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Canada

The Social Ethic of Religiously Unaffiliated Spirituality

by
Siobhan Chandler

Bachelor of Arts Queen's University, 1994
Master of Arts University of British Columbia, 2001

Thesis
Submitted to the Department of Religion and Culture in
the Faculty of Arts in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Religious Studies

Wilfrid Laurier University

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Abstract

Since the sixties, sweeping social change has led to a massive restructuring of North American religious life. This includes the emergence of privatized forms of religiosity that operate without an institutional context. This trend is captured by the growing prevalence of individuals who describe themselves as ‘spiritual but not religious’. Despite its popularity, critics worry that privatized religiosity is undermining more socially responsive forms of traditional religious engagement. They think that private religion does not lead to the types of face-to-face interactions needed to build social trust and foster a vibrant public sphere. In short, they think it lacks social capital.

Following Robert Putnam, I investigate how much social capital Canadians who I describe as ‘spiritual definitely not religious’ (SDNR) produce relative to the religiously committed and average Canadians. Specifically, I measure the levels of 1) social trust, 2) involvement in civic associations, 3) volunteerism, 4) charitable giving, and 4) political engagement (e.g. voting) present among individuals who say spirituality is important to them, but who do not belong to a religious group. Research methods included 32 in-person interviews and an online questionnaire circulated across Canada. My results suggest that SDNRs are high in social trust, and in some cases, their rate of participation in associational activities is higher than 1) the average Canadian and 2) the religiously committed. They do not surpass the religiously committed, however, in terms of formal volunteering, charitable giving, and electoral political

activities. To some extent, this challenges Putnam's contention that high social trust drives formal associational and political engagement. To account for this, I argue that SDNRs are 'expressive-postmaterialists'. The confluence of their monism, expressivism and postmaterialism—described in the theories of sociologist of religion Steve Tipton, and political scientist Ronald Inglehart—shape their socio-political morality. As such, their social values and style of political engagement are in many cases, distinctive from the religiously committed. I suggest that future research will want to explore how SDNRs' moral orientation coincides with alternative avenues of social and political engagement, and how these might be considered potential sources of social capital.

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

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Introduction

The point (or criticism) is often made that one of the most significant differences between New Age spiritualities of life and many forms of traditional religion is that the former don't make much of a difference... Whether taken individually or collectively, New Age spiritualities of life, it is argued, are too superficial, too insubstantial, too vague, too inward looking, too selfish, and of course too consumerized... to be more than inconsequential, ineffectual. Casual and largely irrelevant to important matters, they lack 'impact'.

Paul Heelas (2008, 17)

Spirituality has classically been used to describe the mystical dimensions of religion. Today the term also refers to an evanescent seeker-based religiosity that has no founder, textual corpus, or established institutions. This latter position is a response to the cultural transformations of the sixties and has produced a diversity of groups with a variety of practices and beliefs that are nevertheless all rooted in the shared quest for autonomously mediated spiritual awakening, personal transformation, and/or healing. Too broad to be classed as a new religious movement (NRM), this latter type of non-religiously affiliated spirituality is frequently referred to as New Age. While this has been helpful to orient the discourse on emergent forms of late modern religiosity, in many cases it has failed to apprehend the complexity of a movement that includes, but has significantly grown beyond, the original seventies vision of the New Age movement.

Fortunately, there is a growing body of research that is contributing to more accurate and encompassing analyses of this phenomenon (Heelas 1996; Hanegraaff 1996; Zinnbauer et al. 1997; Wuthnow 1998; Roof 1999; Corrywright

2003; Barker 2004; Forman 2004; Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Lynch 2007).

Although this research has raised the profile of religiously unaffiliated spirituality, many scholars continue to resist the notion that this proliferation of independently fashioned quests could ever duplicate the social and spiritual authority of traditional religion. Critics are not favorably disposed to the self-determinism this type of seeking endorses and are further estranged by the lack of institutional commitments that typify most religious involvement. They argue that a spirituality focusing on the self compromises the integrity of community and a broader social vision.

This position may have a certain logic that should not be dismissed. But in the decades since the sixties cultural revolution in the U.S., the assumed social insignificance of religiously unaffiliated spirituality has become entrenched, despite the absence of much in the way of empirical justification for such a view. This dissertation questions the veracity of such claims. Is it really accurate to say that non-institutional spiritual seeking inhibits the formation of “social capital”—the civic engagement, social trust, social cohesiveness, and improved democratic processes that arise when people work towards shared goals? Is individualism really antithetical to the common good, and by deduction, is religiously unaffiliated spirituality blind to social responsibility and change?

To begin to answer these questions this chapter starts with a brief overview of the recent history of religiously non-affiliated spirituality outlining how its most current expressions are the consequence of complex social patterns related to the surge of individualism following the social revolutions of the

sixties. This is followed by a brief introduction to the concept of social capital, and specifically, its relationship to organized religion. Next I consider new research supporting the hypothesis that spiritual but religiously unaffiliated seekers are engaged in communities that share an ethical commitment to work for the betterment of society and the common good. This overview is provided to introduce the central themes covered in the chapters ahead. The research questions that inform this study will be introduced in detail at the end of the introduction. I begin with a topic that will be covered in detail in chapters one and two, namely, what are the differences between religion and spirituality?

Religion and spirituality

Perhaps the most important issue to clarify at the outset is that being “spiritual” means different things to different people, depending on their relationship to organized religion. An overview of seven major U.S. studies examining the relationship between religion and spirituality suggests that nearly three quarters of Americans describe themselves as spiritual and religious, while a distinctive subgroup ranging between 9% and 30% prefer the label “spiritual but not religious” (see Figure 1). Intriguingly, even the non-religious may describe themselves as spiritual (40%) and believe in God or some higher power (68%) (Stark, Hamburg and Miller, 2005). It is precisely this ambiguity that thwarts a clear conception of what it means to be “spiritual.” The common practice is to contrast spirituality with religion, where religion is typically described as “the creedal and ritual expressions of spirituality that is associated with institutional

Figure 1: Seven US studies that suggest the range of individuals who identify as spiritual but not religious lies somewhere between 9% and 30%.

church organizations,” and spirituality more simply as “a personal affirmation of the transcendent” (Zinnbauer et al. 1999, 901, 903). The analytic paradox to be embraced is that spirituality is both religion and *not* religion.

To clarify matters it is helpful to distinguish between “religion” and “a religion.” “Religion” is “any symbolic system that influences human action by providing possibilities for maintaining ritual contact between the everyday world and a more general meta- empirical framework of meaning” (Hanegraaff 1999, 147). “A religion,” on the other hand, is essentially the institutionalization or social embodiment of religion. However, belonging to a religion is an interactive process between the institution and the individual’s “private interpretation” of the

material on offer (1999, 149). These individual manipulations of symbolic systems are “spiritualities” (1999, 147). In other words, spiritualities are private interpretations of collective religious symbolism. This is an “everyday phenomenon [because] every person who gives an individual twist to existing religious symbols (be it only in a minimal sense) is already engaged in the practice of creating his or her own spirituality” (1999, 151). According to this model, it is impossible for religion to exist without spiritualities. Spiritualities, on the other hand, do not necessarily require a religious foundation: New Age spiritualities, for examples, create meaning systems (“religion”) from many secular sources (i.e., popular psychology, literature, popular science—see 152-153). In fact, New Age spiritualities tend to prefer sources not too closely associated with traditional theologies (1999, 152).

In the literature the spiritual but religiously unaffiliated have been classed as the “holistic milieu” (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005), “seeker spirituality” (Wuthnow, 1998), “spiritual but not religious” (Fuller 2002), “highly active seekers” (Roof, 1995) or the more exacting “metaphysical believers and spiritual seekers” (Roof, 1999). On the ground, however, they appear as Neopagans, Theosophists, Zen Buddhists, New Agers, feminists, nature lovers, assorted mystics, followers of various spiritual masters and seekers with no name for themselves (Roof 1999, 203). Despite this diversity, these seekers demonstrate commitments to a unified spiritual philosophy including holism, personal autonomy, and the divinity of the true Self (Hanegraaff 1996; Roof 1999; Fuller 2002; Forman 2004). The non-patriarchal, egalitarian nature of this religion

makes it especially popular with women, who account for between 60% and 80% of the subculture (Corrywright 2003, 128; Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 94; Woodhead 2007, 120-121). The spiritual but religiously unaffiliated are wary of organized religion: two thirds believe that spirituality is lost in organized religion, and 97% say people should think for themselves in religious matters (Roof 1999, 207). They take a questioning, open approach to the sacred: a strategy that requires self-authority, self-responsibility, and direct personal experience to confirm truth claims. Heelas describes these tenets as part of the “*lingua franca*” of religiously unaffiliated spirituality where the self become the central spiritual resource” (1996, 19).

However, seeing spirituality as a personal phenomenon, as is commonly done, should not obscure the cultural context from which it emerges. Understanding the social and political history of religiously unaffiliated spirituality is instrumental to understanding how it took shape.

From counterculture to mainstream

In recent years, the titles of several publications have alluded to the notion of a spiritual revolution in Western culture. These include; *Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Heelas and Woodhead 2005), *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* (Tacey 2005), and *The Translucent Revolution: How People are Waking up and*

Changing the World (Ardagh 2005).¹ The revolutionary sentiment reflects the fact that organized religion has alienated many (see especially Tacey 2004, 36-37). In particular, forms of religion that attempt to suppress personal autonomy are increasingly less popular (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 7).

Nevertheless, it would be misleading to suggest that this spiritual revolution is only now beginning. In reality, the current revolutionary *zeitgeist* is easily traced to post-WWII developments among the baby boom generation. Drawing on the social criticism and drug culture of the 1950s Beat generation, the boomers launched what would become a sweeping campaign of civil unrest known as the 1960s counterculture. The once powerful voices of religion and government were scrutinized and found lacking (Ellwood 1994). Students took to the streets to protest the war in Vietnam and exercise their right to free speech. National demonstrations drew attention to the social inequalities faced by African Americans, women, and other marginalized groups. Meanwhile, changes in immigration policies swung the door open to a new religious pluralism. Particularly popular were the gurus and religious teachings from India and South East Asia, whose religious traditions appeared to emphasize a self-reliant approach to enlightenment (through meditation primarily) unhindered by guilt, sin, and institutional bureaucracy. The psychedelic drug LSD was frequently used and tantalized many with the promise of accelerated spiritual expansion and transcendence.

¹ Ardagh defines “Translucents” as spiritually motivated individuals living outside the context of organized religion. See pages 51-64.

By many measures, the counterculture revolutionaries failed to realize many of their intended political and social goals. The assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., the national guards' killing of students at protest movements, and finally the Nixon-Watergate scandal, ultimately stilled their revolutionary spirit. Steven Kent suggests that this disillusionment led to a more self-reliant and pragmatic "change the world by changing yourself" approach that emphasized spirituality and personal growth as new forces for social change (2001, 37). In attempting to unite the "spiritual and the political, the inner and the outer" many converted to NRMs, including a variety of Eastern religions and practices (Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation, Healthy Happy Holy Organization, Divine Light Mission, etc.) and a number of syncretic variants integrating eastern and western ideals such as Scientology, Eckankar, Shamabala, and EST.

In many cases, these were considered deviant "cults," but taken together, this spiritual counterculture was often broadly classed as the "New Age" movement to reflect the notion that a new age of spiritually awakened living was on the horizon. This is a tricky point and needs to be clearly understood. In a "restricted sense," New Age was a stream of Western esotericism that grew out of Theosophy and later the 1950s UFO cults (Hanegraaff 1996, 94-102). It was premised on the belief that an enlightened Age of Aquarius was dawning to usher in a new age. It was what is called a weakly other-worldly (world-rejecting) religion with an identifiable doctrinal base, and in this narrow sense was also an NRM. But although the New Age vision of the so-called Age of Aquarius never

manifested quite the way its followers intended, the approach to seeking, including holistic health modalities, personal growth (therapy culture), and spiritual eclecticism, piqued the collective imagination by reinforcing a symbolically significant cultural premise, namely individualism and the value of personal autonomy. Hanegraaff calls this the New Age movement in a “general sense,” and while it resonated with the 1970s New Age, it also drew on its own distinctive past in the American metaphysical traditions that included Transcendentalism and the New Thought movement. It was this complex movement that flowered in the eighties and persists today (Lewis and Melton 1992, Hanegraaff 1996, 103).

All this should suggest that drawing tidy boundaries around New Age is difficult business. And it is made even more so by the New Age’s propensity to act as a cultural carrier for the individualistic values so pronounced in affluent late modern nations. As Roof observes:

[t]o complicate things even further, the spiritual impact of the [metaphysical believers and spiritual seekers] subculture is even bigger than statistical estimates would suggest. There is a boundary problem considering that many people who are affiliated with a church, synagogue or temple embrace teachings, practices and sensitivities derived from this broad movement (1999, 204 italics added).

This “boundary problem” was created because as New Age moved from the seventies into the eighties, it carried its values of self-care and self-exploration into the cultural mainstream. As a religious response to modernity, it merged seamlessly with what Triandis calls the cultural syndrome of individualism that is the hallmark of postindustrial nations (1995, 43). Together these conditions

worked powerfully to drive the demand for a range of products and services catering to the self and its subjectivities, creating what Heelas and Woodhead refer to as a culture of subjective wellbeing (2005, 84). The ubiquity of these cultural values is reflected in marketing strategies emphasizing themes such as being unique, taking control, having adventure, finding freedom, and developing spiritually. Because New Age is transmitted and propagated through commercial networks (Redden 2005), and partly because it endorsed the ethic of subjective wellbeing, New Age in the general sense quickly emerged as decidedly world affirming. It embraced the body, the senses, experience, and fulfillment, so much so that it was widely accused of being decidedly materialistic and consumerist (Carrette and King 2005).

Overall, the social, political, and religious events that coalesced in the counterculture era have produced a massive shift in traditional patterns of religious behavior and belief and given rise to what sociologist of religion Wade Clark Roof calls a “spiritual marketplace” (1999, 10). This powerful cluster of effects have significantly changed the cultural orientation towards authority and instilled a new ethic of autonomy and personal growth. Not surprisingly, the success of this worldview has fueled a powerful backlash. Critics wary of the growing force of individualism argue that it is ultimately socially disruptive. In particular, solo spirituality has been condemned as narcissistic, superficial, and spiritually naïve (Lasch 1979; Bellah et al. 1985; Bruce 2000; Bibby 2004a, 2004b). Instead of high moral standards, doctrinal monogamy, community and discipline, religiously unaffiliated spirituality, they say, seems only interested in

religion's mystical and philosophical treasure (Emberley 2002; Carrette and King 2005). That centuries-old systems of religious belief and practice are open to evaluation, and worse, appropriation by uninitiated seekers raises the ire of many traditionalists. Others rankled by its chaotic amalgamations claim it is anti-intellectual and spurious (Langone 1993).

Critical remarks are plentiful in many academic analyses of New Age (see for example Farias and Laljee 2005). Whatever the virtues or demerits of this mode of spiritual seeking may be, it is clear that it sits in powerful opposition to the official dictates of religious orthodoxy. It tends to resist hierarchy, tradition, and group affiliation and is syncretic, non-committal, and personally legitimated (Heelas 1995; Wuthnow 1998; Roof 1999). Messages such as these are perpetuated in much of the literature that is popular with contemporary spiritual but not religious seekers. For example, in the New York Times best seller *Conversations with God: Book One* (1996) "God" tells Neale Donald Walsch, "You are *already* a God. You *simply do not know it*" (202), and also "*If there were such a thing as sin this would be it: to allow yourself to become what you are because of the experience of others*" (62; italics in original). The idea that one must look within for God and truth, and not be swayed by the truths of others, is a perennial theme in popular spiritual but not religious writings. Yet the critics' charge that locating God within the human makes for an overly self-referencing, self-deterministic, and self-absorbed, spiritual philosophy that is at odds with more communitarian goals. This attitude comes out in a recent CNN news report entitled *Are there dangers in being 'spiritual but not religious'?* It questions

whether the new “Burger King Spirituality” where seekers get to “have it [their] way” is socially problematic. In the short article, a Jesuit priest openly worries that “[b]eing spiritual but not religious can lead to complacency and self-centeredness....If it’s just you and God in your room, and a religious community makes no demands on you, why help the poor?” he asks.²

Yet, despite concerns that the spiritual but not religious are too wrapped up in themselves to be socially engaged, in fact, there is very little empirical grounding for such a view. Comments cited without proper contextualization are commonplace in critical works, but the shortage of careful measurement and evaluation means that the relationship between privatized faith and social behaviors is not clearly understood. Before going on to consider some studies that suggest religiously unaffiliated spirituality may be more socially benevolent than previously thought, I want to introduce the framework I will be using for measuring levels of social connectedness and participation, namely social capital.

Social capital and the critique of religiously unaffiliated spirituality

In the argot of the business world, “capital” usually refers to financial, physical, and human tangibles. Social capital, however, is not as easily defined nor is it limited to the economic sphere. Rather it is a multidimensional and somewhat abstract concept that has aroused interest in business, government, political, and various academic circles where the relationships between groups are of interest.

² <http://www.cnn.com/2010/LIVING/personal/06/03/spiritual.but.not.religious/index.html>. Accessed June 14, 2010.

Despite a lively debate in many quarters, the general consensus is that social capital refers to that form of capital generated by people joining together for a specific purpose. Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam describes it as the “features of social life—networks and norms of trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives... Social capital, in short refers to social connections and the attendant norms and trust” (Putnam cited in Halpern 2005, 1). Although individuals could be said to benefit from social capital (as the idiom “it’s who you know not what you know” expresses), inherently it is an attribute of groups that is concerned with patterns of relationships between individuals, small associations, and larger institutions, especially government.

Putnam’s early research showed that regions of Italy where people joined associations, voted, and read the newspaper, had more effective, democratic modes of government. He concluded that the small associations and networks that build social trust were more important to democracy and social health than typically realized. He applied this insight to contemporary American society in his seminal publication *Bowling Alone* (2000), which painstakingly and somewhat morbidly tracks the decline of American civic mindedness in everything from voter turnout, volunteering, philanthropy, and associational life, to eating dinner with one’s family and even bowling. He suggests that Americans are no longer as committed to the common good and each other as they had been in previous generations. Furthermore, these declines are taking place despite rising levels of education and affluence, factors that usually predict joining and involvement in

civic life. Putnam also documented a corresponding decline in the overall vitality of American society pointing to rising rates of violent crime, divorce, drug use, ill health, and social alienation, suggesting that these two macro trends are causally related.

In this context, a considerable body of research testifies to the impressive civic profile of organized religion. In fact, amidst his gloomy prognoses, Putnam hailed organized religion as a sort of super social capital generator, noting that in the U.S. approximately half of all associational memberships are church related, half of all philanthropy is religious, and half of all volunteering occurs in a religious context (2000, 66). Putnam is not the only one to note the connection between religion and civically minded behaviors. For example, extensive Canadian data corroborates these findings: according to the authors of a Statistics Canada report entitled *Giving and Volunteering: The Role of Religion* (2004), 40% of all volunteer hours and 46% of the value of charitable giving come from a small group of “core supporters” whose distinguishing feature is regular church attendance (17).

The non-institutionally organized, diffuse spirituality movement is frequently charged with being incapable of motivating a similar beneficence and orientation to positive social change (Bruce 2002; Bibby 2004; Carrette and King 2005). Given that organized religions do the following: 1) seed associational networks with sometimes vast national and even international connections; 2) actively encourage and, in many cases, organize community development projects; which 3) create opportunities for congregants to become involved and

develop civic skills; and 4) make their buildings available as meeting spaces for other groups, it is reasonable to ask whether similar functions and frameworks are developing among the spiritual but not religiously affiliated (Furbey et al. 2006, 3).

Canadian sociologist of religion Reginald Bibby expresses this sentiment somewhat differently. Through his surveys of Canadian religion over the past twenty-five years he comments on “the cost we may be paying as a result of our inability to find adequate replacements for organized religion when it comes to instilling values” (2004b, 215). He compares the percentage of weekly vs. never church attenders who consider the following values “very important”: concern for others (77% vs. 64%), honesty (96% vs. 78%), forgiveness (82% vs. 72%) and community involvement (28% vs. 10%) (2004b, 216). Bibby has little patience with non-religious spirituality. For one thing he thinks it is numerically insignificant (2004b, 63), and of questionable social consequence (2004b, 200). Although not commenting on religiously unaffiliated spirituality directly, he suggests “[f]ragments of religion...allow people to retain some central belief and practice elements...[b]ut such beliefs do not necessarily require ethical coordinates” (2004b, 14).

