound, the church organization is the principal of the youtube video, in that the church is the entity that posted the video. Meanwhile, Mark Driscoll is the author of what is being said on the Youtube video, yet the animator is the medium. Although, in a technical sense, it is a depiction of Driscoll speaking, posting a video is much like having a third party retell a story. Since the retelling is done by an object, something without human feeling or cognition, the human agency behind the retelling is removed. Therefore, by allowing the medium rather than himself to animate his words he obscures his agency in positioning himself in his pastoral role. This is further iterated in the church acting as the principal of the video. In this way, he is able to negotiate his pastoral authority and his desire to appear affable and ordinary. He obscures his hand in his positioning as a pastor, while still pointing to that role.

In sum, by using inclusive we Driscoll deliberately positions himself as a part of the lay-membership of his church, and the ambiguous audience to whom he is addressing, while also positioning them in concert with him. Meanwhile, he positions himself in a moral role by utilizing unmarked declaratives to demonstrate his epistemic authority. Finally, a youtube video is used as a means of asserting a strong epistemic stance when discussing religious topics. Yet, the youtube video allows him to also obscure his hand in his moral positioning by allowing the medium to animate his speech. Therefore, both the use of pronouns and electronic features, in this case a URL connecting users to a youtube video, allow him to carefully construct an identity
that shows him as a pastor and authority on Christian values and behavior, but also as a compatriot and an ordinary person.

Similarly, in the following tweet Mark Driscoll invokes his moral position again through the use of a URL, but is now positioning himself, church members, and non-Christians. Here he is tweeting about outreach. The URL is a link to a video from a conference that discusses leadership strategies for church employees. In this tweet, he is positioning himself as an authority on missional work and positioning the church as a disseminator of Christian ideals. Meanwhile, he is putting an emphasis on the spiritual lives of clergy and lay-members, rather than focusing on non-Christians as objects for conversion.

Example 6.

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@PastorMark: The most compelling way to cast vision is to show it.
               People need to see the vision. #e412 http://jesus.to/rGIgtr
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(Posted on October 4, 2011)

Unlike example 5, Mark Driscoll does not use any pronouns to refer to himself or members of the church. He simply says, “The most compelling way to cast vision is to show it.” He could have said “the most compelling way for you” or “the most compelling way I” or “the most compelling way for us,” yet he does not. By omitting pronouns he is accessing his moral position, yet obscuring the division between himself and members of the church. Also, although he does not use a pronoun to refer to non-Christians he uses the word, people. Although he obscures the division between himself and the members of the church, he does not do so when
discussing non-Christians. In using *people* to refer to non-Christians, he aligns himself with members of the church, yet distances himself from non-Christians. Thus, he deliberately positions himself as a Christian, and to a lesser degree a pastor, while positioning non-Christians outside of his group.

At the same time he is trying to convey that he is a benevolent Christian and pastor. Instead of describing the act of proselytizing as the act of telling non-Christians that they must be “saved,” he is saying that proselytizing begins with an admirable lifestyle: “The most compelling way to cast vision is to show it.” The tweet is targeted at individuals who are already a part of the church, and the overhearers of this tweet are non-Christians. Thus, in order to create a culturally relevant identity he must be able to negotiate his role as Christian and pastor, in addition to the role of being a caring, accepting, and ordinary individual. In light of this, he is issuing a directive to “judgmental Christians,” by saying “the most compelling way to cast vision is to show it.” Through omitting pronouns he distances himself from “judgmental Christians,” and portrays himself as a non-judgmental Christian. He demonstrates that he does not see non-Christians as objects for conversion, rather he leads a lifestyle that exemplifies model Christian behavior, and in turn, is accepting of others. He expresses that this admirable lifestyle is a testament to the validity of his faith, rather than actively pursuing converts. This is further shown in the URL he posts. He uses another video of himself preaching a sermon on the same topic. The language used in the tweet and the sermon depicted in the URL work in unison (it is unidirectional) to crystallize his point. Much like example 5 in which one can see his personal and pastoral voice, the permutation of this particular sermon and the words of this tweet express his personal opinion with echoes of his pastoral authority. Again, he is forcefully positioning himself in his pastoral role through the use of a youtube video, and obscuring his agency in that positioning by
allowing the medium to animate his voice. In doing so, he takes a strong reportive epistemological stance.

In both of the aforementioned instances, URLs are utilized to direct attention away from his agency in positioning himself in his pastoral role, while simultaneously allowing him to bolster his epistemic authority to discuss religious topics and behaviors. This is in line with Clark and Gerrig’s (1990) discussion of depictions and descriptions and their relationship to reported speech. They explain how quotations are used to depict rather than describe. Description paints a portrait of a situation or event through the eyes of a particular individual, emphasizing that individual’s perspective. Using reported speech to demonstrate a situation or event endeavors to depict events as they happened. The filtering of the events through another person’s perspective is deemphasized when it is depicted. When video is used to depict events, the filtering of those events in terms of an individual’s perspective is significantly diminished. Since the video was recorded by an object and is being replayed through an electronic medium, human agency in what is being shown in the video is minimal. In this way, URLs linking users to videos are important in framing a tweet. In this case, it allows Driscoll to conjure up his pastoral voice, but direct any responsibility for this pastoral positioning away from him.