In their analysis of New Age spirituality, Jeremy Carrette and Richard King paint a more sinister portrait of New Age ethics. Taking a Foucauldian approach, they suggest that whereas spirituality (“New Age”) ostensibly functions as a means of personal transformation, it actually conceals a neoliberal agenda that seeks to reduce it to a feel good pastime. They think that the rising interest in

spirituality and the corresponding spread of corporate capitalism are not coincidental. Placing spiritually evocative images of the Buddha, Krishna, and peaceful Zen scenarios within the secular realm with no connection to their respective religious traditions, they say, trivializes the traditions from which these images emerge and encourages New Age spirituality to be consumed for self gratification, while conveniently obscuring the ethical dimension of religion that might challenge the dark side of corporate globalization and commerce. In this context, corporate capitalism endorses New Age spirituality precisely because it is fundamentally atomistic, self-interested, consumerist, and prone to political and social myopia. They write:

[...] spirituality [has] become the new addiction of the educated white middle classes, something that show[s] a rejection of the abuses associated with traditional religion but which celebrate[s] freedom and individual expression. Privatised spirituality emerges here as the new cultural *prozac* bringing transitory feelings of ecstatic happiness and thoughts of self affirmation, but never sufficiently addressing the underlying problem of social isolation and injustice. In an environment where many experience a lack of meaning in their lives, spirituality offers a cultural sedative providing individual rapture. What is masked behind this addiction to private religion is the way in which it exacerbates the problems of meaning associated with materialism and individualism in the very desire for some kind of escape from the world (2005, 77: italics in original).

The Canadian literature, too, is rife with criticism of spirituality that is detached from organized religious bodies (e.g. Bowen 2004; Emberley 2002), however, it can be noted that very often the critique of religiously unaffiliated spirituality is confounded by some combination of the following: 1) inaccurate estimates of the number of people who practice it (Bowen, Bibby vs. Roof, Heelas and Woodhead); 2) an underestimation of the complexity of the spiritual

marketplace; 3) a blurring of New Age in the general and restricted sense; and finally 4) a lack of empirical evidence supporting conclusions.

There also seems to be a consistent expectation that individualism will feature as a socially destructive force when, in fact, recent research directly challenges this assumption. A study measuring the relationship between individualism, collectivism, and social capital in the U.S. found that the most “individualistic” states showed higher rates of civic engagement and political activity than “collectivist” ones. The individualistic states were also where people spent the greatest time with friends and believed that most people are honest and can be trusted (Allik and Realo 2004). These findings were extended by a later study that found individualism was related to both higher levels of giving and volunteering across the U.S. (Kemmelmeyer, Jambor and Letner 2006). These studies suggest that equating individualism with low levels of social trust and civic engagement is at best a questionable practice. Likewise, the implication that religiously unaffiliated spirituality is, in the words of sociologist of religion Steve Bruce, inevitably “socially precarious” needs a second look.

The social character of religiously unaffiliated spirituality: What does the research suggest?

As mentioned, organized religion is a premier source of social capital. Although the rates of religious participation in America remain the highest among modernizing Western nations, even there rates of religious participation are in decline. Whereas in the fifties, 48% of Americans reported attending services weekly, current estimates of weekly attendance hover between 22% and 24%

(Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 56; Presser and Chaves 2007, 421). It is widely asserted that falling church attendance will necessarily pull rates of social capital down with it. Kurt Bowen has addressed this matter at length in his study of the relationship between religious commitment and volunteering and charitable giving in Canada (2004). He concludes the volume on a somewhat dour note saying that if high religious commitment continues to decline and

...the expanding body of the Non Religious [continues to grow], we may reasonably expect that life satisfaction will decline, concern for others will diminish, marriage will grow more fragile, family and friendship networks will shrink, volunteering will become less frequent, and we will grow ever less generous in our so very affluent world. In a word our civility is threatened. If this is the victory that secularism and the Enlightenment have wrought, then we have no cause to celebrate. (288)

Organized religions motivate their followers to acts of civic involvement; teachings encouraging charity and compassion towards the less fortunate can be found in the scriptures of all the major religious traditions. In this regard, the “ethical coordinates” of organized religion are both visible and valuable. What needs clarifying is whether social responsibility stems exclusively from these types of institutional affiliations as Bibby, Bowen, and others including Putnam seem to suggest, or if modes of interrelating and civic mindedness may have nother equally viable antecedents, as Allik, Kemmelmeier and their colleagues suggest. One approach might be to recognize that values determine behavior. There is no question that individualism is certainly a central value in religiously non-affiliated spirituality, but is it accurate to translate this as “selfish?” What morality does it actually inspire?

Since 1981, the World Values Surveys have evaluated social, moral,

political and religious values in 64 countries around the world. Two of the studies lead authors, Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, suggest that 70% of all cross cultural variation in values can be explained by a country's religious orientation and economic prosperity (2005). If a country's religious orientation is traditional, the culture will most likely be collectivist and emphasize obedience and conformity to group norms. The cultural tendency will be to reject divorce, abortion and equal rights for women and homosexuals. If, on the other hand, a country has what they call a secular rational value system, it will be culturally individualistic with publics that emphasize personal freedoms, autonomy and equality. The second major dimension is the degree to which societies have achieved levels of affluence that permit it to move beyond the rudiments of survival in material terms ("materialism") to more affluent and stable economies that permit greater personal freedoms ("postmaterialism"). Whereas materialism stresses the basics of survival and sanctions a utilitarian attitude toward consumption, postmaterialism moves beyond mere survivalism towards the cultivation of lifestyles and patterns of discretionary consumption dedicated to self-expression and quality of life. As a rule, postmaterialists are tolerant of religious and ethnic diversity, and support equal rights for women and minorities. They are self-directed individuals and reject authoritarianism and bureaucratic controls which attempt to dictate social norms and values.

Franz Höllinger notes that several European studies have found that New Agers and/or those with higher rates of spiritual and esoteric activities are more likely to have postmaterialist values (2004, 292-93). This makes sense for two

reasons. First, these seekers tend to belong to the baby boomer generation who, unlike their parents, did not weather economic depression and the devastation of the Second World War. Instead they came of age in prosperous and peaceful times, precisely the conditions that foster postmaterialism. Second, New Age values are transparently postmaterialist: there is an emphasis on autonomy, self-expression and the equality that stems from non-hierarchical networks. It is a spirituality that values women's voices and is comfortable with, indeed is fed by, diversity. Recasting religiously unaffiliated spirituality as postmaterialist spirituality affords a more sophisticated reading of its civic engagement profile.

As mentioned, the Putnam school views social capital formation as a communitarian endeavor where social capital is generated when the bonds of community are strengthened through volunteering, charitable giving and associational membership. In this fashion, civic engagement builds community networks, which subsequently builds social trust, the outcome of which is social capital. Recall that effective political governance is the reason social capital is sought. Yet Inglehart and Welzel's analysis of the World Values Survey data do not corroborate this theory. Using factor analysis, they find that the societies with the most effective democracies are those that demonstrate mass support for the right to self expression and personal autonomy, not those with high levels of volunteering or associational membership as Putman suggests (2005, 287). Following an idea adopted from Welzel (2003), the authors think that a more humanistic society derives from expanded opportunities for personal choice. According to their human developmental model of social capital, democracy is

strong when individuals accustomed to high levels of personal freedom demand forms of governance that do not infringe on their civil liberties (2005, 104, 248). The humanism of the “human development approach” to social capital presumably derives from its egalitarian philosophy that neither solicits conformity nor sanctions authoritarianism. Yet what remains to be demonstrated is whether the ostensible correlation between the “emancipative ethic” of postmaterialism and the social values of the spiritual but religiously unaffiliated bears out empirically.

Although by no means comprehensive, data from a survey of nearly 4000 university students in four western countries regarding their religious and esoteric beliefs, as well as their social and political attitudes, found that the small group of students (10%) classified as “New Age” had a higher frequency of reported involvement in political activism, participation in political party activities (such as electoral campaigns), solidarity campaigns and charitable activities than non New Age students (Höllinger 2004, 300). The study concluded that the general level of social participation and activism amongst New Age was above the population mean. These findings specifically challenge the view that New Agers (or postmaterialists for that matter) are primarily concerned with their own well-being and personality development, and unconcerned about social and political issues (2004, 294).

These results do not support the theory that “New Agers” are civically inert, although there is no evidence volunteering is a central concern. If Inglehart and Welzel are correct, this is because volunteering is not centrally linked with

liberty aspirations (2005, 259). These findings do, however, support the theory that postmaterialists are motivated to social actions that insure the persistence of democratic freedoms. Specifically, postmaterialists tend to respond to perceived threats to their personal liberties by way of “elite challenging behaviors” (2005, 116-117). These socio-political actions (i.e. boycotts, demonstrations, petition signing) challenge authority and coordinate action beginning at the level of the individual. This contrasts with the more bureaucratic, top-down forms of directed civic participation such as voting and political party membership favored by Putnam.

These forms of social capital may seem coldhearted compared with more traditionally—that is, religiously—inspired forms of civic engagement where people act selflessly for the good of another. A study by psychologist Paul Wink and his colleagues (2005) speaks against this conception. Drawing on data collected from a longitudinal study begun at the University of California, Berkley in the 1920s, the authors evaluated the relationship between narcissism, “non-tradition centered” spirituality, and concern for the welfare of future generations (generativity). Three hundred local newborns or preadolescents were studied intensively in childhood and adolescence, and subsequently interviewed up to four times through early and late adulthood. In their analysis of the resulting personality data, the researchers assessed whether the participants’ showed characteristically healthy or pathological patterns of narcissistic behavior. Whereas autonomous narcissism is considered a healthy emotional process that contributes to creativity, wisdom, and healthy levels of self-investment, including

the drive for personal achievement and independence, both hypersensitive and willful narcissism are considered pathological. They found that in late adulthood, spirituality was positively associated with autonomous narcissism and was unrelated to either of the pathological types. They also found a positive relation between autonomy in early and late adulthood and generativity in late adulthood. They write, “In this sample, autonomous individuals were also likely to be socially responsible for the wellbeing of others and their community” (155). Their conclusion is that both spirituality and generativity are fostered by a personality characterized by autonomous narcissism. In short, by their definition, spiritual individuals tend to be psychologically balanced and socially engaged: they care about their own wellbeing within the broader context of concern for the collective, including the as yet unborn generations. While these studies suggest previous judgments about the spiritual but religiously unaffiliated are wrong, more work needs to be done.

A new framework for discerning the social ethic of religiously unaffiliated spirituality

In the late 1960s, Thomas Luckmann coined the term “invisible religion” to suggest that religious ways of making sense of life were increasingly giving way to personally created ones (1967). The sixties were a time when organized religion was viewed with distrust and skepticism by many. Consequently, invisible religion was appealing precisely because it offered relief from institutional religion’s authoritarianism. Furthermore, it aligned well with the budding postmaterialist ethic of autonomy and self-expression. The term

“invisible religion” implied that religion had left the public sphere and moved to the personally constructed meaning systems of individuals. Because its new home was the private sphere, invisible religion was felt to have little to say about social matters. While this view has been sustained up to the present day, the data presented here suggest that despite a disinclination towards hierarchy and social interventions that limit self-expression, religiously unaffiliated spirituality is not “invisible” in quite the ways its critics assume. Rather, these data point to the possibility that conclusions about its putative invisibility may be more assumption than fact. Postmaterialists do not defer to tradition or authority as a matter of course. This has led many critics to assume they threaten the collective good, our very “civility” as Bowen puts it. Philosopher Charles Taylor (1992) acknowledges that modernity places a high value on personal authenticity and advocates ongoing moral scrutiny to guard against what he calls “negative freedom,” or what Ken Wilber (2006) less graciously refers to as a “fuck you nobody tells me what to do” sort of freedom. The point raised in this discussion is that autonomy and self-expression are not synonyms for negative freedom. By the same measure, the autonomous and self-expressive nature of privatized religion does not make it *de facto* a selfish religion, even if it is a religion of the Self. Sweeping generalizations condemning a massive cohort of postmaterialist seekers as narcissists is untenable. That some spiritual but religiously unaffiliated individuals are selfish is inevitable, but so are many of the religiously affiliated. Not all individuals are equally benevolent and moral no matter what their religious beliefs. It is not enough to dismiss the notion that spiritual but religiously

unaffiliated seekers generate social capital on hypothetical grounds. What is required is an alternative theory, an alternative program of empirical research, a study that was specifically designed from the outset to tackle the question of social values amongst the spiritual but not religious. That is what this study does, and in so doing fills a prominent lacuna in the research agenda for NRMs.

Central hypotheses and design of this study

In this thesis I argue that the social ethic of religiously unaffiliated spirituality cannot be clearly discerned using Putnam's institutional framework for social capital since religiously unaffiliated seekers embrace a form of social morality that resists many mainstream social conventions and institutions. Instead, I follow sociologist of religion Steve Tipton (1982) to show how contemporary spiritual but not religious seekers demonstrate what he refers to as "countercultural-expressivist" morality that values the rights of others to pursue self-development and self-expression with the understanding that all things are connected and therefore interdependent. This is a moral position that places a high value on freedom, autonomy and close, nurturing relationships; it solicits forms of social engagement that operate outside mainstream institutions since these are frequently viewed as unethical to the degree they are complicit with regimes that constrain individual freedoms.

At present, the social capital of religiously unaffiliated spirituality is largely invisible to most sociologists of religion who equate social engagement with participation in social institutions. This is because sociologists of religion are

accustomed to a particular religious history of Western societies; they have strong preconceptions concerning 1) the public function of religion and therefore, 2) the social weight or merit of religion, which leaves them struggling to see how religiously unaffiliated spirituality could have any social impact. Their conclusion is that it is socially “weightless” or insignificant.

Ultimately, many sociologists of religion, social critics, social and political philosophers, traditional religionists and lay observers are unable to make out the social role of privatized religiosity for the following reasons: 1) the Protestant version of a good society holds sway in countries where Christianity is the majority religion such as Canada and the U.S.; 2) spirituality is ambiguous as a research category and its highest expression is often associated with organized religion; 3) the social morality of religiously unaffiliated spirituality is understudied and prone to polemics rather than critical analysis; and 4) the communitarian view of civil society upheld by Putnam is friendly towards institutional forms of social capital and therefore religion, which impedes its utility as an analytic instrument for discerning new forms of social capital emerging among the spiritual but not religious. Thus when someone who is spiritual but not religious acts on the basis of his or her spiritual morality in the public sphere by joining Greenpeace, World Vision, volunteering at a hospice, purchasing Green products, or helping someone with childcare for instance, it is difficult to trace their acts of civility or social engagement back to their spirituality. Yet this is simply because their religious identity is not formally linked to an institution, or formal religious belief system. The specific value of

this study, then, is that it makes an explicit connection between non-traditional forms of religiously unaffiliated spiritual seeking and the formation of social capital, more broadly conceived.

Because this is currently the most prominent theory of social capital, my research closely follows the contours of Robert Putnam's study on declining rates of social and political participation in the United States (2000). My findings are based on in-person interviews with 32 Canadians from the Kitchener-Waterloo region of southwestern Ontario who self-identified as 'spiritual but not religious', and survey data collected from a national sample (n=265). The interviews, which took between one and half and two hours each, assessed the perceived connection between the informants' spiritual beliefs and practices and their levels of social capital based on criteria such as their propensity to join civic organizations, vote, engage in campaign activities and express confidence in public leaders. Likewise, the questionnaire assessed the respondents' religious beliefs, practices, and influences, as well as various measures of social capital.

The findings of my research challenge the position that privatized religion is narcissistic and socially disengaged. Many of the people I interviewed were quite involved in their communities and sincere in their spiritual practices. While my informants did not volunteer as much as the most religiously committed Canadians, there was ample evidence of widespread civic engagement – both politically and socially – and strong signs of involvement in small groups and a variety of social and 'religious' networks. They engage in electoral politics more than average Canadians do. My conclusion is that while Putnam's theory is an

important starting point for this analysis, in the end his categories cannot explain ambiguities in the social capital of the cohort. For instance, they are high in social trust, but low in formal volunteering and charitable giving. Overall, I think his model 1) is too focused on specific measures of social capital that do not reflect the values and priorities of religiously unaffiliated spiritual seekers; and, 2) marginalizes the importance of new forms of social engagement and elite challenging behaviors such as political consumerism (e.g., the deliberate purchase of or refusal to buy certain goods and services for ethical reasons). Finally, Putnamian social capital is a gendered construct that does not pay enough attention to the types of informal social networks—especially those centered on care giving—that women tend towards. Given that women outnumber men in the ‘holistic milieu’ (78% of my questionnaire respondents were female) this is a significant problem.

Outline of thesis

To develop this analysis, the thesis is arranged as follows. The first two chapters focus on defining and clarifying the parameters of spirituality. In chapter one, I use a metaphor—solid, liquid, and ether—to create a typology for describing how sociologists of religion talk about spirituality. This metaphor is intended to capture how these scholars perceive the relationship between religion and spirituality. Briefly, in solid form, spirituality is viewed as having solidified as an independent construct outside the walls of organized religion. This is the metaphor of the (revolutionary) spiritual but definitely not religious cohort. Here

spirituality is viewed as distinct from religion. In liquid form, spirituality conjures up images of flow and infusion. Scholars who invoke this metaphor conceptualize spirituality as meta-religious, as a way liberal branches of organized religion can connect with each other despite their theological differences. Some scholars acknowledge that solid spirituality is an important dimension of this spiritual discourse, while others do not. Regardless, liquidity implies that religious boundaries are permeable and that spiritual ideas circulate freely. The final metaphor is ether. Most often the critics of religiously unaffiliated spirituality adopt this metaphor. Implicitly, they view spirituality as something vapourous and intangible that needs to be grounded by the routines of tradition and institution. With varying degrees of vehemence, they shun solid spirituality, which they regard as shallow, and vacuous —“airy fairy” so to speak. Because of the potential for institutional religious engagement to influence formation of and/or access to social capital, it is critical that I distinguish between solid and liquid spirituality.

With this analysis in place, the second chapter pursues the ambitious goal of attempting to estimate how many Canadians are spiritual definitely not religious (henceforth SDNR) versus spiritual but not religious (henceforth SBNR). Two Canadian studies suggest that about half of all adult Canadians are SBNR, although estimating the prevalence of SDNRs is significantly more difficult. For this I must rely on data collected in the U.S. (Roof 1993, 1999) and Britain (Heelas and Woodhead 2005).

Chapter three marks the opening of my exploration of the social capital of

religiously unaffiliated spirituality. It begins with an overview of the critique of religiously unaffiliated spirituality. What is it about this form of religiosity that critics are so opposed to? Why do they insist it is socially inconsequential? As I frame it, the answer sits between two interconnected critiques. The first is what I call the therapy culture critique. Since the fifties, scholars such as Richard Sennett (*The Fall of Public Man*, 1974), Christopher Lasch (*The Culture of Narcissism*, 1979), and Robert Bellah et al. (*Habits of the Heart*, 1985) have reiterated the concern that modernization has caused North Americans to anchor their social identities in a fragile therapeutic ideal that valorizes individualism, and professional therapeutic relationships, over collective identities and relationships. This tendency, they argue, is undermining the desire, even the ability, of individuals to become engaged with their communities and each other. As such, the therapy culture critique dovetails with the social disengagement critique as articulated by Putnam (2000) and Bowen (2004). In terms of religiously unaffiliated spirituality, what both the therapy culture and social disengagement critiques share in common is the belief that privatized forms of religiosity such as SDNR are complicit in the deterioration of public life. The remainder of the thesis is fundamentally directed at establishing the legitimacy of this claim.

Following an outline of the methods used in the collection of my survey and interview data in chapter four, I present the results of the social capital portion of my research. I do this in two phases. In chapter five, I explore social trust and associational involvement, but defer details of their political social capital to the final chapter. I interrupt my discussion of social capital in order to

present an alternative framework for interpreting my findings. Looking at associational involvement, I find that SDNRs rank higher in social trust than both the average Canadian and the Very Committed. While this should predict higher rates of associational and political engagement, this is not uniformly the case. There is nothing in my findings to shore up the critics view that SDNRs are socially unresponsive, but they do fall short of the Very Committed on several indices including formal volunteering, charitable giving, and formal political engagement. While this supports Putnam's claim that face to face interactions are responsible for higher rates of social capital, it fundamentally contradicts his contention that social trust is the engine of social capital. Thus while its scholarly reach and influence make Putnam's model of social capital de rigueur in any analysis such as this, it does not entirely explain my findings. Basically, I want to suggest that while many elements of Putnam's theory are useful, his communitarian framework, with its emphasis on institutionally mediated forms of civic engagement, can too easily be used to dismiss the contributions of those late modern individuals who—like SDNRs—resist institutional identities and prefer more informal, or “loose” social ties (Wuthnow 1998b).

Chapters six develops this argument by proposing that SDNR social morality is best viewed as the confluence of their “countercultural-expressivist” (Tipton 1982), and postmaterialist (Inglehart 1977, 1990, 1997) orientation. Following sociologist of religion Steve Tipton, it describes how SDNRs demonstrate the characteristics of what he calls countercultural-expressivist morality. Drawing extensively on my qualitative data, my discussion highlights

the connection between SDNR spirituality and their moral reasoning. Tipton's main thesis is that whereas America has historically had three prevailing moral subcultures (biblical, "regular" and utilitarian), the counterculture gave birth to a fourth moral culture, namely, countercultural-expressivism. In his theory, this moral system is not freestanding, but rather combines with the three aforementioned moral cultures (biblical, regular, utilitarian) to produce new hybrids. While the hybrids he describe work in the context of his analysis, they seemed too narrow to encompass the SDNR cohort since it is vastly bigger than the NRMs he uses in his case studies. A better way to understand SDNR moral culture, I argue, is to combine countercultural expressivism with postmaterialism. This resulting equation has excellent explanatory power, and seems to capture the essential infrastructure of SDNR social and political morality.

With this discussion in place, in the final chapter I return to social capital once more and investigate the degree to which this "expressive-postmaterialist" orientation predicts their engagement in political activities. Drawing on Shalom Schwartz's values research to corroborate the postmaterialist orientation of my cohort, I am able to show that 1) SDNRs are strongly postmaterialist, and 2) their postmaterialism, in conjunction with their countercultural-expressivist moral reasoning, accounts for their distinctive form of socio-political engagement. My research tentatively confirms that SDNRs are drawn to elite challenging forms of political engagement as Inglehart and Welzel suggest (2005).

Overall, this research covers a vast terrain, and contains many firsts. It begins with an in-depth analysis of the sociology of spirituality, and introduces a

novel, metaphoric conceptual scheme to classify the literature. Next, it attempts to 1) identify, and 2) estimate the prevalence of SDNRs in Canada—another research task that has not yet been attempted, and is not therefore part of the Canadian scholarly literature on this subject. Finally, the social capital sections mark out new conceptual territory. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study anywhere to specifically measure the social capital of religiously unaffiliated spirituality.

Given that two of my main theoretical premises are drawn from the political sciences (e.g. Putnam and Inglehart), and I am primarily a religious studies scholar, I have traveled over significant stretches of unfamiliar ground in composing this work. Although I have endeavored to be comprehensive, there are bound to be times my assumptions lack depth and nuance—occasions that I hope open the way for further interdisciplinary inquiry.

A note on terminology

In this study I consider the following terms cognates for SDNR, and sometimes use them interchangeably for stylistic variation: religiously unaffiliated spirituality; solid spirituality; private religion; distinct spirituality, and, on the rare occasion, the holistic milieu or New Age. The rationale for this will become clear by the end of the first two chapters. While I used the term “spiritual but not religious” to recruit individuals for the study, ultimately it proved too broad to describe the cohort under investigation. When I do use the term spiritual but not religious (SBNR), it refers to progressive, liberal seekers with some connection to

organized religion. It is synonymous with liquid spirituality. The goal of the next two chapters is to help dispel the ambiguity the phrase ‘spiritual but not religious’ invites.

Chapter 1

What is spirituality? Moving towards a definition

Introduction

Spirituality is a visible part of popular culture these days. It is also a concept that is gaining currency in a variety of disciplines including social and psychological study of religion, business and healthcare (Holmes 2007). As we shall see, however, spirituality is notoriously difficult to define precisely. Indeed, Wade Clarke Roof is certainly correct when he writes that “words like spirit and spiritual [are] difficult to grasp” (1999, 34). Although lay people seem quite confident they know what they mean when they use these terms, words like ‘spiritual’ and ‘spirituality’, as well as phrases such as ‘spiritual but not religious’ and ‘spiritual and religious’ are highly ambiguous as research categories.

To begin to address the problem, this chapter explores how the term ‘spirituality’ is currently used in the sociology of religion. This is necessary because the range of meanings covered by the term has become so large that it now subsumes elements that on close inspection have very little in common. Overall, three basic orientations stand out: first, there are scholars who see contemporary spirituality through the lens of the NRM called New Age; second, are those scholars who link spirituality to the beliefs and practices of organized religion; finally, an emerging third group is taking up the study of spirituality as a meta-religious phenomenon. These scholars see spirituality as a medium that

connects liberal branches of organized religions with one another, either with or without an emphasis on alternative/holistic spirituality.

Since this study is only interested in spiritual seekers with no ties to organized religion, I must advance a strategy to isolate this particular group from the broader quest culture. This chapter, therefore, is theoretical in scope. It describes how spirituality is currently being used as an emergent category in the sociology of religion, and clarifies precisely how I intend to use the term in this study. This chapter begins with a look at general conceptions of the relationship between religion and spirituality, and then turns to my proposed classification scheme.

The relationship between religion and spirituality

For those who have spent time researching contemporary spirituality it is apparent that the concept is in a troubled state. Princeton sociologist of religion Robert Wuthnow speaks for many when he writes:

...[t]here has been a persistent, and in my view, justified queasiness about the current interest in spirituality. For one thing, *spirituality* itself is seldom precisely defined. To most Americans it means something about their relationship to God. But how this relationship is understood and pursued varies immensely...When spirituality can mean so many different things, it is hard to know how to interpret [it]. (2003, 24 original italics)

Elsewhere, health science researcher Leila Shahabi and her colleagues write that due to the personal nature of spirituality, there is little agreement on what it is or how to measure it (2002, 60). Commenting on this lack of agreement, psychologists of religion Brian Zinnbauer and Kevin Pargament note that since the concept of spirituality currently lacks coherence it is difficult to generalize

findings across studies (2005, 22).

Most times, the confusion about spirituality arises by way of religion. Are they the same thing or something different? Roof sums this up well:

As Americans speak of spirituality today, the term may, and most often does, include religion in the sense of a tradition, yet for many it is not bound by doctrinal, creedal, or ecclesiastical categories. Some people claim to be spiritual but with little, if any grounding in any faith tradition; still others claim to be spiritual but are opposed to religion. And if that is not confusing enough, people readily refer to differing types of spirituality, Latino spirituality, Native American spirituality and the like. (1999, 34)

For heuristic purposes, most writers—academic and popular—distinguish between religion and spirituality (Zinnbauer et al. 1997; Tacey 2004, 30-44; Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 12-32; Zinnbauer and Pargament 2005, 24-25).

Conveniently, most definitions can be reduced to the same basic formula: religions have a founder,³ institutions, traditions, dogmas and texts, whereas spirituality is personal, experiential, mystical, and non-institutional. Spirituality connotes a sense of peace, truth, love and connection with a something greater (see for instance Barker 2004, 26).

These attitudes resonate in the words of the well-known, contemporary spiritual (not religious) teacher Eckhart Tolle:

The new spirituality, the transformation of consciousness, is arising to a large extent outside of the structures of existing institutionalized religion...Partly as a result of the spiritual teachings that have arisen outside the established religions, but also due to an influx of Eastern wisdom teachings, a growing number of followers of traditional religions are able to let go of identification with form, dogma, and rigid belief systems, and discover the depth within themselves. They realize that how

³ Hinduism is a notable exception.

“spiritual” you are has nothing to do with what you believe, and everything to do with your state of consciousness. (2006, 17-18).

Tolle’s words amplify an assumption that was common in my interview cohort, namely that religion and spirituality are different sorts of metaphysical categories. For example, Glen, a successful businessman in early mid-life told me, “Religion is a path that seems to have a lot of dogmas. It is an organization with rules, and it almost seems as if you slip outside one or two of the rules you are outside the religion.” Spirituality on the hand is “an ever changing pathway to Source.” Justin, a middle-aged professional, thinks religion is “a political organization that has a doctrine about God and how people should behave according to rules defined by the religion” whereas spirituality is “a connection to a bigger entity which includes life, physicality and the interconnectedness of all things.” Patricia thinks, “religion is an organized institution” whereas spirituality is “more a personal connection to God, Goddess or the Creator, or however you define a greater being.” Likewise, Devon considers religion is a “system of dogmatic rules and regulations that are enforced on a congregation,” whereas spirituality is “communing with the divine.” A questionnaire respondent had this to say: “I don’t profess any religion, because I consider the relationship between the individual and the divine to be intensely personal, based on experience, rather than by any religious dogma.” More poetically, Darren, a man in his early twenties equates spirituality with following his heart: “I belong to the Church of Love,” he says.

Because it is subjective, spirituality has come to signify a new symbolic

territory beyond the reach of the religious authorities. Yet the specifics of this are ambiguous. When someone says, “I am spiritual” nowadays, they might mean “I am in no way religious,” or they may simply be cueing their listener to hear “As a rational person I have thought over the requirements and dogmas of my preferred religion: I am not blindly following or in any way beholden to its rules except as far as they serve me.” In both cases, spirituality has become shorthand for “I am doing it my way,” but these subtle shades of meaning are creating many problems as far as the meaning of spirituality is concerned.

In an attempt to sort things out, researchers have investigated what people mean when they say they are ‘spiritual’ or ‘religious’ (e.g., Zinnbauer et al. 1997; Zinnbauer and Pargament 2005; Barker 2004). Overall, five conceptual configurations stand out: 1) religion and spirituality are overlapping but distinct; 2) religion is contained within the broader category of spirituality; 3) spirituality is contained within the broader category of religion; 4) religion and spirituality are entirely distinct; and 5) and, religion and spirituality are the same. In terms of the numbers of people who identify with the preceding classifications—Zinnbauer et al. (1997, 555) found the following:

- 41 7% see spirituality and religion as overlapping but distinct
- 38 8% see spirituality as broader than religion
- 10 2% see religion as broader than spirituality
- 6 7% see spirituality and religion as entirely distinct
- 2 6% see religiousness and spirituality as the same concept

Zinnbauer et al. (1997) also found that the way people describe the relationship between religion and spirituality determines whether they describe themselves as ‘spiritual and religious’ or ‘spiritual but not religious’. As mentioned in the introduction, researchers have found that 9% to 30% of people describe themselves as spiritual but not religious, but the majority of people—somewhere between 48% and 74% of the Americans surveyed—describe themselves as spiritual *and* religious.⁴ Very few people describe themselves as religious only (4% -10%), although, depending on the study, somewhere between 3% and 29% admit to being uninterested in religion and spirituality altogether.

Not surprisingly, the way the relationship between religion and spirituality is perceived varies according to things such as the type of religious group a person belongs to, their gender, level of education and income. Perceiving oneself as spiritual versus religious is associated with being female, having a higher education, enjoying a higher socioeconomic class, having mystical experiences, having no religion, and engaging in religious or spiritual activities (Zinnbauer et al. 1997, 557; Shahabi et al. 2002, 59-60). As the data reproduced in Figure 2 suggest, differences may also be linked with religious affiliation. Although Zinnbauer et al. (1997, 554) found that, on the whole, people rated themselves as more spiritual than religious, there were also notable differences among groups. For instance, the New Age group, and non-traditional Episcopalians were significantly more spiritual than religious, while the Catholics and the conservative Christian college students showed less divergence on this scale.

⁴ This makes sense since three of the five Venn diagrams reflect this dynamic.

Figure 2: The differences of self-reported religiousness and spirituality in 11 American groups: reproduced from Zinnbauer et al. 1997.

1= New Age group
 2= Mental Health workers
 3= Nontraditional Episcopalians
 4= Unitarians
 5= Mainstream college students
 6= Rural Lutherans

7= Rural Presbyterians
 8= Faculty at College of Nursing
 9= Conservative Christian college students
 10= Nursing home residents
 11= Roman Catholics

In terms of clarifying what spirituality means in the modern context, studies such as the ones described here (and in the introduction) are interesting for three reasons: first, and most generally, they show how the meaning of spirituality is shifting to accommodate new types of religious identity. Namely, religion and spirituality continue to coexist as interchangeable, overlapping, or even identical constructs for many people, but now a second cluster of spiritual individuals are making their mark—the spiritual but not religious. These are the independents of the religious world. These are people who reject a religious identity but affirm a spiritual one. Second, these data highlight the serious methodological difficulties that confront any serious study of contemporary spirituality. The multiple

meanings of spirituality create problems that do not stop at semantics but cast long shadows over empirical research. To paraphrase the scholars cited earlier, how can we know what spirituality means when it can mean so many different things? Finally, and fortunately, these data also point to a method for sorting things out. Specifically, my research suggests that SDNRs are more inclined to view religion and spirituality as distinct, separate spheres, compared to SBNRs who more frequently view them as overlapping.⁵

In what follows I develop these conceptualizations with the help of a solid, liquid, and ether metaphor. My aim is to simultaneously review and classify the spirituality literature in the sociology of religion, while advancing a theoretical approach for distinguishing my research cohort. Not only is this crucial to my analysis, it also serves to locate myself and this research within the broader spirituality discourse.

A proposed classification scheme: Spirituality as solid, liquid, or ether

A graphic and metaphorical way to explore the relationship between religion and spirituality in the sociological literature on spirituality is to class researchers according to whether they view spirituality's relationship with religion as "solid," "liquid" or "ether". Doing this, I find that scholars see spirituality in one of three ways: 1) as subsumed/contained by religion (ether); 2) as separate but able to mix with religion (liquid); or 3) as distinct from religion (solid). In the first case,

⁵ The recently created website and forum www.sbnr.org is a good example of this. Its audience is the broader spiritual but not religious community and they feature some high profile and credible members (e.g. Joan Borysenko). It welcomes the voices of religious liberals, and is friendly to the SDNR and New Age community as well.

scholars view spirituality in its classic etymological sense as breath or ether where it is subject to entropy and expansiveness and must therefore be grounded or embodied in religion lest it evaporate. It is not an independent, stand-alone phenomenon and requires the mass of tradition and institution to give it shape and substance. When scholars conceive of spirituality as a 'liquid', it has the capacity to flow in and between various religions. This is the type of spirituality practiced by those who claim to be spiritual but not (strictly) religious. It is a philosophical position that encourages ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue. It contains a freestyle clause that gives adherents and even entire traditions the go ahead to experiment a little and open up to new ways of doing things. The assumption is that each religion has its own unique way of expressing spirituality, but ultimately there is something shared or universal about spirituality that transcends religious difference. Finally, spirituality can be conceived as a solid, a concrete entity in its own right. This is the home of the SDNR, a category that scholars sometimes couch in terms of New Age. Here spirituality is not part of another religion, but rather constitutes its own 'distinctive' religious path.

The careful reader will find that writings on spirituality often incorporate—unwittingly or not—these solid-liquid-ether metaphors when attempting to articulate how spirituality relates to conventional, organized religion. This makes it a handy way to classify the literature and keep things straight when making comparisons. Although this approach is not without its limitations, the places where the metaphor breaks down have something important to say about the limits of our conceptual horizons. Overall, the objective here is to

discern spirituality's different shades of meaning and underscore an important analytic fact: the term 'spirituality' is not a constant. Although it would be preferable to discuss these metaphors in the more logical solid-liquid-ether sequence, it will be best to develop the liquid metaphor last since it relies on the other two and is by far the most complex. I begin with ether.

Ether: Spirituality is subsumed by religion

The metaphor of ether is consistent with the classical Western rendering of spirituality. It is the way the concept is understood in the traditional, Abrahamic sense with its *monotheistic* rather than a *monistic orientation*. The etymology of spirituality, it is often noted, derives from the Hebrew *ruach* for breath, translated as the Latin *spiritus*, and not surprisingly, thinking about spirituality in these terms effectively constructs it as evanescent and ethereal. Conceptualized this way, spirituality is only tangible when it is anchored, grounded, or embodied in some way. As such, scholars inclined to more traditional conceptualizations of spirituality inherently privilege institutional religious bodies and tend to look askance at privatized (e.g., SDNR) forms of religious expression, which they see as unstable, self-centred, and socially inconsequential (see for example, Lasch 1979; Wuthnow 1998; Bibby 2004a, 2004b; Bowen 2004). In fact, it is typical of scholars who adopt the ether metaphor to invest considerable energy defining the qualities and/or advantages of traditional conceptions of spirituality by setting it in opposition to non-traditional forms of religious expression. Although he is not a sociologist of religion, the trenchant words of American social activist and

Catholic priest Daniel Berrigan are instructive. In a short article published in *Tikkun* magazine⁶ (1998), he unleashes a roundhouse assault on a common expression of SDNR spirituality—New Age.

Of course I am aware that there is a kind of spiritual movement growing in America today...with people uninterested in anything outside their own feelings. I've watched some of this new American spirituality fill itself with prideful psychobabble as it provides a self-obsessed inner focus for people who have "made it" but don't care much about those who have not.... I rarely find New Age people involved with us when we are demonstrating against militarism or when we are feeding the hungry or creating shelters for the homeless or in the hospital work we do with AIDS patients, whereas I find many spiritual people who are connected with religious communities... Some people today argue that equanimity achieved through inner spiritual work is a necessary condition for sustaining one's ethical and spiritual commitments... This focus on equanimity is actually a narrow minded, selfish approach to reality dressed up with the language of spirituality...

For our purposes, what is interesting to note is how even in this very short piece Berrigan uses spirituality in three senses as 1) a generalized, new and growing American spirituality; 2) a more specific form of that spiritual movement known as "New Age"; and 3) and traditional spirituality attached to religious communities. According to Berrigan, there is a right way and a wrong way to be spiritual. The wrong way is the Johnny-come-lately spirituality that is equated with New Age. This is the realm of hyper-individualism and self-absorption. The right way to be spiritual is to root one's spirituality in the traditional religious ideal of history, community, and service, with well-defined social and ethical commitments.

⁶ According to their website, *Tikkun* magazine supports a progressive view of spirituality that challenges established orthodoxies. They feature articles on "social theory, religion/spirituality, social change, contemporary American and global politics and economics, ecology, culture, psychology." <http://www.tikkun.org/index.php?topic=about> accessed August 20 2009.

This is also the view of British scholars Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, who portray contemporary spirituality as the consequence of market developments associated with the rise of therapy culture and neoliberalism, and therefore as socially corrosive and highly undesirable. For the purpose of analysis, they place all spiritualities on a spectrum from anti-capitalist to capitalist (2005, 17-20), where capitalist spiritualities are couched exclusively in terms of New Age (2005, 14). They think New Age represents the worst of neoliberal economics, which perpetuates itself by appropriating the cultural goods of religion. According to this schema, neoliberal entrepreneurs strip away religions' theological and socio-historical elements in order to sell off its "spirituality" as a feel-good pastime for those who seek subjective titillation with no corresponding requirements for engaged, social morality. Their position is that institutional religion is the proper place for spirituality, for only then can it act as a counterweight to political and economic ideologies that harm millions of people around the world (2005, 170).

Robert Wuthnow also advocates a prominent role for religion in guiding contemporary spirituality, but his analysis is more temperate than that of Berrigan and Carrette and King. In his study of American spirituality since the Fifties, he describes spirituality using the metaphors of dwelling and seeking. As these terms imply, spirituality in dwelling mode is spirituality housed by tradition, whereas seeking is analogous to non-traditional spiritual quests (1998a). He is not as cynical about New Age and other expressions of SDNR spirituality as other critics, but he is nevertheless skeptical about the type of religious and social

integrity that can be cultivated by spiritual seeking that is ungrounded, undisciplined, and unstructured. He thinks that “contemporary spirituality often smacks of gullibility and irrationality—the kind of wishful thinking and self-indulgent fantasizing about miracles and wonders that makes more sober minded folks blanch” (2003, 24). This brand of spirituality is at odds with the type of spirituality embedded in the theological wisdom of the Christian and Jewish traditions. Wuthnow is concerned that these weighty traditions might be “abandoned for a do-it-yourself faith oriented to good feelings” (2003, 25). He does not put much stock in popular culture and its alternative religious discourse as a reliable purveyor of spiritual truth.

Although Wuthnow is clear that a spirituality of seeking is giving chase to spirituality dwelling in religion, he worries that spirituality in the seeking mode often “results in transient experiences characterized more often by dabbling than depth” (1998a, 168). Based on findings from his *Religion and the Arts Study*, Wuthnow finds that, although many people who are interested in spirituality keep their distance from organized religion, 80% of those who said they value spiritual growth the most are church members, 71% of whom attended services weekly (Wuthnow 2003, 36). In other words, those seriously interested in spirituality turn to organized religion to bring their quests to fruition (2003, 15).

The foregoing are but a few examples to illustrate what is for many scholars an axiomatic truth—religion houses spirituality; it is religion’s institutional structures that nurture spiritual seeking and provide a vehicle for it. Without these institutional coordinates, spirituality exists as a highly abstract,

ineffable dimension of the religious life. Without religion, spirituality lacks social impact. It is either trite or damaging. This view is emphatically opposed by the cadre of scholars who view spirituality as something distinct from religion.

Solid: Spirituality is distinct from religion

Scholars who view spirituality as something distinct from religion often convey in their language the idea that it is not vaporous *ruach* but rather something decidedly solid and independent. This is spirituality with a capital S. Here spirituality exists as a concrete alternative to traditional religion. Scholars whose works fit this category are most often describing New Age-style spirituality, but the New Age label has been dropped. There are many reasons for this, both practical and stylistic. Practically, New Age is a notoriously slippery construct. It is well known, for example, that those individuals whom scholars identify as New Age frequently reject the label. Stylistically, the term spirituality is preferable to New Age since as Berrigan's comments illustrate, New Age frequently carries a pejorative inflection. By staying away from the New Age label in favour of spirituality, scholars (and publishers) can encompass a larger audience. These are some of the reasons why we are currently noticing a migration away from talk of New Age towards talk of 'spirituality', especially among those sympathetic to its values. This includes references to 'inner life spirituality' (Heelas 1996), 'subjective life spirituality' (Heelas and Woodhead 2005), and 'post-Christian spirituality' (Houtman and Aupers 2007).