His use inclusive we in example 5 and his lack of pronouns in example 6 is done to negotiate his moral and personal positions in a way that is consistent with the emergent church’s perspective on hierarchical systems in the church. By forcefully positioning himself in his pastoral role he expresses an aversion for traditional church hierarchies and the distinction between lay- and clergy members of the church. This coupled with his choice of pronouns, or lack thereof, allows him to construct an identity that moves away from negative conceptions of the church as judgmental, hypocritical, and detached from society at large. Instead of
repackaging to make traditional church structures appealing to non-Christians, as Warren and the seeker movement endeavor, he expresses a dislike for how these perceived judgmental, hypocritical Christians conduct church business.
CONCLUSION

The results and analysis of Warren’s and Driscoll’s tweets demonstrate that each has a preference for specific communicative strategies. Rick Warren’s strategy relies heavily on text, crafting words to convey his message. In contrast, Driscoll’s tweets use electronic features more substantially. A closer examination of the electronic features reveals that although Driscoll used more electronic features throughout, there is a distinct difference in which electronic features were preferred by Warren and Driscoll. Warren used significantly more RTs and @tags than Driscoll, and Driscoll used exponentially more URLs than Warren. Since @tags and RTs are used to connect and interact with other users, Warren’s preference for these particular electronic features is a reflection of the seeker movement’s outward focus. Meanwhile, Driscoll’s use of URLs to link users to his blog posts, video content of his sermons, and photographs of himself or Mars Hill church is consistent with the emergent church’s inward focus.

Also, an examination of the retweets and URLs reveals how these electronic features are used to frame tweets in such a way as to provide a means for Warren and Driscoll to negotiate moral and personal positions. Retweets allow Warren to position himself and others, and URLs linking users to video content of Driscoll’s sermons provide a way for him forcefully position himself in his pastoral role, and obscure any agency he has in his moral positioning. Both the strategies for negotiating personal and moral positions aid Driscoll and Warren in accomplishing their goal of shifting their identity and their movement’s brand away from negative conceptions of Christianity. The difference in strategy is consistent with the structural constraints of their respective institutions. In particular, Warren’s positioning through RTs allows him to position himself away from a negative Christian identity, while still adhering to religious hierarchies and express the distinction between Christians and non-Christians. His use of you to distinguish him
from lay-membership and his descriptions of judgmental Christians in his text heavy tweets further supports this notion. Driscoll’s use of exclusive we, inclusive we, and URLs demonstrates how he deemphasizes hierarchies and focuses inwardly, which are all in line with the emergent church’s structure. In this way, the different strategies allow both participants to work toward their goal of moving the church away from Christianity’s negative affiliations, such as its perceptions as hypocritical, judgmental, and socially detached, yet allow them to accomplish this goal in accordance with their divergent movements.

Although my research explicates how linguistic and communicative resources are used by religious representatives to construct identity on Twitter, this work examines these facets using only two representatives from one type of institution, and does not scrutinize how these tweets are responded to by the Twitter community. Nor does it fully capture how @tags and #tags are used in the process of identity construction. Addressing these limitations would better explain how identity is constructed between clergy member and lay-member discursively. Thus, further research should include the tweets of the institutional representatives and the responses to these tweets. Alternatively, the development of #tags by members of religious communities or the development of conversations between institutions and other users through @tagging could give a more rounded understanding on how identity construction is accomplished discursively between members of religious institutions and the larger Twitter community.

As previously discussed, examinations of religious discourse on the internet have focused on older forms of internet media, such as forums run lay-members (see Berger & Ezzy 2004; Lövheim 2003, 2004a, 2004b). My work expands the scope of this work by examining religious identity construction by religious representatives of an institution in a new media setting. This examination illuminates how social media is used as a forum for institutions to accomplish goals,
and how the electronic and linguistic features become instruments for accomplishing those goals. In this way, it explores how the constraints of Twitter coupled with institutional structures influence the kinds of strategies that are utilized by a religious institution on the internet.

Additionally, CMC scholarship on Twitter has explored the functions of these electronic features in terms of connectivity (see Honeycutt & Herring 2010; Boyd et al. 2010). My research illustrates the use of these features beyond their capacity for connection. Specifically, it explores how these electronic features are used to frame a tweet and in turn give users resources for identity construction. The permutation of RTs and URLs to create new messages that meet the parameters of the platform and constraints of an institution speaks to the ingenuity of individuals and institutions in terms of their ability to repurpose linguistic and communicative resources to meet their interactional needs. This in turn sheds light on how institutions are using public space for their institutional agenda.

Andrew Sullivan’s discussion of organized religion in *Newsweek* magazine criticizes the Christian church, accusing it of straying away from its original purpose as a spiritual institution. He contends that it has changed its focus from spiritual to political matters. This research reflects on this religious issue by examining how ideals and power structures of the church are manifest in the tweets of religious representatives. The examination of the seeker-sensitive movement’s outward focus, and the emergent church’s inward focus illuminates this conversation about the secularization of the church. The manifestation of the inward focus in the form of URLs linking users to video content is a testament to the manner in which the church is re-evaluating how it sees itself in relation to others. Meanwhile, the repackaging seen in Warren’s tweets is a reflection of the church’s struggle to find itself in an ever changing contemporary society.

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