Scholars who frame spirituality as something distinct from religion

generally construct it as a specific form of religious expression that can be traced back several hundred years, if not considerably longer. Cast in this light, spirituality is only the most recent manifestation of a well-established, spiritual philosophy rooted in what has been variously described as the “the alternative religious tradition” (Ellwood and Partin 1988), “the Western esoteric tradition” (Hanegraaff 1996), the “unchurched religious tradition” (Fuller 2001), and the “metaphysical religious tradition” (Albanese 2007). Scholars who view spirituality as a viable tradition are likely to accept that it bears a family resemblance⁷ to ancient sources, including Gnosticism and Neoplatonism, although many do not go back quite that far. In a recent publication, American historian Catherine Albanese traces the origins of American metaphysical religion or “New Age coda” to a distinctive tradition dating back through Renaissance Hermeticism and Paracelsian ‘magic’ of the thirteenth and fourteenth century. Robert Fuller’s exploration of the unchurched religion in America offers a more modest genealogy that pays tribute to influential figures such as Emmanuel Swedenborg, Antoine Mesmer, Andrew Jackson Davis, and movements such as Transcendentalism, New Thought, and Theosophy. Whatever historical arc is favoured, the important point is summed up by Heelas when he says, “there is no doubting the fact that the New Age—so to speak—has been around for a very long time indeed” (1996, 41).

In short, ‘solid scholars’ frequently consolidate spirituality by reconstructing it as a tradition in its own right. This implies that it cannot be

⁷ Antoine Faivre specifically uses this term to describe the western esoteric tradition.

reduced to a random occurrence that grew out of the enthusiastic spiritual experimentation of the sixties (Tipton 1982). Instead, this is a spirituality connected to events in play long before that tumultuous decade arrived. All this serves to give spirituality some much needed weight, effective for countering criticisms that New Age spiritual ether is “spirituality lite” (Coleman 2005, 35), an “airy-fairy”, “flaky” or “waifish” way of engaging the sacred.

Solid spirituality has been growing since the sixties. As discussed in the introduction, this is because its emphasis on autonomy meshes well with the cultural climate of individualism so pronounced in North America. Valorizing the self has become a cultural norm, and is steadily undermining the hegemony of organized religion (Partridge 2004, 46-50; Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Houtman and Aupers 2007). Based on research done in Kendal, Cumbria, Heelas and Woodhead foresee a future where holistic spiritualities (solid) are practiced more than organized religion (2005). They anticipate a “spiritual revolution” with holistic (e.g. “body-mind-spirit”) activities steadily replacing Christian congregational membership and participation over the next three decades (2005, 45). They note that already “terms like spirituality, holism, New Age, mind-body-spirit, yoga, feng shui, chi, and chakra have become more common in the general culture than the traditional Christian vocabulary” (2005, 1). In this context, solid spirituality is anything but waifish or ethereal. It has momentum and weight, and constitutes a viable alternative—or even a threat—to what organized religions offer.

This view is also audible in Houtman and Aupers’ analysis of “post-

Christian spirituality,” which they describe as “spirituality inclined, unchurched Christianity.” In an interesting turn of phrase they describe it as “spirituality standing on its own two feet and broken from the moorings of the Christian tradition” (2007, 305). This anthropomorphic metaphor frames spirituality as something that can stand upright like a human being; it has sufficient power to break away from (or revolt against) the Christian moorings that have held it down in the past. As with Heelas and Woodhead, their analysis of the World Values Survey data suggests we can expect to see post-Christian spirituality becoming more widespread in the West in the years ahead.

The primary question is, however, what is the institutional base of solid spirituality? Quite controversially, the answer is—the marketplace. Although critics of solid spirituality say that commodification is a sure sign of its triviality, it can also be argued that the marketplace of spiritual goods and services is evidence of its cultural significance (Redden 2005; Heelas 2008). In the case of solid spirituality, the marketplace emerges as the primary means of transmitting and disseminating its principles and practices (Redden 2005; Emerich 2006; Heelas 2008). Because solid spirituality tends to be based on an ethic of healthy living and expanded human potential, adopting this lifestyle usually involves purchasing products such as books on juicing, meditation, and visualization as well as signing up for classes in things such as yoga, tai-chi, and aromatherapy, for example. This market activity produces networks of affiliation which operate in lieu of more traditional institutional bodies.

Liquid: Spirituality overlaps with religion

The final and most complex metaphor is liquid. Metaphors invoking liquidity and flow populate descriptions of spirituality and are especially apparent when scholars attempt to describe spirituality's new relationship with organized religion(s), yet upon close inspection I discerned three discreet orientations, namely seeping, flowing and binding. In the first case there are intimations that New Age style spirituality has 'seeped' into the mainstream carrying the values and technologies of the culture of subjective wellbeing with it. Related to the first is a second metaphoric framing that expresses something akin to the erosive force of waves, rivers and ice to highlight how popular ways of being spiritual are wearing away the boundaries between religion and popular culture. Finally, a third metaphor is emerging that depicts spirituality as neither seeping nor eroding, but rather *binding*. Here spirituality is more like plasma, a suspension of shared spiritual ideals that holds liberal branches of religion in close proximity so they may more easily relate to one another, even work together as a meta-religious social movement. This is a completely new way conceptualizing the interaction between religion and spirituality, one where spirituality becomes a third order phenomenon, a suspension of shared spiritual ideals with enough cohesion to gel into a meta-religious social movement. These three variations are discussed next.

Liquid 1: Organized religions absorb New Age

Playing on an evocative liquid metaphor, Albanese compares New Age's tendency to endlessly incorporate a wide range of theologies, philosophies and

health and healing modalities to a sponge that absorbs whatever “spiritual moisture” is available. By the millennium, however, she thinks that this moisture was “disintegrating the medium” (2007, 513). For Albanese, the solid medium of New Age has dissolved into what she calls the “new spirituality,” a phenomenon that has gone its way “innocuous and underlabeled” (2007, 513). In Albanese’s view, then, New Age has disappeared, is in the process of dissolving into what she refers to as “the new spirituality” and as a result, it has become amorphous and hard to pin down or discern. So where has it gone exactly?

According to some scholars, in part, mainline religious groups have absorbed the best of what New Age had to offer. This dynamic is explored in studies that examine how mainline religions are increasingly absorbing beliefs and practices connected with New Age (Orenstein 2002; McKinnon 2003; Bainbridge 2004; Mencken, Bader and Kim 2009). What they find is that whereas frequent church attendance mitigates the belief in paranormal phenomena such as aliens, telepathy, and astrology, lower levels of church attendance correlate with higher levels of paranormal belief. William S. Bainbridge makes this observation:

Finding substantial paranormal belief in the middle of the religious dimension interestingly contradicts a stereotype about the New Age. It becomes harder to dismiss the New Age as peripheral to our culture if it is the moderates in the middle of the road who are attracted to it. It may involve fringe beliefs, but at least as measured by church attendance and subjective religiousness, it is not the fringe people who believe in it. (2004, 393)

In other words, Bainbridge emphasizes how the peripherally religious often hold unorthodox views that incorporate many of the practices and techniques drawn from the New Age ‘canon’. In terms of my metaphoric scheme, he is arguing for

the flow of New Age into conventional religious bodies.

Peter Versteeg's study of the growth of Christian spirituality outside church institutions is another study that highlights this phenomenon well. Based on his research of a Dutch meditation group in a spiritual centre founded by Jesuits, he documents how members of this Christian group adopt the values of "life spirituality," (2006, 86). He suggests that this mode of Christian spiritual development emphasizes "holistic relationships" over "transcendent revelation," is non-hierarchical and has marked therapeutic overtones (2006, 86). Overall, his main argument is that while these Christian spiritual centres provide some institutional scaffolding and are therefore especially attractive to people with a religious background (2006, 95), their fundamental aim is to provide individuals with meaning through emphasis on subjective feelings and a personal experience of the sacred (2006, 85). Here, spirituality is equated with the individual's personal spiritual quest, that is, her or his right or obligation to understand the sacred through personal experience (2006; 85, 88). It bears mentioning that while it is often said that New Age has "kleptomaniac" tendencies, meaning that it gains inspiration by borrowing freely from a variety of religious sources, here it is the other way around with mainline religious bodies absorbing elements of characteristically New Age pursuits.

Versteeg also notes that the "structures of the meetings and the practices used greatly resemble meditation methods used in alternative centres" (89). He specifically notes that although the activities of the spiritual centres are unconventional by traditional standards (92), many retain their affiliations with

their respective religious orders or congregations, which serve to channel these alternative values into mainstream religious life (87). Whereas historically the churches may not have looked favorably on these religious outliers, Versteeg notes how—with some exceptions—they are openly supportive of the spiritual centres. This is likely because these churches have had to augment their repertoire—“reformulate their mission and ministry”—in the face of declining participation (87). He writes the following:

Although Christian spiritual centres are inspired by their respective spiritual traditions, the interpretation of it is rather liberal and ecumenical, with a focus on the subjective needs of individual seekers and openness to various worldviews. This is a *major shift* from the traditional spirituality of Catholic orders, which was understood as a religious life in relationship to an external sacred within the boundaries of a specific tradition. (87 italics added)

The “major shift” that Versteeg refers to is produced by the assimilation of New Age style values into mainstream religious bodies so that Christian spirituality begins to resemble New Age style spirituality.⁸ “In some cases” Versteeg says, “it may just be a variety of that” (94).⁹

Overall, the studies mentioned here all suggest that New Age (solid spirituality) is permeating the increasingly porous boundaries of liberal religious groups. This view is certainly not popular with all scholars. For example,

⁸ Stephanie Palmesano has described how an Italian Catholic community called the Reconstructors has incorporated elements of Hinduism after the founder’s spiritual experiences with an Eastern spiritual teacher. See “Reconstructors: Reinventing the Spiritual Path within Italian Catholicism,” in *Fieldwork in Religion* 4:1 (2009). 29-45.

⁹ While I have placed Versteeg’s study under the overlapping or liquid heading, clearly he shares sympathies with distinct spirituality scholars such as Heelas and Woodhead and Houtman and Aupers because he sees New Age as a distinctive source of inspiration for the type of spiritual activities he examined

although David Tacey thinks that the “waters of spirituality [are] flooding their banks...” (18), moving beyond traditional religious institutions to become “a much larger field of human activity” (38), he holds New Age at arm’s length, referring to it in one instance as “a vulgar series of spiritual technologies” (69). This view, however, is modified by Wade Roof who conceptualizes spiritual liquidity not as the uptake of New Age style beliefs and practices by mainline religious groups, but rather, the flow of individuals between various religious bodies, including New Age.

Liquid 2: Seekers flow through the spiritual marketplace

The second discernable category of liquid spirituality is typified by Roof’s analysis of quest culture in America (1999). His main argument is that many boomers no longer adhere to a fixed religious path but instead have “fluid religious identities” based on experimentation and change (1999, 135). Whereas in the past the boundaries separating religious groups were well marked, today they no longer are. Religious identities have become “malleable and multifaceted, often overlapping several traditions” (1999, 4), making the boundaries between believing and seeking more permeable than ever before (1999, 131). As such, “religious energies now flow in channels different from those described by previous maps” (1999, 5). This has happened because subjective experiences based on one’s innermost feelings have become the basis for much religious life (1999, 113,161). Thus, Roof does not see spirituality as bounded by traditional religious categories, such as creed and doctrine, but rather as something

personally achieved (1999, 34-35). He thinks that it was the religious suppliers who helped foster the conditions for religious fluidity by fashioning a common vocabulary that effectively standardized religious and spiritual themes for easier consumption (1999, 140). He grants prominence of place to those “metaphysical believers and spiritual seekers” whose grassroots spiritual sensitivities are now “rather widely *diffused* in American culture as a whole—including within churches, synagogues and temples” (204-205, italics added). The spiritual marketplace Roof describes, therefore, is a metaphor for the open exchange of spiritual ideas, values, products and services, whether inside or outside the auspices of organized religion, which has become characteristic of American religious life in the early twenty-first century.

Liquid 3: Spirituality is a medium or plasma connecting religious liberals

At this point, the narrative concerning liquid spirituality undergoes a thematic shift. Whereas the studies under consideration so far have largely dealt with spirituality as a relatively personal aspect of faith and religious identity, studies are beginning to emerge that frame spirituality as a meta-religious phenomenon. In this scenario spirituality becomes shorthand for a movement or ideology that can theoretically unite diverse religious groups through a shared vision of a better society (Forman 2004; Lynch 2007; Jones 2008). What makes this form of spirituality different from those already mentioned is how culture and not religion per se becomes the medium of cohesion. The span of this movement is held to be enormous, extending into the secular realm of business, education, healthcare, and

politics (King 2001, 2; Forman 2004, 26-27; Holmes 2007). Forman calls this the “Grassroots Spirituality movement,” while Lynch speaks of “Progressive Spirituality.” Both refer to a spontaneously created and non-centralized spirituality *movement* that “cuts right across the traditional/non-traditional divide,” drawing in spiritual seekers from all religious backgrounds, including the alternative religious or holistic milieu (Forman 2004, 27; Lynch 2007, 20).

In their analyses, meta-religious spirituality functions as the basis for a shared cosmology upon which social reforms of various kinds can be undertaken. This type of spirituality is portrayed as panentheistic, holistic, and relational; nature is regarded as sacred (Forman 2004, 46-71; Lynch 2007, 11). Forman thinks the grassroots movement has the potential to transform systems by bringing spirituality into the workplace, government, and health care system (2004, 137). Likewise, Lynch sees progressive spirituality as the ideological cornerstone of what he refers to as the progressive milieu. Not only is it a way for “progressives” to forge a shared sense of identity, it encourages forms of faith that are “outward looking,” that is, less reflexive. It is a form of spirituality that inspires a socially conscious conception of selfhood with people behaving as responsible actors willing to take on various forms of social activism (2007, 126).

Although Lynch recognizes the philosophical and spiritual influence of New Age, he downplays its role arguing that it inherently lacks shared programs of belief and forms of collective action (2007, 85). In contrast, he thinks because the progressive milieu gains significant institutional edification from organized religious bodies it shows signs of emerging into a more cohesive movement

Figure 3: Zinnbauer et al.'s model (right) versus an updated model where multiple religions are suspended in spiritual 'plasma' (or is that culture?)

(2007, 85). Lynch notes that a palpable tension exists between organized religious progressives and alternative/holistic spiritual groups and that “boundary crossings between mainstream religious institutions and alternative spirituality are still relatively uncommon” (2007, 94). Lynch’s perspective reiterates the fact that SDNR is still a marginalized phenomenon. Outside the solid discourse, it is usually treated as an ambiguous or undesirable presence.

In Zinnbauerian terms, the only Venn diagram that comes close to expressing this ‘plasmic’ type of relationship between religion and spirituality is where the big circle ‘spirituality’ encases a smaller circle ‘religion’, but in fact, a more accurate image is presented in Figure 3 where the field called spirituality is like plasma, suspending multiple religious groups.

Discussion

Even though categorizing how scholars sometimes represent the relationship between religion and spirituality as solid, liquid and ether is helpful, in the end

they are only metaphors. There is only so much such metaphors can do because ultimately they are too reductionist to capture how a changing social landscape impacts the expression of human religious experience. Despite their limitations, though, these metaphors do bring the following issues to light. To begin with, they illustrate that the term spirituality is too variegated to constitute an accurate analytic category; scholars need to exercise greater self-awareness and self-criticism about how they define spirituality. They need to be aware of the limitations of their own metaphors, metaphors that frequently are drawn from their own experiences and prejudices rather than from empirical evidence. Often much of the disagreement about spirituality stems more from the root assumptions of these metaphors than any data.

Second categorizing scholars according to these metaphors shows how spirituality is increasingly conceptualized, not as an aspect of religion in a narrow sense, but as an autonomous, meta-religious phenomenon. Spirituality is increasingly viewed as a separate phenomenon that can be channeled into projects aimed at social change—despite the claims of those who criticize it for being inherently self-absorbed, esoteric and ethereal. This movement towards looking at spirituality as a social, rather than strictly personal, phenomenon could well be the frontier of spirituality studies in the sociology of religion, especially since relatively little has been done in this area.

This is connected to a third insight revealed by the solid-liquid-ether metaphor, namely whether solid spirituality is more properly a religious or cultural phenomenon. For example, there is a discernable line of tension

concerning the role of New Age or solid spirituality among scholars who adopt the liquid metaphor. Sometimes it is seen as an active ingredient that has a significant role in determining the shape the spiritual milieu or marketplace takes, but more frequently it is presented as a minimal 'religious' presence—a bit player in the new spiritual milieu. Whether spirituality is a cultural rather than religious phenomenon is not something that should be answered too quickly, but rather only after much empirical study.

Clearly, understanding the assimilation of solid spirituality into the cultural and religious mainstream is a theoretical challenge. Because spirituality has historically been the bailiwick of organized religion this process will likely remain a contested one. Still, we seem to be approaching a threshold where in some cases it is more useful to define spirituality in terms of popular culture rather than religion, much the same way we no longer think through a range of once-religious concerns such as morality or the nature of evil, for instance, solely or even mainly by resorting to theological explanations. Today we find seekers delving into the traditions of the past like "*bricoleurs*" rather than faithful adherents. They pick and choose what helps them from the world's religious traditions but their motivations are "spiritual" rather than religious.

Conclusion

The analysis offered here has important implications for this study. By labeling three major conceptual orientations—solid, liquid and ether—I am now in a position to say exactly what sort of spirituality this research considers and what it

does not. To be clear, this research concerns the social capital of solid spirituality. It does not concern meta-religious or liquid spirituality (though future research could profitably investigate the social capital of this group for comparative and other purposes). The question under consideration here is how spirituality with no traditional institutional props creates social capital. As such, it excludes liquid spiritual seekers (SBNRs) because in many cases they retain attachments to the institutional religious life, which is itself a source of social capital. With this conceptual hurdle crossed, the next chapter considers how many Canadians are SBNR versus SDNR.

Chapter 2

Privatized religion in Canada: How widespread is it?

Introduction

The previous chapter looked at the difficulties spirituality poses as a research term, and argued that one way to locate SDNRs within the broader quest culture is to define it as “spirituality distinct from religion.” This is an important theoretical point, but it still leaves two questions unanswered: first, why is it here? What has led to the growth of privatized spirituality? Second, how widespread is it? How many people are SDNR and SBNR in Canada? If you refer to Figure 1 on page seven once more, you will notice all the studies listed there are American. This is because there are almost no similar studies conducted in Canada. In fact, much of the information that is currently available about spirituality is from American surveys and polls. Another key research project is also problematic, namely Heelas’ and Woodhead’s Kendal study, which estimates the numbers of individuals who are active in holistic as opposed to congregational activities. First of all, sociologists of religion David Voas and Steve Bruce (2007) have questioned the methodology used, and second, it is a British research project. Because there are notable differences between British, American and Canadian religious culture, I cannot assume that datasets from these countries reflect the Canada reality in any exact way (Lyon and Van Die 2000; Casanova 2003). It can be difficult to talk about the social impact of religiously unaffiliated spirituality, therefore, when it is unclear how representative this ‘religious’ orientation is.

This chapter examines data that can be used to predict the prevalence of SBNR and SDNR spirituality in Canada. It begins with a general assessment of the “subjective turn” (Taylor 2002; Heelas and Woodhead 2005) —the social changes underpinning the cultural shift towards privatized forms of religion in general. This term refers to a condition where the late modern psyche seeks existential meaning in the self rather than in the duties and obligation of predefined social roles. In this context, one’s subjectivities (thoughts, feelings, and attitudes) give one a sense of purpose, direction and, therefore, security in what is often a confusing and fast-paced world. This has led individuals to crave personal freedom, and insist on liberties that allow for the exercise of personal power (Wuthnow 1999). Subsequently, there is widespread resistance towards institutions, which can threaten personal autonomy. The subjective turn predicts that forms of religion that are liberal and autonomous will be more suited to this cultural value orientation (Heelas and Woodhead 2005). In short, it explains the growth of more liberal attitudes towards religious life manifest in solid and liquid spirituality. My analysis suggests that compared to forty or fifty years ago, religious spirituality (ether) is now less popular than the liquid and solid forms.

This chapter takes stock of these trends. It begins with a look at the growth of liquid spirituality as a way to establish the ambient cultural mood concerning privatized spirituality. This is not easy to do since there are very few reliable studies that assess this in any systematic way. In this section, I draw on the work of Andrew Grenville (2000) and Reginald Bibby (2004b) to estimate what percentage of Canadians might be considered SBNR in the broadest sense.

Finally, I will try to estimate how many Canadians are SDNR. By this I mean Canadians who are spiritual in the solid sense. This is almost impossible to do satisfactorily since there are simply no studies that deal explicitly with this issue. Consequently I rely on data collected by Roof (1999), and Heelas and Woodhead (2005), which I back up with a very tentative estimate based on the prevalence of “Religious Nones” in Canada. My analysis suggests that over 50% of Canadians with some religious involvement are SBNR—that is, spiritual in a liquid sense—and between 5% and 8% of Canadians in total are SDNR, or spiritual in a solid sense. Although the figure for solid spirituality may seem low, I think it is quite significant. Not only is this substantially higher than the percentage of Canadians who belong to minority religious groups (Hindus and Buddhists only make up about one percent each), it is very high considering SDNR is bypassed in academic analyses on the grounds it is numerically insignificant (e.g., Bruce 2002; Bibby 2004a). The tentative methods used to arrive at these figures preclude firm conclusions. Still, the effort is an essential first step in bringing the SBNR and SDNR phenomena into view.

Please note that this chapter introduces data collected in my study, including quotes from interviewees and responses from the questionnaire. To preserve the continuity of the spirituality chapters, I introduce my study methods in chapter 4, before the lengthier analysis of social capital begins. I recognize, that I have not formally introduced the particulars of my study, and that some readers might prefer to have that information presented earlier. If that is the case, you may wish to refer to chapter four before proceeding.

The privatization of religion

Social change: the role of the counterculture and higher education

Why were the sixties so critical in the restructuring of North American religious life? According to most analysts, a few major patterns stand out (see for instance Wuthnow 1988, 142-172; Roof 1993, 32-60; Ellwood, 1994, 104-175; Pike 2004, 67-89; Dawson 2006a, 39-70). First, population growth, fed by the post War baby boom, led to a large cohort of young people who came of age during the sixties. Second, a corresponding post War economic boom meant that the middle class grew. Affluence and leisure were more widespread, which contributed to the baby boomer's perception that choice, freedom and leisure were routine expectations. Third, the introduction of the birth control pill changed the rules of sexual relationships. It lowered birthrates and delayed marriage by giving women control over their fertility and reproductive cycles. In this way it also freed them to pursue careers more aggressively than in the past. Not surprisingly, attitudes concerning the proper social roles of men and women changed dramatically during this time. Fourth, the change in immigration laws introduced a new and previously unfamiliar ethno-religious component into North American culture. In particular, Asian inspired spiritual teachers and practices became popular with many counterculture youth. Fifth, the civil rights movements focused awareness on personal liberty and justice, and spawned a series of liberation campaigns that included gay rights, women's rights, and even animal rights. The ecology movement was also an important movement at this time. It brought together the notions that humans had the right to live in an unpolluted world, and that the

planet and natural world had rights that needed to be respected. Sixth, state sponsored education programs in the US meant that more people than ever before were attending college and pursuing higher education. Taken together, these factors precipitated a widespread change in values, which simultaneously weakened the legitimacy and authority of established institutions such as religion, education, and the government (Inglehart 1977; Dawson 2006a, 40). This shift in values is important to understanding the social ethic of religiously unaffiliated spirituality and will be taken up in detail in chapters 6 and 7. For now I want to say a little more about the effect rising levels of education have had on North American religious life.¹⁰

Education and quest culture

In *The Restructuring of American Religion* (1988), Wuthnow argues that more than any other single factor, mass higher education was responsible for the decline of traditional religious life in America. At the end of the Second World War, the US government actively expanded higher education. This helped war vets re-establish themselves by securing their financial security, but the government's decision was also motivated by the need to promote scientific progress as a key pillar of national defense. The Cold War years, in conjunction with the Soviet's launch of Sputnik in 1957, made cutting edge technological and scientific developments a national priority (1988, 154).

¹⁰ I focus on the American situation for the time being since the dynamics are basically the same in Canada. Wuthnow draws specific parallels between Canada and the US in his article "Religious movements and counter-movements in North America" in ed. James A. Beckford's *New religious movements and rapid social change*, (1986: Sage) 1-28.

In the fifties there were 2.6 million Americans enrolled in higher education in the US. By the sixties this had climbed to 3.6 million, and by the seventies, the figure had reached 8.6 million (155). This growth was a function of both the size of the boomer cohort, and the investment the government had made in supporting advanced education (155). Whatever the government's ambitions might have been, the emphasis on mass higher education had many unintended side effects.

To begin with, it produced a shift towards egalitarianism, and a greater tolerance of diversity (155). Whereas in the fifties, only 40% of Americans were willing to dine in a restaurant with blacks, by the seventies, 80% of Americans said they were comfortable with this (156). Overall, attitudes became more liberal amongst the more educated. Professionals and those with some higher education were typically more accepting of various alternative and experimental lifestyle options. They were more accepting of homosexuality, and pre-marital sex, for instance. In this way, education emerged as the "fundamental basis of attitudinal divergence in American culture" (158). Within organized religion, it produced progressively deepening divisions between those who were more versus less educated. Those with a college education were more likely to identify themselves as religious liberals. Conservatives were typically lacking college education, and held more traditional religious views (168).

Not surprisingly, one of the most significant trends was the decline of religious involvement amongst the more educated (161), which led to an overall decline in religious participation. In the U.S. and Canada, church membership as a

percentage of the total population began to decline in the early seventies. In the U.S., weekly attendance dropped from 49% in 1958, to about 40% in the early seventies (159). Likewise, a Canadian Gallup poll in 1945 showed that 60% of Anglo-Canadians and a staggering 95% of Quebecois were attending church on a weekly basis (Bibby 2004b, 12). This boom in religion continued into the fifties, but by the sixties, membership was not keeping up with population growth (12). In 2005, The Canadian General Social Survey conducted by Statistics Canada found that only 21% of Canadians aged 15 and older were attending weekly religious services (Lindsay 2008, 1).

The steady growth of higher education through the sixties and seventies had other ramifications for religion as well. To begin with, whereas up to the fifties the American religious landscape was cast in terms of Protestant, Catholic and Jew, this began to change in the sixties. With higher levels of education came greater sensitivity and appreciation of religious difference. This led to more respectful interactions between religious groups and denominations, and a corresponding drive to emphasize cooperative rather than contradictory elements of faith. Through the sixties, and to a lesser extent in the seventies, denominational mergers were increasingly common (Wuthnow 1998, 80-84).

This trend towards tolerance and an expanded locus of engagement also held true for individuals. Educated congregants were more open-minded, a perspective which made them more likely to marry outside their faith, and more prone to religious switching, that is, looking beyond old religious boundaries to find the right religious home (162).

Higher levels of education also encouraged the growth of religious experimentation, including involvement in NRMs (162-163). As Wuthnow notes, most NRMs recruited heavily from student populations (163). Participation rates were not astronomical, but they were noteworthy. About one percent of Americans said they were involved in Eastern religious practices; four percent practiced TM,¹¹ and three percent did yoga (166). Even though it is clear that most Americans had nothing to do with NRMs, these new religions contributed an “important symbolic dimension to the more general cultural upheavals of the 1960s” by redefining the horizons of religious life, and the meaning of “religious respectability” more generally (Wuthnow 1988a, 170).¹²

Taken together, the liberal spiritual consciousness that took root in organized religion in general, and NRMs in particular, has culminated in the contemporary spiritual but not religious phenomenon in the broadest sense. Liberal seekers—typically boomers—have accepted, and in turn cultivated, the idea that religion is something one can experiment with, even dismantle and serve up “a la carte,” to use Bibby’s vocabulary (Roof 1993, 1999; Hammond 1992; Cimino and Latin 1998; Dawson 1998b; Wuthnow 1998b; Lyon 2000; Emberley 2002; Bibby 2004a, 14). In the late modern context, religion has “become a neatly packaged consumer item—taking its place among other commodities that can be

¹¹ Transcendental Meditation

¹² I agree with Wuthnow, that a very good way to understand the religious changes that began at that time of the counterculture is to focus on the role that education played in producing a more liberal social orientation. The connection between liberal religious views and higher education are certainly demonstrated in my research findings where 90% of my questionnaire respondents had some post-secondary education, with 20% holding either a Masters (16%) or Doctoral (4%) degree.

found or bypassed according to one's consumption whims" (Lyon 1994, 62, cited in Partridge 2007, 235). This has resulted in a vibrant "spiritual marketplace" of religious choice and opportunity, and a tendency to see one's religious life in terms of options rather than static requirements (Roof 1999). At the same time, these changes have divested religion of the authority it once had. Organized religion is no longer seen as an institution capable of providing failsafe formulae for navigating life's complexities. Sociologist of religion James Beckford argues that many people see religion as more of a "cultural resource" that can be drawn on selectively, whether for inspiration, to consolidate one's social identity, or to address existential concerns (1989, 175). As such, many individuals have come to expect that they can "exercise considerable agency in defining and shaping what is religiously meaningful" (Roof 1999, 75). In what follows, I want to take this discussion a bit further by considering how these liberalizing trends have caused many individuals to turn away from external voices of religious authority and search for meaning by looking within. This trend—referred to as the privatization of religion—lies behind the appeal of spirituality in its solid and liquid forms.

A point of clarification is called for here. In the sociology of religion, privatization has two connected, albeit distinctive, meanings. On the one hand, privatization can refer to the process of functional differentiation in social structure (Luckmann 1996, 73). In this context, it is a description of the process whereby religion (Christianity) has moved from a central role in the public affairs of the nation, to a separate, specialized institutional sphere alongside education, healthcare, government and so forth (Casanova 1994, 35-39). On the other, it can

refer to shifts in the locus of religious authority from the realm of the external and institutional, to the internal and personal. Here it refers to a process where individuals construct their religious identities without institutional religious constraints. While I recognize that there is a strong—indeed fascinating—relationship between the diminishing public significance of religion and the privatization of religious consciousness, I want to focus on privatization in the second, or personal sense, since it informs the critique of religiously unaffiliated spirituality to a high degree. I will examine this issue in detail in the next chapter.

The subjective turn and the growth of privatized religion

The subjective turn has been unfolding in the West since the dawn of the early modern period (Baumeister 1986; Taylor 1989), though the process has been accelerating since the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions with a major watershed in the counterculture era. A consequence of the far reaching social changes that came about in the sixties has been a corresponding relocation of religious authority. Formerly vested in institutions and clergy, with the widespread cultural acceptance of more liberal social values, many have come to see religious or spiritual authority as something that resides within the self (Luckmann 1967; Bellah et al. 1985; Roof 1993, 1999; Wuthnow 1998b, 2003; Emberley 2002; Bibby 2004b; Smith and Denton 2005). What Heelas calls the “shift to the self” can be seen in the nature of prevailing views about religion in contemporary Western society, where God is seen more in personal, experiential terms. There is a prevailing sense that there is no “right answer” where God and

religion is concerned (Smith and Denton 2005, 145). Overall, there is a diminished emphasis on God's strength and power and a greater emphasis on God's love and presence, and a turn from dogmas of redemption to messages of harmony and wellbeing (Furseth and Repstad 2006, 122; see also Barker 2004, 26).

These changes are not idiosyncratic, but rather derive from the emergence of a new narrative in contemporary Western culture, one that centres on the importance of autonomy (Inglehart and Welzel 2005, 2-4), wellbeing (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 84-85), and self-understanding, or self-reflexivity (Giddens 1991; Roof 1999). The shift to the self is particularly pronounced in the younger generations. Sociologists of religion Christian Smith and Melinda Denton note, "American youth, like American adults, are nearly without exception, profoundly individualistic, instinctively presuming autonomous, individual self-direction to be a universal human norm and life goal" (2005, 143). This is not surprising given the growing visibility of a self-expressive value orientation (Inglehart 1990, 1997). According to Inglehart's research, postmaterialist values are becoming more widespread. Specifically, he argues that whereas historically materialists outnumbered postmaterialists four to one, this shifted in the nineties when for the first time three out of four Westerners were moving towards the postmaterialist end of the spectrum (Inglehart 1997 138-139; see also Inglehart and Abramson 1999). Heelas and Woodhead attribute the growth of solid spirituality (what they call "life spirituality") to this postmaterialist shift (2005, 11).

As such, the shift to the self is not something that originates in religion but

rather in culture at large. As Luckmann observes, today “the sacralization of subjectivity is celebrated in much of mass culture” (1996, 76). This rather obvious point bears emphasizing. The emergence of subjective spirituality is best seen as ancillary to the subjective turn, not the other way around. Thus, subjectivized religiosity is the byproduct of a subjectivized culture, not a strictly personal value orientation that arises *ex nihilo*. Sociologists of religion Inger Furseth and Pål Repstad put this succinctly:

Private religiosity and religious individualism are constructed on the basis of social experiences. The ability to cherish freedom of choice and self-realization do not come out of the blue—it is learned. It is reasonable to assume that the ideal of the individual’s search for their own world-view will find support in societies that are characterized by a high degree of individualism (2006, 124).

The implications are clear: as society becomes more subjectively oriented, subjective forms of religious life will grow. Indeed, the critique of solid spirituality is embedded in narrative about the perilous path of modernization that is leading many away from deference to higher authority to the sacralization of inner authority. As I discuss in detail in the next chapter, critics see all too clearly that social changes favour the emergence of individualistic rather than communitarian values (e.g., Bellah et al. 1985; Carrette and King 2005), and worry about the spread of forms of religious life consistent with that.

For the purpose of the analysis in this chapter, I have outlined the social context of these phenomena as a way of demonstrating their cultural appeal, while 1) imparting the potentially large scale of the phenomena, and 2) simultaneously suggesting that exact measurements of anything so amorphous are bound to be challenging. The remainder of the chapter is my attempt to estimate the size of the

SBNR and SDNR cohorts in Canada. I say “attempt” because conclusive answers cannot be wrung from incomplete data. Still, I consider this an important exercise to verify the pervasiveness of privatized forms of religiosity, of which solid spirituality is merely a more evident form. Although my study of social capital does not include SBNRs, I begin with an estimation of this demographic. Not only is this data more accessible than comparable figures for SDNRs, the prevalence of this demographic makes it clear this is not a phenomenon that is likely to disappear soon.

SBNRs in Canada: How many?

Rowan is an example of a Canadian who stays in the fold of organized religion but considers herself spiritual but not religious.¹³ She loves singing in her church choir and the feeling of belonging to a religious community, but Rowan is also very interested in New Age. She has even been to a well-known New Age, transformative growth centre for trainings. Things have not been easy juggling her religious bricolage, though. She told me that these days “when I talk to church people I am careful about my language. I can say angels, but I won’t say nature spirits, or devas, or overlighting angels...” When I asked her why she told me that several years back she had a conflict with her minister. When he asked her if she believed that Jesus Christ was her only savior she said “Of course not!” The divine is in everything, you know, the rocks the sky the tundra, the birds, the

¹³ Rowan was one of two individuals I interviewed whose data was not included because her church attendance might have impacted her social capital.

whole land and everything that grows on it!” He told her “well if that is the case, you cannot sing in the choir anymore.” Rowan left that congregation. She told me “I was mad, really pissed off (pardon my language) that a minister, an ordained minister—a man of God—was so limited in his vision and understanding of creation...but from then on I was careful with my language.”

Rowan is like many Canadians these days: she is Christian her way. And despite her difficulties with that particular minister, and her now more cautious approach to sharing her true beliefs, Rowan probably ticks the box of a Christian denomination to tell pollsters what her religion is when it comes census time. She is spiritual in a liquid sense. She is part of a large number of Canadians who still claim some sort of affiliation with organized religion, but do so in unconventional ways.

To estimate how large the spiritual but not religious cohort is in Canada, I rely on two sources of data: the first is Andrew Grenville’s analysis of the rates of public versus private religion in Canada (2000), and the second is Reginald Bibby’s Project Canada surveys (2004a). These two studies are the only data I am aware of that are suited to this type of analysis.

Private versus public religion in Canada: Grenville’s typology

According to Andrew Grenville, senior vice-president of Angus Reid, it is unfortunate that “relatively little empirical work has been done ...that explores both the public and private ways of being religious that we observe” (2000,

212).¹⁴ To address this, he presents a classification scheme based on a cluster analysis of data from the God and Society in North America Study (2000, 212) and a 1997 Angus Reid World poll.¹⁵ Two groups of questions were used to distinguish public (traditional churchgoers) from private Christian involvement. The first included five questions similar to the following (cited directly from page 215):

- I believe the Bible is the inspired word of God
- I have committed my life to Christ and consider myself to be a converted Christian
- I feel it is very important to encourage non-Christians to become Christians

A second set of two questions was used to tap into privatized dimensions of faith (cited directly from page 214):

- My private beliefs about Christianity are more important than what is taught by any church
- I don't think you need to go to church to be a good Christian

Based on this analysis, Grenville divides the Canadian Christian religious landscape into the following segments:

- **The church centered:** this group makes up 9% of Canadian adults (2000, 217). These individuals attend church regularly: 40% attend services more than once a week. Not surprisingly, they take their religious commitments

¹⁴ He uses the term private religion to refer individuals who perceive that their religious beliefs and behaviors are formed independently from the religious groups they interact with, whereas weekly attendance is equated with public religion. See page 213.

¹⁵ This 1997 study was conducted by the Angus Reid group in conjunction with Queen's University Unit of Religion and Society, The Institute for the study of American Evangelicals and a group of political scientists. See Andrew Grenville, "Public and Private Religion in North America" in *Rethinking Church State and Modernity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000) 212.

seriously, and disagree that one's private beliefs about Christianity are more important than what the church teaches (2000, 217)

- **Privatistic churchgoers:** this group makes up 11% of the Canadian adult population (2000, 218). They are as committed as the church-centered, but think that private beliefs about Christianity are more important than what is taught in church. Almost all members of this group are relatively orthodox otherwise, with most agreeing that they have devoted their lives to Christ, and that it is important to proselytize. This group is equally split amongst those describing themselves as religious liberals or progressives, and evangelical Christians (2000, 218)
- **Independent believers:** this group represents 22% of all Canadian adults (2000, 219). They do not think church attendance is what makes a person a good Christian, and strongly believe in forming a personal interpretation of the faith. Although they agree with basic Christian doctrine, they are less resolute than the aforementioned group. For instance, most only moderately agree that the Bible is the inspired word of God; only a quarter believe the Bible is literally true; and, overall, they do not think it is important to share their faith with others (2000, 219).
- **Occasional Christians:** this group accounts for 19% of Canadian adults (2000, 220). Like independent believers, they do not consider church attendance necessary, but unlike them, they tend to be more orthodox in their views about Christian doctrine. Generally speaking, this group tends to be slightly younger and have a slightly lower level of education (2000, 220-221).
- **Private theists:** 19% of Christian Canadians are private theists (2000, 220). They do not pray as often as regular churchgoers, and think private

beliefs take precedence over what is taught in church. Most do not attend religious services. In other words, they are not very devout (2000, 220).

- **Atheists and Agnostics:** 20% of Canadians fall into this final category. They are distinguished by the fact 80% of them agree that “the concept of God is an old superstition that is no longer needed to explain things in modern times” (2000, 221). Participation in any religious activities is negligible. Still, Grenville notes “for some, membership in this group is more about ambiguity and ambivalence towards faith, than a complete rejection of it” (2000, 221). This is because half of this group identified themselves as liberal and progressive Christians.

So what can these figures tell us about the percentage of Canadians who conceive spirituality in a liquid sense? According to my very basic appraisal, about half of this group is SBNR. I arrived at this figure based as follows: 1) none of the Church Centered or Occasional Christians are SBNR, given that they tend to be orthodox; 2) half of the Privatistic Churchgoers who are evangelicals are not SBNR by my definition (e.g., liberal religionists); 3) one quarter of Independent Believers who think the Bible is literally true are not SBNR; 4) all of the private theists are potentially SBNR; 5) half of the Atheists and Agnostics who are liberal or progressive are potentially SBNR. The numbers are tallied and presented in Figure 4. Although the estimate is precarious, it suggests about half of Canadian adults might be spiritual but not religious in the liquid sense. It is important to keep in mind that because of the way this study was designed, it only measured indices of Christian belief and does not include measures from other organized religions. How this translates into overall measures of the Canadian population is

Figure 4: The percentage of Canadians who might be SBNR based on Grenville's typology.

Grenville's type	Total percent	Estimated percent SBNR
Church Centered	9%	0%
Privatistic Churchgoers	11%	5.5%
Independent Believers	22%	16.5%
Occasional Christians	19%	0%
Private Theists	19%	19%
Atheists and Agnostics	20%	10%
TOTAL	100%	51%

not clear to me. Yet, with so little data to go by, the results are at least suggestive.

To develop a better picture, I will expand on this assessment using Reginald Bibby's Project Canada research. As we shall see, in the final analysis, the results are very similar.

Conventional versus unconventional Christian beliefs: Bibby's estimates

According to data collected by Bibby through his Project Canada surveys ¹⁶ (2000), there is widespread interest in spirituality in Canada. Some 66% of Canadians between 18 and 34 say spirituality is important to them; the number climbs higher for those between the ages of 36 and 54 (69%) and is highest for

¹⁶ Bibby has been conducting Project Canada surveys every five years since 1975 through self-administered questionnaires sent out by mail. All samples are constructed to be highly representative of the Canadian population, with participants randomly selected using the telephone directory. For more details see Appendix entitled "Methodology: The Project Canada Surveys" in *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Novalis, 2004), 249-254.

those over 55 (75%). Bibby notes, however, that “although the term *spirituality* is widely used by average citizens and everybody else, it isn’t at all clear what people have in mind when they use the word” (2004a, 194). To address this, Bibby included an open-ended question in his survey, “What do you mean by ‘spirituality’?” (195). He sorted the answers to this question into two main groups—“conventional” and “unconventional”—and five further subgroups (belief, practice, experience, knowledge and behavior) (194-195). Overall, Bibby found that the conventional and unconventional groups were roughly equal (53% conventional versus 47% unconventional). Not surprisingly, the conventional appraisal of spirituality was more common among regular church goers, whereas unconventional definitions of spirituality that emphasize for example, 1) feeling oneness with the earth, 2) being accepting of others and oneself, 3) meditating and reflecting, 4) relating to one’s inner self or soul were most pronounced among “religious nones” and those who listed their faith as “Other” (195-196). What this points to is that potentially, 47% of Canadians are spiritual but not religious in the broad sense. Even Bibby acknowledges that in Canada, “spirituality is high among people involved with religious groups, and also among those who are not,” and further “many Canadians have conceptions of spirituality that are fairly foreign to religious bodies ...” (197, 199). Notwithstanding that I disagree with Bibby’s interpretation that the Churches could experience a renaissance if only they could find some creative way to meet the needs of the unconventional group (2004b, 86-110), given that many of these individuals have explicitly rejected organized religion, his data is nevertheless a helpful indication of just how

widespread the spiritual but not religious phenomenon might be in Canada. The next task is to try to estimate what part of this big SBNR group is spiritual definitely not religious.

How many Canadians are SDNR? Part one: refining the cohort

As it currently stands, SDNR is an invisible subset of the SBNR sample: these seekers are housed within Bibby and Grenville's typologies, but do not stand out. Although this cohort is hard to see clearly, I hope this section makes it clear that this does not have to be the case. I think it is possible for researchers to devise surveys that can distinguish SDNRs from SBNRs, and provide a more exact picture of the prevalence and orientation of both cohorts. In terms of SDNRs specifically, as mentioned, one strategy would be to ask respondents how they perceive the relationship between religion and spirituality. Clearly, though, this is not enough. In what follows, I explore some additional ways this could be done. The main strategy is to focus on the unique attributes of SDNRs. What makes them different from SBNRs?

Based on my research, I find three obvious differences between the two groups as follows: first, SDNRs either avoid organized religion completely or have left it behind for good. They do so for personal reasons, and also because they have an anti-institutional bent. Second, they have no qualms about picking and mixing the elements of their spirituality to find a personally authentic path. Finally, they are monists not monotheists. I will cover each of these in order before concluding with my best estimate of how many Canadians fit this general

description.

1) They have left organized religion for good

Unlike Rowan, most of the religiously unaffiliated seekers I spoke with have become so disillusioned with organized religion they have decided to leave it for good. Trevor, for example, was raised in a religious home and went to Sunday school regularly. “I knew the Bible well,” he said. When he was sixteen, however, his mother passed away. She had assured him there would be a miracle, that God would save her and did not seek treatment. “When she died,” he said, “I became a God hater.” Today Trevor is in his early forties and employed in the retail sector. Asked to describe his religion he says,

I guess you would say I am a pantheist. Yeh, I feel that there is God in all things, that life force is everywhere...I think that if there was a true religion or spirituality [it would be Love]. That’s what it would be; just Love. And what you form from that is up to you...There is too much negativity associated with organized religion. It creates an ‘us versus them’ mentality.

Morgan, a fifty-year-old gay woman, offers another example. Morgan grew up in a tight-knit, Catholic family and today spirituality is still very important to her. When I asked her why she chose to pursue her spirituality outside the church she told me that

the Catholic Church doesn’t do it for me anymore. Part of this is because I am homosexual, but it is also because they won’t ordain women as priests. It is so fear-based. I tried going back to the church when I was dealing with the death of my mother, to seek solace and comfort, you know? But I realized then that I wasn’t going to find it in an organized religion. That’s not where I am going to find it, whatever ‘it’ is...I can’t go back.

Trudy, a professional woman also in her fifties, was likewise very

involved with the church growing up. She went to Sunday school a lot and liked it. Her grandfather had been a Presbyterian minister but died a few months before she was born. She said she always felt an affinity for him because, like her, he was a “questioner.” Trudy’s said,

From a very young age I always wanted to know about the soul. I had questions about the soul; and, I’ve always wanted to know about truth. I grew up in the church and I remember changing the words in the hymns or prayers to something I could accommodate to, something I could accept.

When she was older she joined a youth group at her church that proved to be a pivotal turning point:

It was very much a time of questioning for us, and in truth the church rejected us. We did not reject the church. They pushed us out because it could not accept the things we were saying about openness in the liturgy, and accepting different types of people into the church. It was a lot about conformity. We were trying to break that open and the church wasn’t about to let that happen, so I drifted away from it.

Tanis is another example of an SDNR seeker who relinquished her Christian faith. Tanis grew up in the United Church, but left for a time. One year at Christmastime when she was a university student, she heard the Jesus story on the radio and broke down crying. She decided she would return to the church. It didn’t last long, however, and soon she left it for good. “Christianity is not gender neutral,” she said. “I couldn’t stand it.”

Glen has also left the church for good. His mother was a very devout Christian and as a child they attended services up to four times a week. Yet Glen would not stay in this “Catholic universe” forever. To begin with, he told me that even at a very young age he had trouble with basic tenets of the theology.

I remember walking into a church and seeing Jesus on the cross and the attitude everyone had to Jesus was different than mine. I remember thinking that he was a friend, and so the dying for our sins part [never sat] well with me. I still went through the motions [though], out of respect for my mother and father.

To complicate things, in early adolescence, Glen began having intense paranormal experiences that further “challenged the framework of the church.” The final denouement came when he was nineteen and the priest and his mother forced his pregnant sister into marriage. “The way all that happened just turned me right off, and I stopped going to church after that.”

I could give more examples, of course, like Julia who returned to the church after years of spiritual searching, but left for good when she caught her priest staring at her breasts, or Casey, whose mother forced her to go to her father’s church as a teenager, even though he drank and never attended himself. The important point is that whatever their past experiences might have been, these spiritual seekers are (definitely) not religious anymore. While in many cases they continue to agree that organized religions have value and merit, this is not the case for them personally. They find organized religion flawed and limited, and demand a spiritual ‘theology’ that matches their beliefs and experiences. In this sense, they have left organized religion behind and have no intention of going back.

2) They are fine to pick and mix

Another distinctive feature of SDNRs is the importance of following a spiritual path that feels personally authentic. Unlike Rowan who had to hide the fact she

was incorporating non-Christian elements into her spirituality, religiously unaffiliated seekers are not shy about their tendency to “pick and mix.” Yana, a dedicated spiritual seeker in her early fifties, says this:

I've explored it all and I have gleaned the important, the most positive and strong pieces from all the different traditions, and at the same time I am not comfortable believing in dogma. So I take the important parts of many traditions and build it into rituals that celebrate balance, the cycles of life, that celebrate the phases of the moon, the seasons of the year and the stages in our life. It doesn't have to be about dogma: I can take the methods of worship the ideals, the music, from various traditions and incorporate [them in such a way] that so I can get the best of all worlds.

Alice also wants to be “open” because she thinks, “all faiths have something to offer:”

I like to pick and choose personally what works for me. When you're at a church you don't get to pick and choose what works for you. So you can't take a little bit of Buddhism or a little Native American, things that fit with you personally. It's more that you're told there's 'this' you have to believe. This part doesn't work for me...I just want to do my own journey, find my own way, you know?

Question 29 of my questionnaire highlights the eclecticism of the group: exactly half the sample said they like to try many types of spiritual activity; only 5% said they have always done the same sort of spiritual activities. Twenty eight per cent have “tried different things in the past [and] now like to stick with the same type of spiritual activities.” These are just a few examples that help illustrate how “pick and mix” is integral to the SDNR approach to spirituality.

At the same time, this “Burger King” approach is also what makes SDNR so distasteful to many observers. They think that it is evidence that there are no unifying beliefs, and therefore no standards, which makes it a trivial spiritual

path. Since I discuss the critique in detail in the next chapter, I will not go into it here except to say that I categorically reject the notion that picking and mixing means that SDNR seekers are all over the spiritual map, and, therefore, impossible to classify as a cohort. The reason I am so confident about this is that I see monism as the underlying basis of their spirituality. As such, it is the key to uniting the cohort.

3): They are monists not monotheists

As a proponent of distinct spirituality, I share the view that spirituality can exist as a solid that sits apart from religion. What makes it distinctive is not just pick and mix or an antipathy to organized religion, but more so, its distinctive religious beliefs. As outlined, solid spirituality is heir to the Western Metaphysical tradition. It is a monistic, not a monotheistic orientation.¹⁷ Monism is less precise than monotheism; there is no single deity such as God in the Abrahamic tradition around which it can be organized or institutionalized. This is why questions concerning traditional forms of institutional affiliation are of no use when trying to isolate this cohort for empirical purposes.

Monism posits that the divine is imminent in all creation: there is a correspondence between the macrocosm (the infinite) and the microcosm (every

¹⁷ This is what sets SDNR seekers apart from SBNRs like Grenville's independent believers who believe that their personal beliefs about Christianity are more important than what the churches teach, but nevertheless tend to "assent to basic Christian doctrine". See "Public and Private Religion in Canada" in *Rethinking Church, State and Modernity: Canada Between Europe and America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000) 219.

finite element of creation).¹⁸ Since the godhead is present in all creation, the ethos of monism is that there is no separation between God and his creation, and that while all creation is not the same (humans are more complex than bees for instance), a divine spark inhabits them all. While Christian theology also can be seen as emphasizing the unity of being and “the church as one body of which we are all members,” Christianity has typically retained its “ultimate dualism of creator and creation” (Bellah 1976, 347). What makes SDNR distinctive, therefore, is its unqualified monism. This sentiment is pronounced among SDNRs and is expressed in notions such as “we are all one” and “nature is alive and sacred.” Question 14 of my survey corroborates this. Asked “What best describes your concept of the divine?” the top four responses to this were as follows: “a life force present in all creation” (82%); “energy” (60%); “pure consciousness” (49%); and “nature (40%).¹⁹ In chapter 7 I will explore this matter in much more detail. What I want to do here, therefore, is offer a framework for discerning monism. For this, I find the French classicist Antoine Faivre’s typology of Western esoteric spirituality extremely helpful (1998).

Faivre identifies the characteristic elements of the Western esoteric

¹⁸ The twin concepts of macrocosm and microcosm are woven through the Western Metaphysical tradition. An early citation is the found in Ficino’s translation of the Emerald Tablet (attributed to Hermes Trismegistus) in the fourteenth century. They are found in for instance in the Hermetica, and persists in the works of Paracelsus, Swedenborg and the Theosophical movement.

¹⁹ Respondents could choose more than one response which is why the figures do not add up to 100. In retrospect it would have been wise to include response options that pointed to a personal God or Savior.

tradition in its various historic expressions.²⁰ His definition is specifically concerned with esotericism in the sense of a diverse group of works or currents of thought that possess a family resemblance. Here are the five foundational criteria he thinks converge in the esoteric or monistic worldview:²¹

1. **The idea of correspondences:** This is captured in the motto “as above so below” and refers to the idea that there is an innate correspondence (symbolic or real) between the material and spiritual worlds, between the seen and the unseen dimensions of all existence. The spiritual and material are interactive and interdependent: humans can influence the cosmos and vice versa. Because all material forms mirror a spiritual reality, material existence exists as a doorway to greater knowledge about spiritual realities for those with the skill to decipher it. (118)
2. **Living nature:** Nature is a living being permeated and woven together by a divine presence or life force. (119)
3. **Imagination and meditations:** Imagination is not whimsical, but esteemed as an “organ of the soul” that opens the gate to different realms of existence/reality. Imagination is a faculty that converts all manner of ritual, meditation, spirits and symbolic esoterica into gnosis, or knowledge of the relationships between God, humans and the universe. How one imagines is how one knows (attains gnosis/ illuminated knowledge) and is more important than what one believes.

²⁰ This includes for instance, Spiritualism, New Thought, and Theosophy and individuals stretching back at least as far as the Renaissance including Marsilio Ficino, Paracelsus, Franz Anton Mesmer and Emanuel Swedenborg. I refer to this in chapter five.

²¹ Technically Faivre arranges his typology so that it includes four foundational and two tertiary elements. I have excluded one of the tertiary elements (the idea that an individual cannot initiate himself but must pass through authorized spiritual channels to attain gnosis) because based on my research I do not find it relevant.

4. **The experience of transmutation:** the belief in the possibility that the essence of the person can be modified or changed. Gnosis is not sought for experiential pleasure but because it facilitates a second birth. (119-120)
5. **The perennial philosophy:** This involves the attempt to harmonize religious divergence by seeking a common denominator or essence. He notes that this tendency develops strongly in the nineteenth century with the introduction of eastern religious thought into western esotericism, and continues throughout the twentieth century (120).

Faivre's scheme is a very concise template for helping to clarify what constitutes a monistic orientation. Furthermore, it demonstrates a more or less clear line connecting New Age with more distant esoteric movements, especially Theosophy. The upside of this is that it confirms my insistence that monism constitutes an enduring and demonstrable esoteric worldview—one that can be transmitted to New Agers and SDNRs. The downside is that it runs the risk of reducing SDNR to New Age. Bruce and Voas, for instance, specifically equate holistic spirituality with New Age. New Age is certainly the source of much of what SDNR encompasses today, but this does not mean that the two are synonymous. As an NRM, New Age tends toward certain types of beliefs and practices that may not be popular with the larger SDNR cohort. Forty-three percent of the questionnaire respondents, for instance, say that belief in reincarnation is not that important (27%) or unimportant (16%) to them.²² Many feel the same about astrology (50%), crystals (62%) and visiting with a psychic

²² Question 15

(73%).²³ Furthermore, as already mentioned, many SDNR seekers are not fond of the label New Age, and do not use it to describe themselves. Referring to my questionnaire findings again, 41% of respondents said they are definitely not New Age compared with only 9% who said they definitely are.²⁴ Overall, Faivre's typology provides a straightforward and comprehensive way to think about the broad themes that typify SDNRs, and can help distinguish them from SBNRs.

The main point of this section is to suggest that there are some real differences between the two groups. Specifically, SBNRs are monotheists,²⁵ whereas SDNRs are characteristically monistic. Regrettably, my insight that SBNRs can be distinguished from SDNRs on the basis of monism came long after my questionnaire was compiled. As such I was not able to include direct questions to that effect. Fortunately, however, the monistic orientation of the cohort came out spontaneously in my interviews and will be discussed at length in the section entitled "SDNR theology" in chapter 6.

At this time, most research (especially in the Canadian research context) collapses solid and liquid spirituality. This not only obscures the true extent of SDNR spirituality, but as we shall see next, it makes 'spirituality' or 'spiritual but not religious' amorphous, unworkable categories,

²³ Question 16. Unfortunately, I did not ask questions about aliens, UFOs, or millennialism (e.g. the 2012 Mayan prophecy), although impressionistically speaking I expect that the results would have been much the same, since none of my informants mentioned these sorts of things in the interviews.

²⁴ Question 24

²⁵ My sense is that SBNRs blend monism and monotheism, but this is purely impressionistic. It may be that monism is the horizon that unites SBNRs as a broad class. This comes across in Rowan's account, but it is also suggested in the types of ideas and resources offered on the website <http://www.SBNR.org>. More research needs to be done to confirm this, however.

How many Canadians are SDNR? Part two: empirical estimates

Evaluating how many Canadians are SDNR is difficult. No systematic evaluation has been done, so everything that follows here is simply educated guesswork. I will rely on three sources of data to estimate the size of this group: First I will outline Heelas and Woodhead's Kendal project findings; second, I briefly consider the size of the "Metaphysical Believers and Spiritual Seekers" cohort Roof refers to in his study of the spiritual and religious lives of American baby boomers; and finally, I provide an estimate of the subgroup based on World Values Surveys figures for Canadians who describe their religious affiliation as "Other" or "None."

1) British SDNRs: Findings from the Kendal Project

The Kendal Project is named after the town in Cumbria, UK, where Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead undertook research to assess whether alternative spirituality is becoming more widespread than traditional Christianity. The research project—which ran from October 2000 to June 2002—was specifically designed to count the numbers of people involved in traditional Christian worship, versus those active in body-mind-spirit activities (Heelas 2007, 63). Kendal was chosen as the site for the study for its relatively small population (27,610 in 1999), which made headcounts of this sort manageable. Furthermore, with the nearest towns 10-25 miles away, they argued that it was unlikely residents would travel elsewhere to attend religious services or participate in holistic activities (2005, 151).

By mapping the "congregational domain", researchers located a total of 25

churches and chapels in Kendal. A headcount was conducted by a total of 29 counters stationed at each of these churches and chapels on Sunday November 26, 2000. They determined that 2207 adults, teenagers and children attended worship that that day, a total of 7.9% of the population.

Assessing participation in holistic activities was more difficult as no umbrella organization or institutional base could direct the research team to holistic service providers and their clients (2005, 37). Therefore, the sample was selected as follows (36-37): At the outset, a research assistant located all the body-mind-spirit activities that were taking place in Kendal.²⁶ This included things such as yoga, tai chi, and the private practices of homeopaths, spiritual healers, reflexologists, and so forth (37). Next, three specific criteria were applied to make the sample roughly comparable with the congregational domain: first, since church is a public activity, holistic activities were only counted if they were done one-on-one with a service provider, or in a group. Private activities such a prayer or meditation did not qualify as participation in the holistic milieu in this study. Second, since the congregational domain only included activities in churches, and not in schools for instance, the activities of the holistic milieu were counted only if they were offered by an independent service provider (at a private yoga studio, rather than yoga offered through one's gym for instance). Finally,

²⁶ As Heelas and Woodhead describe it, this required quite a bit of "detective work." They located recruits based on visits to "cafes, shops, other public places such as the town hall, the Library, leisure and tourist information centres, and centres for specialized holistic healing and spirituality like Rainbow Cottage, to look for flyers and cards advertising anything of spiritual or spiritual-cum-religious significance" See *Spiritual Revolution Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford. Blackwell, 2005) 37.

since worshipping at a church is a sacred activity, facilitators and practitioners of holistic activities had to likewise agree that their services had “a spiritual dimension.” Those who said “yes” were admitted to the study. They were asked to fill out a questionnaire, and to pass it along to as many clients as possible during the week the count was undertaken.²⁷

To count how many people in Kendal participated in holistic activities in a typical week, researchers attended all the groups run by practitioners involved in the study in a chosen week in the autumn of 2001 and counted the numbers of attendees (2005, 38). Practitioners of one-to-one services were asked how many clients they saw on the same week.²⁸ In this manner it was determined that about 840 “acts of participation” occur in the holistic milieu in a typical week (2005, 39). In the final analysis, this figure was reduced to 600 to offset the fact 1) many individuals participated in more than one activity in a given week, and 2) some participants did not consider their involvement to have spiritual significance (2005, 39-40). Both of these factors were assessed through the questionnaires. Heelas and Woodhead thereby determined that 1.6% of the Kendal population was involved in holistic activities in a typical week. Two thirds of these individuals participated in groups, compared with one third who participated in

²⁷ Although measurements for the congregational domain were taken on one day, Heelas and Woodhead did not think this a viable methodology for the holistic milieu. There is no equivalent to the “Christian Sunday” in the holistic milieu. Rather, they argued, activities had more of a weekly “rhythm” such as a weekly class or visit to a spiritual practitioner. See *Spiritual Revolution Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) 36.

²⁸ To evaluate how many clients one-on-one practitioners saw during the same week was more difficult, since the workload of practitioners tended to fluctuate. To get around this, the researchers sometimes had to convert average monthly figures to average weekly figures to get a more accurate picture (ibid, 39)

one-on-one activities (2005, 40).

A methodological ambiguity bears mentioning. Although the research team counted 840 acts of participation, which was reduced to 600 to compensate for those who participated more than once, and those who felt the activity did not have spiritual significance, in fact, only 252 questionnaires were returned. In other words, they only had this data for 42% of the sample. Yet, because 45% of questionnaire respondents said the activity did not have spiritual significance for them, Voas and Bruce have argued that the figure 1.6% is too high and should be reduced (2007, 48). Heelas and Woodhead, however, defend the 1.6% figure; their rationale is that since they were comparing the holistic milieu to churches, what mattered was how the provider, and not the recipient, viewed the services on offer (46-47; see also Heelas 2007, 64). In a later publication, Heelas reiterates that there is no convincing data that church attendance is usually spiritually motivated as Voas and Bruce contend (2007, 64). Furthermore, Heelas refutes their contention that a far greater percentage of the holistic milieu than the congregational domain is at the “secular end of the scale” (2007, 64). He notes that 55% of respondents meditate at home, 90% know what “chi” is, and 81% believe in a personal God, spirit or life force (65). In fact, Heelas now feels that the 1.6% figure is not only fair, but too conservative. He writes:

Voas and Bruce write of the admirably conservative approach to enumeration adopted for the Kendal Project (Voas and Bruce 2007, 56). If it were not for the fact that we were almost certainly too conservative, it is difficult not to agree. Indeed, in a less cautious mode, I am now strongly inclined to conclude that the most realistic figure is 2.2 per cent of the population of the town of Kendal *itself*, possibly slightly more. (2007, 67 italics in original)

Overall, my sense is that given the difficulties measuring participation in the holistic milieu, expecting a wholly accurate measure is probably idealistic. To address the question of whether holistic activities are spiritual or not, I offer an insight based on question 45 of my survey, which asked “Do complementary or alternative therapies have spiritual significance for you?” The responses were as follows: yes (26%); no (20%); in some cases (48%); and, not applicable (6%). The high figure for “in some cases”—nearly half the sample—suggests that assessing whether activities in the holistic milieu are spiritual is not straightforward since many of these could also be classed as complementary health therapies (e.g., acupuncture, or reflexology) or exercise (e.g., yoga, or tai chi). To complicate things, the same person might experience an activity as spiritual one day and not the next. Martin, for instance, told me of a profound experience he had when he received energy healing for a wound on his foot. While normally skeptical about the efficacy of such treatments, his yoga teacher persuaded him to let her “work on it after class.” During the treatment he felt a powerful burning sensation; although he had had the infection for nearly a month, it cleared up almost immediately. In other words, I am confident that Heelas and

²⁹ The reason for this inflated figure is reflected in the italicization of the word “itself” in the quote. Although the Kendal Project was ostensibly confined to Kendal, measurements for the holistic milieu were for “Kendal and environs.” This is because two large holistic retreat centres were in operation a few miles out of town. To include these, they had to include all the towns within a five-mile radius of the town. This elevated the population to 37,150 instead of 27,610. In retrospect, though, Heelas thinks that the number of activities conducted at these centres was proportionately small; 15 and 8 out of a total of 126. Furthermore, because they cater to many people who live in Kendal, Heelas thinks it would have been reasonable to count them as part of the Kendal holistic milieu. This would have permitted them to use the lower population figure, which is where 2.2% figure comes from. See “The Holistic Milieu and Spirituality: Reflections on Voas and Bruce. In *Sociology of Spirituality* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) 67.

Woodhead have confronted and managed the ambiguities of measuring the holistic milieu in a satisfactory manner. This is especially true if participants, who are spiritually inclined, can nevertheless waver on whether they consider an activity spiritual or not, as my study suggests.

The enormity of the undertaking—headcounts of both the congregational domain and holistic milieu—cannot be underestimated. The Kendal Project is the only study of its kind to date and for this reason it is a very significant contribution to the sociological study of spirituality. Nevertheless, given that secularization has not followed the same course in Canada as in Britain, what are the implications for this study?

Implications of the Kendal Project: What can it tell us about SDNRs in Canada?

Generally speaking, the holistic milieu coincides with the SDNR cohort. To begin with, 68% of the holistic milieu questionnaire respondents say they are spiritual rather than religious (Heelas 2007, 65). Furthermore, those active in the holistic milieu lean toward a monistic worldview. Specifically, 82% of questionnaire respondents reported “some sort of spirit or life force pervades all that lives” and further, 73% believe in subtle energy channels in the body, both of which invoke Faivre’s “theory of correspondence.” The Kendal Project offers a rough estimate of rates of participation in holistic versus congregational activities in general. If the figures are rounded, the ratio is approximately 4:1, that is, four weekly church attenders for every weekly participant in the holistic milieu. Since, according to the 2005 World Values Surveys, 25% of Canadians attend religious services

weekly, this ratio suggests that in the range of 6% of Canadians are potentially “committed” SDNRs. I say “committed” since weekly church attendance is not the norm. In Kurt Bowen’s study (2004), for instance, those who attended services weekly were classed as the “Very Committed.” Weekly participation in activities with spiritual significance in the holistic milieu, therefore, should be considered an exemplary status, an above average level of participation. This implies that the figure for more casual participation is much higher. Until more research is done, the Kendal Project is the only prospective study of SDNR available.

2) American Boomer SDNRs: Roof’s “Metaphysical Believers and Spiritual Seekers”

Perhaps one of the most influential articulations of contemporary spirituality comes from Roof’s longitudinal study of baby boomers, undertaken in three phases between 1988 and 1997 (1999). His thesis hinges on the decline of traditional theism and the rise of what he calls quest culture. Roof contends that Americans have a shifting relationship to the sacred where overarching systems of religious meaning that were once grounded in tradition are giving way a more process-oriented “reflexive spirituality.”

Roof’s research is important in the context of the discussion underway because he “redraws” the boundaries of American boomer religion by implementing the following typology (1999, 178; for details see 180-216):

- Born-Again Christians: 33%
- Mainstream Believers: 25%
- Metaphysical Believers and Spiritual Seekers: 15%

- Dogmatists 15%
- Non religious Secularists 12%

It is this third category, “metaphysical believers and spiritual seekers” that is of particular interest here as it is analogous to the group I call SDNR. It is a broader group than “what usually passes for New Age,” he says (1999, 203-204). As Roof puts it, metaphysical believers and spiritual seekers are those “whose traditions are identified more as spiritual than religious, and who resist the “R” word because of its connotations of religious and cultural establishment” (1999, 176). It is a diverse subculture that includes individuals who consider themselves Theosophist, Buddhist, Neo-Pagan, “seekers,” nature lovers, and practitioners of alternative spirituality (1999, 203); many reject the label New Age (1999, 204), and most believe in an impersonal not a personal God (209, 210, 211). Broadly, these are individuals who “reject a religious identity [but] affirm a spiritual one” (1999, 203). They have made a clean break from “conventional patterns of religious participation” because they experience “[d]ogma, fixed beliefs and routinized practices [...as...] obstacles to personal transformation” (1999, 206). In fact, two-thirds think that organized religion is not spiritual enough (1999, 205). Worse still, as with my informants, many metaphysical believers and spiritual seekers recount “horror stories” about their experiences with the ‘Church’ (1999, 205). This is why they have left it for good, not because they are indifferent to spirituality and personal transformation (1999, 205). Although Roof thinks that what unites metaphysical believers and spiritual seekers is “shared hostility to the term *religion*” (206, italics in original), he is careful to note that

some find that their previous religious identities still “have a hold on them” (1999, 206). Still, 80% of metaphysical believers and spiritual seekers think organized religion is not required to be spiritual (1999, 207). A few final facts: 97% agree that people should think for themselves and 80% think one is wise to experiment with choice when it comes to religion (1999, 207).³⁰ There is a radical emphasis on the body as a source of experiential knowing (1999, 210).

Like Heelas and Woodhead’s study, Roof’s study is based on a surplus of quantitative data that cannot simply be grafted onto the Canadian landscape. Nevertheless, as with Heelas and Woodhead’s findings, it offers a general estimate of the size of the SDNR subculture. Specifically, since boomers account for one third of the American population, and metaphysical believers and spiritual seekers are 15% of that, in total they represent about 5% of the total US population (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 57).

3) What can we learn from “Others” and “Religious Nones?”

According to Roof, the reason people claim to have no religion “is partly a function of the way questions on religious preference are asked in surveys and polls” (1999, 206). For example, the question “What is your religious preference—Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Other or None” forces many SBNRs, and certainly SDNRs, to select “Other” or “None” (1999, 207). This turns these categories into catchalls that assemble multiple, dissimilar groups under a single

³⁰ Question 12 of my survey corroborates this: 85% agree that when it comes to religion, overall, it is up to the individual to decide what is true.

heading for convenience.³¹ While looking at the numbers of Canadians who indicate they belong to “Other” religions like Wicca, New Age and Theosophy seems like it might offer some clues to the size of the SDNR cohort, I am not convinced this is the case. According to the 2001 Census, there are only 1525 New Agers in the whole country (Bibby 2004b, 39). Along the same lines, Statistics Canada finds that atheists, Humanists, Free Thinkers, New Age, Scientologists, New Thought, Native Indian or Inuit, and other such groups only totaled .4% of the Canadian population in 2001.³² What accounts for this? While I cannot say for certain, I suspect that many SDNRs say they have no religion. As we have already seen, many avoid or reject the label New Age, and there are no alternatives that resonate with them. More to the point, I think many of these folks have no clear “religious” identity. In my survey I specifically asked people how they respond when people ask, “What is your religion?” Here were some of the answers I got: “I’m a free thinker;” “I love god;” “I believe in the universe;” “I can’t categorize it;” “that’s a long story;” “homemade” “Free Agent;” “eclectic heretic;” “Post Christian—subject to change without notice;” and, “non-practicing Hindu.”³³ Many did opt for “spiritual but not religious,” but almost half of the responses were personal creations.

As such, I think that more is to be gained by looking into “Religious Nones,” despite the fact it is an especially bizarre category, stacking atheists up

³¹ This imprecision suggests these categories are of marginal interest to those commissioning the surveys.

³² <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85f0033m/85f0033m2001007-eng.pdf>. Accessed June 23, 2010.

³³ Question 23

alongside—in some cases—very committed spiritual seekers. Religious Nones offer a partial glimpse of religiously unaffiliated seekers since what we do know about them is that they say they do not belong to a religious group. Therefore, Nones who show evidence of religious beliefs and behaviors are prime candidates for inclusion in the SBNR, and SDNR cohorts.

Overall, the percentage of North Americans who say they have no religious affiliation has increased rather dramatically in recent years. Despite the large size of this group, and the fact that it appears to be increasing, it has not been well studied by social scientists (Baker and Smith 2009, 1251). In the US, the number has doubled from 7% in 1993 to 14% in 2000 (Stark, Hamburg and Miller 2005, 12). In Canada, those with no religious affiliation increased from 12.6% in 1991 to 16.2% in 2001.³⁴ There is some evidence that higher levels of education contribute to foregoing a religious affiliation (Hayes 2000, cited in Baker and Smith 2009, 1252).

Still, as Stark et al. note “[N]ones are not the vanguard of secularization...Atheists are few; the majority believe in God and many of the rest believe in a ‘higher power’” (12). Hout and Fischer argue that most Americans who say they have no religious affiliation still show signs of religious activity (2002, 175). They do not attend religious services, and three quarters do not read the Bible at home, but they do pray at least sometimes (93%) and one fifth do so every day (175). In Canada, Bibby’s Project Canada 2000 results suggest the

³⁴

<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/highlight/Religion/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo=P&View=1a&Code=01&Table=1&StartRec=1&Sort=2&B1=Canada&B2=1>. Accessed June 23, 2010.

following: 44% of Nones believe in life after death; 48% say spirituality is “very” or “somewhat” important; and 54% say they have spiritual needs (2004a, 181). Referring back to Bibby’s typology of conventional and unconventional belief, he finds that 98% of Nones are unconventional (181).

Bibby also notes that 30% of Nones are specifically not religious: they have no interest in the matter (181). That being the case, it follows that about 70% of Nones are not avowed atheists. This works out to 11.3% of Canadians. Of these 11.3% we know that about half (48%) say spirituality is important to them. This means that approximately 5.4% of Canadians are spiritually inclined but not associated with an organized religion. Compared with the 3.7% of the population that is Jewish, and the 1% that are Hindus and Buddhists,³⁵ this is quite a significant figure. I do not want to suggest that 5.4% of Canadians are SDNR, but we can safely assume they have the markings of being spiritual but not religious in a general sense.

I admit that searching for religiously unaffiliated spiritual seekers in this way is partial and speculative. If nothing else, though, it strongly signals the serious shortage of accurate and reliable information on this topic in Canada.

Conclusion

The central message of this chapter is clear enough: although the spiritual but not religious phenomenon exists, it is not well documented in Canada. Two problems

³⁵ See

<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/highlight/Religion/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo=P&R&View=1a&Code=01&Table=1&StartRec=1&Sort=2&B1=Canada&B2=1>. Accessed June 23, 2010.

stand out. First, there does not appear to be a research agenda of any kind concerning either the SBNR or especially the SDNR phenomena in this country. There is very little objective academic writing devoted to these subjects. Analysts such as Grenville and Bibby are content to describe SBNR primarily in terms of Christianity, and given that 80% of Canadians say they are affiliated with one Christian denomination or another, this has some logic to it. Yet this is far too simplistic given the prevalence of unconventional belief. New studies are needed that can bring a nuanced, critical eye to the dynamics of solid and liquid spirituality in the Canadian context. How are they the same? In what ways do they differ? What trends can we expect to see if Religious Nones continue to grow and many mainline religious congregations continue to shrink? Despite the profusion of unanswered questions, the call for research on this subject is dull to inaudible, despite the fact similar research is being undertaken elsewhere. Unfortunately, this dearth of empirical research is self-perpetuating, and makes it hard to form an accurate picture of this phenomenon. In this case, spirituality becomes a subject handled by the popular press and small polls at a time when scholarly analysis is so keenly needed. Second, there is currently no assessment of—indeed recognition of—the SDNR cohort despite the fact they could account for about 5% of the Canadian population. This is a staggering oversight, a situation that reflects the priorities and assumptions of many sociologists and religion scholars in this country. It is simply incorrect to assume all spirituality is brokered by organized religion and that everything else is marginal and insignificant, especially when Roof's data and the Kendal Project both offer strong evidence to

the contrary.

Chapter 3

The therapy culture and social disengagement critiques of religiously unaffiliated spirituality

Introduction

In what follows, I will be exploring the perspectives of some of the primary theorists whose works enter discussions concerning the social significance of religion, and/or the putative insignificance of religiously unaffiliated spirituality. Their criticisms of privatized spirituality can be reduced to two basic claims. First, this type of spirituality is an outgrowth of the subjective turn, manifest in a cultural ethos of therapeutic individualism, and is, therefore, overly self-referencing—even narcissistic. Second, this makes it socially disengaged, and, therefore, a threat to social order and even democracy. This negative view of religiously unaffiliated spirituality is the consequence of the shift in values in the post War era, which created, in effect, two competing moral cultures with a fault line running between liberal and conservative camps (Wuthnow 1988). Liberal, privatized spirituality has been a convenient scapegoat for traditionally oriented scholars in political science (e.g. Putnam 2000; Emberley 2002) and the sociology of religion (e.g., Berger 1967; Lasch 1979, Bellah et al. 1985, Lau 2000; Bibby 2004a; Bowen 2004; Carrette and King 2005) who regard the privatization of religion—whether at the level of society or the individual—as a situation to be remedied. These polemics, which date back to the sixties, but gained momentum in the seventies and early eighties, have largely gone uncontested within academic circles, especially, the sociology of religion. This is likely because the academic

study of NRMs was slow to materialize, which meant few scholars had the training to debunk these claims. Indeed, situating and measuring such seekers is in the early stages even now.

Whatever the case, the goal of this chapter is to lay out, in broad strokes, the critique of privatized spirituality. There are two main sections: the first is a description of the therapy culture critique, which centres on the concern that individuals are turning inward at the expense of communal life. The second is a longer description of the social disengagement thesis. Here I describe the work of Robert Putnam and Kurt Bowen in some detail, since they constitute the theoretical basis of my research project.

Character and society: The therapy culture critique

David Reisman

“Character and society” is a phrase from chapter one of David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd*. First published in 1953, the book went on to sell a staggering 1.4 million copies, quite an accomplishment for a social study by a researcher who was not even trained as a sociologist.³⁶ In the forward written for the 2001 edition, Tony Gitlin muses that its runaway success arose because it

systematically expos[ed] the anxieties of a middle class that was rising with the postwar boom, suburbanizing, busy availing itself of upgraded homes, machines and status, relieved to be done with the Depression and the war, but baffled by cultural and psychological upheavals beneath the surface of everyday life (xiii).

Riesman’s work posits that cultural change produces changes in personality. He

³⁶ According to the forward in the 2001 edition, a study by Herbert Gans done in 1997, *The Lonely Crowd* is amongst the top selling books by an American sociologist (xi).

traces a progression from the “traditional” personality type, which was best adapted to life where social roles were tightly prescribed, to the inner-directed type that emerge as the stronghold of tradition recedes (Adams 2008, 19). He argues that both of these types had given way to a new, third type, the ‘other-directed’ personality. The other-directed personality is characterized as empty (lonely) because it seeks approval and validation from outside sources, especially the media and peer groups. The emergence of this other-directed personality signified unwelcome changes that threatened social wellbeing, even economic progress and stability (Elliott and Lemert 2006, 169).

British social psychologist Matthew Adams portrays Riesman’s analysis as typical of a genre of writings (including the work of Robert Putnam) that view the modern self as “impoverished,” and lonely because it is not able to move beyond superficial commitments to the deeper and more sustaining bonds of community (21). Overall, the details of Riesman’s character typology need not specifically concern us here, but simply point to a theme etched deep in numerous cultural commentaries that have steadily appeared since that time, namely that modernization has adversely affected the character of ordinary Americans. Many of these works do not expressly deal with religion and focus instead on how the subjective turn and the concomitant rise of individualism and/or therapy culture are eroding community and civil solidarity. In the memorable phrase of Christopher Lasch, they articulate in various ways, how America is progressively evolving into a “culture of narcissism.” Directly and indirectly, these critiques implicate SDNR spirituality, which fosters an attitude of self-reliance, and is

frequently indifferent to institutional forms of solidarity.

Richard Sennett

Richard Sennett's *The Fall of Public Man* (1974) is another prominent early description of the relationship between narcissism and social fragmentation. He does not specifically address religion/spirituality except in passing. Still as one reviewer notes *Fall of Public Man* was "... a powerful argument for a more formal public culture and a swipe against the rise of a self-indulgent counter culture" (Benn 2001). In his book he outlines the rise of narcissistic character disorders and connects this to a diminished public sphere. Sennett describes how public life, once a rich medium of exchange with discernable boundaries, has been undermined by an increasing emphasis on intimacy where individuals attempt to make sense of life, not by engaging with one another in the public sphere, but by devoting their energies to sustaining relationships and withdrawing into the self (Elliott and Lemert 2006, 61). The way Sennett uses the term, narcissism does not refer to self-admiration; it is a pre-occupation with the self that arises when the valid boundaries between public and private worlds break down (8-9; see also Giddens 170). "Increase intimate contact" says Sennett, "and you decrease sociability" (Sennett 1974, 15). Thus, Sennett thinks that an expanding private sphere leads to an increasingly shallow, vulnerable and depleted—"dead" is the word he uses—public sphere (12). He specifically counters the idea of intimacy between individuals as an adequate form of social cohesion: these private worlds may be precious, but they are not ends in

themselves (4).

The reigning belief today is that closeness between persons is a moral good. The reigning aspiration today is to develop individual personality through experiences of closeness and warmth with others. ...[This amounts to] an ideology of intimacy...[which] transmutes political categories into psychological categories. (259)

Sennett argues that political and social reality cannot, and should not, be interpreted in terms of personal feelings (5). What is required instead are “impersonal social relations” that bring people into contact with the world beyond their back door. Communal relations with strangers are required to balance the excessively inward focus on feelings and personality: engaging with the public encourages people to pay attention to the motives and actions of political forces, especially “the evils of modern capitalism,” ends not achieved by cultivating a vibrant inner life (310). Sennett reminds his readers that it serves no purpose if, when the time comes to stand against “the larger structures of city and state which have the actual power, the community is so absorbed in itself that it is deaf to the outside, or exhausted or fragmented” (310). In other words, those who focus on self-expression and enriching their inner life, do so at the expense of the greater social good.

Christopher Lasch

Christopher Lasch is perhaps the best-known critic to apply the vocabulary of narcissism to social analysis. In the opening lines of *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979), he surveys the aftermath of the turbulent sixties in tones of chagrin and disdain. He writes:

Americans have retreated to purely personal preoccupations. Having no hope of improving their lives in any of the ways that matter, people have convinced themselves that what matters is psychic self-improvement: getting in touch with their feelings, eating health food, taking lessons in ballet or belly-dancing, immersing themselves in the wisdom of the east, jogging, learning how to “relate” [and] overcome “the fear of pleasure.” Harmless in themselves, these pursuits elevated to a program and wrapped in the rhetoric of authenticity and awareness signify a retreat from politics and a repudiation of the recent past... To live for the moment is the prevailing passion—to live for yourself, not your predecessors or posterity (1979, 5).

He refers to the new cultural narcissism, a contemporary climate where religion has been replaced by the more banal quest for a modicum of personal wellbeing and psychic security (7). According to Lasch, this has occurred as a consequence of the decline of tradition (especially the family and respected leaders) and the invasion of the private sphere by a host of “experts” who provide the necessary guidance on how to live and operate in all aspects of life (10). In this way, the competent individual of yesteryear no longer has the confidence to run his or her life as s/he used to, mutating instead into someone dependent on “the state, the corporation and other bureaucracies” for their sense of self-identity (10).

Lasch’s analysis draws a parallel between this institutional dependency, this need to have self worth externally validated, and the characteristics of pathological narcissism in the clinical context. For this reason, he sees American culture as a cauldron for the creation and maintenance of this increasingly widespread personality disorder (1979, 37). Implicit in this degenerative trend is the consumptive ethic of late capitalism that substitutes attachments to commodities for attachment to real people, thereby disrupting the development of a coherent identity and the ability to relate to others in a genuine way outside the

nexus of the family (Adams; 114, 116). Given these challenges, individuals (mostly the affluent) have gravitated towards therapy, and this “therapeutic ethic” has replaced religion as the new ideology of American culture. It is a vicious cycle, though, because the act of seeking therapy is not the antidote but rather more of the same poison, in Lasch’s opinion, for here again the individual is encouraged to defer to outside authorities, and foster his/her pre-occupation with the self (Adams 2007, 49).

Lasch is stoically unmoved by any popular religious sentiment. He specifically links the social-psychological narcissism in American culture more generally to the specific activities of what he describes as the “new consciousness movement.” Lasch spurns “authenticity” and “awareness” as viable developmental goals (218): he thinks that “the popularization of psychological modes of thought” and the values of the ‘new consciousness movement’, “both share a quality of intense preoccupation with the self,” a quality so pervasive that it now informs the moral climate of contemporary society (25). For Lasch, therapy culture “constitutes an antireligion” because it provides for nothing beyond our immediate needs (13).

Robert Bellah et al.

Lasch’s criticism of therapy culture reappears in another popular social analysis *Habits of the Heart* (1985) written by five prominent American social scholars,³⁷ Robert Bellah chief among them. Based on interviews with over 200 white,

³⁷ Bellah’s co-authors are Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swindler, and Steven Tipton.

middle-class³⁸ Americans between 1979-1984, *Habits* argues is that the therapeutic discourse that has arisen since the sixties is socially untenable because it frames moral concerns as a matter of personal preference, and is, therefore, not able to give any substantive definition to the public good (187). Being inherently individualistic, it advocates a model of decision-making—whether political, personal or religious—based on personal gain and enhancement rather than any moral imperative (47).

Rich in historical detail, *Habits* identifies the emergence of new social roles connected with modes of bureaucratic organization that arose with the industrialization of America following the end of the Civil War (42). Innovations in transport, communications and manufacturing took capitalist ventures to new heights, and spread them across national and international boundaries. In this context, the need arose for men competent to oversee the maintenance and expansion of a range of commercial ventures—the entrepreneurs and the managers—those self-reliant individuals who knew how to compete and survive. But in the twentieth century, another major role emerged—that of the therapist. According to Bellah et al., taken together, the manager and the therapist define the cultural horizons of twentieth century America (47). They have penetrated the pre-existing social and economic forms and become infused into mainstream American society more broadly, a fact that Bellah et al. see as contributing to the decline of the traditional moral order (47).

³⁸ The authors acknowledge that their sample inherently limited the generalizability of their findings, and was due in part to economic constraints. They also say, however, that the study was intended to be cultural rather than strictly sociological. See pages viii-ix.

Still, the need for the therapist did not arise in a vacuum, but in response to the alienating cultural reality of capitalism with its almost idiosyncratic demands for discipline and flexibility, amiability and competitiveness, mobility and stability. In the new economic order, individuals were required to impress others and negotiate well (118). They were expected to be mobile, which meant uprooting and facing unfamiliar situations without the support of a network of friends and family. A poor self-concept, nervousness, burnout from stress, or other personal problems, became conditions to be mitigated for the individual determined to go forth and prosper. The role of the therapist was to provide the type of support that traditional relationships no longer adequately supplied (121).

In this limited context, Bellah et al. have no problem with therapy: unlike Lasch, they do not link it with self-indulgence or narcissism per se (139). Their concern is that the therapeutic relationship has become a model for all relationships (121). This situation disturbs them for a number of reasons: First, therapy lacks a collective context and is therefore unable to address the source of problems clients face, which require actions to be taken at the social or political, level as well. Therapists do not constitute a social organization with a voice or public forum (127). Second, and contrary to Sennett, they do not think that intimacy is taking over the public sphere but quite the opposite. In therapy they see an unfortunate merger of the managerial and therapeutic ethos that has created a cold “contractual intimacy,” based on mutual exchange—the “giving-getting model” they call it—which is a distortion of traditional forms of connection, support, benevolence and mutuality (128, 133). Third, they think that the

consequence of this cost-benefit approach to human relations reflects and creates moral impoverishment (139). Because the therapeutic worldview is based on subjective feelings (“this is true for me”), it encourages widespread moral relativism (pluralism) and makes meaningful discussion impossible. This is undesirable because it eradicates the perception of common moral ground and/or a moral high ground (139-141). As individuals, therapists want integrated communities and a vibrant public sphere as much as other Americans, but Bellah et al. argue that the therapeutic enterprise undermines this possibility through a moral logic based on the uniqueness of the individual and his or her need to be autonomous, a free agent (144).

To be clear, Bellah et al. do not argue that individuals enmeshed in the therapeutic discourse are amoral, only that the discourse is not amenable to the construction of a cohesive moral position (81; 203-204) because fundamentally “the ultimate purpose of ...[therapy] is to teach the client to be independent of anyone else’s standards” (99). It does not teach “enduring commitments resting on binding obligation” (102), a standard these authors certainly favour. The question still remains, however, of how to move beyond modernity as a “culture of separation” to a “culture of coherence.”

One of the principle metaphors Bellah et al. use to describe moral discourse is that of ‘languages’. The first language of America, its most basic moral vocabulary, is that of individualism (20). This is not a judgment, merely a description of the social reality of American life. But they also recognize that this first language, which includes therapy culture, is an inadequate discourse for a

rich and textured public life. For this, they think American society must call forth its “second languages” especially its republican and biblical traditions:

In the civic republican tradition, public life is built upon the second languages and practices of commitment that shape character. These languages are practices that establish a web of interconnection by creating trust, joining people to families, friends, communities and churches, and making each individual aware of his reliance on the larger society. They form those habits of the heart that are the matrix of moral ecology, the connecting tissue of a body politic. (251)

As an outgrowth of the first language, they see little promise in the trend towards religious individualism. Indeed, their description of the young nurse Sheila Larson who dubbed her faith “Sheilaism” has become a buzzword for the facile dimensions of seeker spirituality (221).³⁹ Still, Bellah et al. resist the rhetoric of narcissism, even if they find Sheilaism as a phenomenon distasteful. For them, the “logical possibility of 220 million American religions, one for each of us” is the focus of their critique (219). While they show a sensitive regard for individuals who I interpret as practitioners of solid or liquid forms of spirituality, Bellah et al. remain unconvinced that these spiritual paths encourage social integration and public engagement. As social ideals, monism, pantheism and other modes of self-realization

lack a notion of the future from which any clear social norms could be derived. Rather, the tendency in American nature pantheism is to construct the world somehow out of the self. (Again Emerson is a clue). If the mystical quest is pursued far enough, it may take on new forms of self-discipline, committed practice and community...But more usually, the languages of Eastern spirituality and American naturalist pantheism are employed by people not connected with any particular religious practice or

³⁹ “I believe in God,” she told the interviewer: “I am not a religious fanatic. I can’t remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It’s Sheilaism. Just my own little voice” (221).

community. (235; see also 237, 159)

Since ours is a society that requires people to be strong and independent to get along, Bellah et al. accept that some degree of religious individualism is inevitable (247). The authors even note in passing that the new religious consciousness has contributed some much needed vitality to American religious life (246). Regardless, their position is firm: despite the ecology, peace, feminist and other movements of the sixties, “the mystical type” is prone to distortions including incoherence and an “extreme weakness in social and political organization” (246). Above all, its close affinity for the therapeutic model makes it fundamentally a “pursuit of self-centered experiences” leading to “difficulty with social loyalty and commitment” (246). Like most commentators who pursue this line of argument, solid spirituality—guilty by association with therapy culture—is not expected to contribute much if anything to the revitalization of the public sphere.

I have spent some time considering the work of Bellah and his colleagues because their work is well known and their argument conscientiously highlights the practical value of organized religion as, at the very least, a partial antidote to social fragmentation. At the same time, the downside of religious individualism is made explicit. *Habits* articulates a balanced, insightful critique of the social ethic of religiously unaffiliated spirituality that warrants serious consideration.

Although Lasch’s language of narcissism is evocative and has been adopted by many critics of New Age, the more measured insights Bellah et al. are inherently more difficult to dismiss as polemic. The same cannot be said of a more recent

critique of the social implications of therapy culture undertaken by British religious studies scholar Jeremy Carrette and sociologist Richard King. As with Bellah et al., this work is significant not only because it offers a critique of the therapeutic aspects of solid spirituality, but because it bears on questions of social engagement specifically.

Jeremy Carrette and Richard King

In *Selling Spirituality* (2005), Carrette and King develop the argument that psychology has reduced religion to a product for personal consumption, and in the process effectively silenced religions' social justice ethic (67,79). Psychology, they argue, adopts the idea of a "closed self," that is, a self that is personally and not socially created (85). This psychological model of the human being is "pernicious and dangerous" because it overstates the notion of an independent self at the expense of social interdependence (57). This would not be a major issue in itself, were it not for the fact psychology has become an authoritative discourse in its own right, "a central ideology of western institutions, particularly welfare, educational, and medical systems," a force on par with politics and economics in its power to shape society and the individual (60). As a structural system, psychology contributes to the isolation, quantification and therefore, manipulation of the individual in a variety of ways. In measuring aspects of individual performance, IQ or deviance for example, it creates categories that reduce all attributes to the level of personality without due consideration of social context (61).

Their main concerns are twofold. First, they regard psychology as the handmaiden of an abusive neoliberal capitalism (63). As they see it, psychology is a “political apparatus” that works hand-in-hand with capitalism to create and then sustain consumers (56). An isolated self cut off from meaningful bonds of community is a weak self, thrown back on consumption for validation and gratification (56). Corporations, of course, have much to gain from the weakening of social bonds that the psychological discourse of self-interest propagates. “The harsh reality” they say, “is that few people, especially those benefiting from the situation want to see the interconnected structures of psychology and capitalism”(58). In their view, it is the relationship between psychology and capitalism that has created a profusion of, and “addiction” to, privatized spiritualities (58). This is connected to the second issue, namely that psychology has contributed to the secularization of spirituality.

Since its earliest days, they submit, psychology has systematically subsumed religion as one of its own categories such that now it addresses itself to all those human conditions—grief, death, birth, mystical states and so forth—that were once the domain of religion. This expert system has “disarmed much of the cultural heritage that [gave] birth to psychology in the first place” (66).

Significantly, though, psychology does not pay attention to social or relational identity, and this is its major failing (59). The humanistic and transpersonal psychologies that arose out of the human potential movement are particularly problematic because they locate human potential in states of consciousness, rather than in culture and society (72-73). As such, transpersonal psychology “rarely

becomes transformative of the social...and provides little evidence of an orientation to the collective” (73). They think its model of transcendence can offer little hope to either challenge or change the structural inequalities that plague society (73).

They are particularly critical of the work of Abraham Maslow, the social psychologist whose work appeared in the late sixties. His language of ‘self-actualization’ and ‘peak experiences’ broke the connection between religion and spirituality by creating the perception that spirituality was a secular and not a strictly religious phenomenon (75). According to Carrette and King, this split led to the commercialization of spirituality in a plethora of New Age style products (77). It was after Maslow that spirituality became like “cultural prozac...the new addiction of the white middle classes” (77).

The tragic side of this process is that those who uphold the virtues of a private spirituality believe that it represents the salvaging of an ethical and transcendent dimension in a materialist and rationalist culture gone mad. In reality, however, such a privatized spirituality operates as a form of thought control that supports the ideology of late capitalism. ‘Spirituality’ is the conceptual space that suggests the promotion of wholesome ethical values, but only by perpetrating a form of ethical myopia that turns our attention away from social injustice. It does this by turning the social ethic of religion into a private reality for self-comfort and self-consumption” (68).

Built on such a foundation, spirituality isolates people from one another and as such is no agent of moral responsibility (81).

Interim conclusion

What I am calling ‘the therapy culture critique’ is a central pillar of the critique that religiously unaffiliated spirituality is socially insignificant. While not

intended to be an exhaustive overview, the main point of these scholars is clear; since the sixties, the growth of humanistic psychology has enhanced an ethic of self-engagement at the expense of traditional ways of being social. The early critics of therapy culture did not take pains to point the finger at privatized forms of religiosity per se, but in the post-counterculture era, this has become a discernable trend. This is easy to understand—the psychotherapeutic dimensions of privatized spirituality are pronounced, as are its links to Maslow's transpersonal psychology and the human potential movement more broadly. The purpose of this historical sketch is to provide a context that is implicit—I think—in most of the theorizing about the ostensible incompatibility between private religion and public life. In the next section, I look at an extension of this critique, this time in the discourse of civil society.

The social disengagement critique

What is Civil Society?

There is no simple definition of civil society. The concept is probably best described as a cluster of theories that attempt to articulate how to best inhabit a social world structured by the coercive and/or oppressive powers of the state and the economy. What is the proper role of government in ordering peoples' lives and mitigating the power of larger social institutions through which they live and work? What mechanism makes a good society possible so that all can peacefully coexist and prosper? What can citizens do to ensure the continuation of their rights and liberties, and what do they owe to one another in the process? For

theorists working within the civil society discourse, the answer lies with the creation of a collective field of free association in which citizens pursue objectives with little or no interference from the government or market, whether to meet their own needs and desires or, in many cases, those of less fortunate others. This realm of voluntary engagement and interaction includes groups such as NGOs, philanthropic organizations, citizen advocacy groups, religious organizations, trade unions, sports teams and clubs for the hobbyist. At its most intense, it is a space where ethnic, cultural and gender groups strive for recognition and agendas for social and political reform are galvanized. Whatever form it takes, civil society offsets the atomism inherent in modernity and tries to balance peoples' needs for autonomy with the social realities of communal life.

In America, Robert Putnam's highly influential *Bowling Alone* (2000) reinvigorated the civil society debate with his suggestion that civil society was eroding due to declining participation in what had once been a rich civic life. Using a variety of evidence from polls, election surveys, and membership reports, Putnam examined trends in social and political participation in the United States. He concluded that Americans in the 1990s were less civically minded than the average American had been in fifties, sixties and seventies, both in the degree to which they joined civic organizations and their propensity to vote, engage in campaign activities, and express confidence in public leaders. He suggested that Americans were being systematically pulled away from their communities and each other and remarked on what he saw as a disturbing collapse of honesty and social trust. He explained the withering of civil society as a loss of social

capital—the networks and norms of trust and reciprocity that kept society functioning in adaptive and beneficial ways.

The Putnam thesis emphasized that civility was reinforced when people learned the social rules of conduct by meeting together in groups. Here, according to the theory, they would be propelled to further acts of social and political involvement, thereby creating stronger communities while enhancing democratic processes. Although critics find the connection between associational life and political behaviors ambiguous (e.g., Foley and Edwards 1999; Boggs 2001), the important point is that Putnam and his followers see participation in civil society as, well, civilizing.

Putnam's civil society with its myriad grassroots institutions is quite specifically conceived as a matrix of socio-moral behavior. In the communitarian view, civil society is a lost good that must be recovered. Etzioni puts it this way:

In the 1950s American society had a strong and clear set of social values, but these were somewhat authoritarian, unfair to women, and discriminatory towards minorities. These values were roundly attacked by the civil rights movement, the counterculture, and the women's rights movement, among others. Although these movements opened America's eyes to the negative practices of its own society, these attacks caused a moral vacuum, typified by an unbounded relativism, situational ethics and excessive individualism. Liberals were reluctant to step in and fill the void and help evolve a new moral culture. Social conservatives, especially the religious right, have viewed a return to traditional morality as the key to national salvation. ...[This unresolved] moral vacuum ...has continued to gnaw at us. (2001, 21)

Although Putnam's theory of social capital has been vigorously debated, his communitarian views of civil society resonate with a large body of sociological thought that eyes late modern self-expression and individualism with

overt suspicion (Berger 1967, Berger et al. 1973; Bellah, Madsen et al. 1985; Bellah, Madsen et al. 1991; Sennett 1998; Etzioni 2001; Bruce 2002; Bibby 2004a, 2004b; Bowen 2004; Elliott and Lemert 2006). According to these thinkers, any forces that augment the individualism of our age are considered highly problematic and in urgent need of remedy. In this regard, Putnam's theory gives empirical muscle to those who argue for the social dangers of excessive autonomy and subjectivity. As a political scientist, Putnam does not dwell on the specificities of New Age or contemporary non-traditional spirituality per se; however, following his line of reasoning leads to the inescapable conclusion that by focusing on autonomy and self-development, and making group religious participation optional, religiously unaffiliated modes of spirituality encourage the type of behaviors that are incompatible with healthy social life.

Putnam's research finds evidence of declining religious involvement, which represents a serious loss of social capital in America, since fewer adults than ever before belong to traditional religious groups and therefore are not active in the types of social networks that can foster social interconnectedness and benevolence. According to this view, the inexorable drift away from institutional religious commitments has led to a spirituality of the "dispersed self" of which "Sheilaism" is a classic example.

In what follows, I present Putnam's theory of social capital in some detail since it is the primary empirical framework for the fieldwork portion of my research (further details will also be presented in the chapters ahead). I also introduce the work of Kurt Bowen who has conducted in-depth research on the

relationship between measures of social capital and religion in Canada. Both these researchers emphasize that religiously committed citizens are the premier source of social capital. Works such as these have contributed to the assumption that privatized forms of religious engagement compromise civil society and its currency—social capital. Given that declines in social capital may ultimately endanger the function of political democracy, the contention that privatized religion erodes social capital is inherently a serious one.

Robert Putnam

Contemporary work on social capital frequently invokes Alex de Tocqueville's observation that joining associations is a distinctive feature of American social life, one that has contributed to the health and vibrancy of American democracy. Tocqueville observed that following the French revolution in 1789, a community-oriented society gave way to a new, more individualistic one. In this situation, two forms of democracy were possible: on the one hand, individuals could use their newly achieved freedoms to pursue their self-interests at the expense of more encompassing forms of social connectedness; or two, they could create a strong civil society by participating in public assemblies and associations of various kinds—especially those of a political nature—thereby preventing the accumulation of power in bureaucratic structures (e.g. governments) that might operate without concern for the health of society at large (Putnam 2002, 13). Whereas the first type of democracy produced atomistic despotism, the second was the basis of a decentralized liberal democracy (2002, 13).

Today, Tocqueville's political insights continue to serve as a warning for many social and political theorists who are concerned that late-modern social norms now constitute a silent but substantial threat to the integrity of western liberal democracy and the very health of the society that rests upon it. Putnam in particular takes Tocqueville's vision quite seriously. According to Putnam, for the first two-thirds of the twentieth century Americans conscientiously engaged with their communities and each other. During this time "a powerful tide" pulled Americans deeply into the flow of civic life. The boomer's grandparents were a generation who created a strong civil society by joining associations, voting, volunteering and connecting with neighbours and friends on a regular basis. Yet neither the baby boomers nor their children have emulated this pro-social ethic. This has created what Putnam calls a "generation gap in civic engagement" (2000, 34). Thus, the tide of associating, has, over the past few decades, changed direction and become a "treacherous rip current" pulling communities and people apart from each other (2000, 27). A variety of factors have contributed to this scenario. Putnam highlights the following as among the key factors that might explain the dissolution of civic culture in the United States (2000, 283):

- **Suburban sprawl** means that people have to travel further to work, shop, be with friends and spend time with family. This situation disrupts a sense of community integration and discourages engagement in local groups especially when people have to spend hours each day commuting.
- **Technological innovation** means that new forms of media and

entertainment and new social networking platforms such as Facebook threaten to pull people away from civic and social connections (2002, 16). Putnam thinks that the privatization of leisure, especially increased television viewing, is a primary cause of eroding social capital. Time spent watching television diminishes social interaction and may account for as much as 40% of the decline in involvement in groups.

- **The breakdown of traditional family arrangements** as women return to the paid work force, and the rise of “two-career families” has jeopardized civil society since historically women have been more involved in associational life than men. The overall decline in social capital is linked to a relatively greater loss of women’s involvement in voluntary activities.

Putnam does not necessarily argue that new modes of social connectivity are absent. Rather he claims that unless people meet face to face, as they have traditionally done in various group settings, social capital will not be created. He says:

Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue.” The difference is that “social capital” calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital. (2000, 19)

Social Trust

At the philosophical heart of Putnam’s theory of social capital lies the concept of

social trust. According to Putnam, when people meet together in groups—and especially when the community is characterized by a density of such groups—people are socialized into the norms of trust, cooperation and compliance that can be deployed to strengthen community ties, and solve all manner of local, national and even international problems. This in effect is what Putnam observed in Italy, namely that civic engagement created solidarity, trust and tolerance, which in turn enhanced political equality and produced greater economic prosperity. Overall, the key to understanding Putnam’s thesis is his contention that social interaction produces social trust, which in turn creates political trust and a desire to participate in the body politic because one inherently believes it is a dynamic, interactive process, and not a futile one. Social networks act as conduits for political information to flow so that individuals’ needs, interests and demands can and will be heard by those in power.

Putnam thinks that joiners are “more tolerant, less cynical, and more empathetic to the misfortunes of others” (2000, 288). He thinks that when people are disconnected from others, they are less able to gauge the accuracy of their views about others and may be more likely to be “swayed by their worst impulses” (2000, 289). By joining civic organizations, individuals learn to trust others and extend this trust to people who are different from them. By extension, when people can relax more with others, and are less suspicious of unfamiliar faces and groups, the so-called “transactional costs” that are part of daily life are minimized (2000,135). According to Putnam, trusting communities have an economic advantage because trust alleviates the more stressful and inefficient

assumption that others are out to cheat you (2000, 135). When one trusts, one also signals that they expect to be trusted. In this scenario, a stranger helps another because of an essential confidence that such help will be reciprocated if and when it is needed. This Golden Rule ethos is known formally as “generalized reciprocity.” It is the “touchstone” of social capital because “a society that relies on generalized reciprocity is more efficient than a distrustful society...Honesty and trust lubricates the inevitable frictions of social life” (134-135). In this sense, social trust and the social capital inherent in it are both public and private goods. Individuals benefit, as does the wider society, when levels of social trust are high. Crime rates are lower and communities and individuals are healthier and happier (144). This is because

[o]ther things being equal, people who trust their fellow citizens volunteer more often, contribute more to charity, participate more often in politics and community organizations, serve more readily on juries, give blood more frequently, comply more fully with their tax obligations, are more tolerant of minority views, and display many other forms of civic virtue...People who believe that others are honest are themselves less likely to lie, cheat or steal and are more likely to respect the rights of others” (2000, 136-137).

Voluntary associations as sources of trust

Because there is less opportunity for dishonesty and malfeasance when economic and political transactions occur in groups where levels of social interaction and therefore social trust are high (2002, 7), fostering social trust is highly desirable. Although nodding at a stranger one sees on the bus each day builds social trust, it does not lead to the development of the types of civic skills required for engaged citizenship the way being involved with a voluntary association does. Belonging

to a formal voluntary organization requires commitment, and carries certain responsibilities. Belonging to voluntary associations carries “internal” and “external” benefits. Externally, participation in voluntary associations such as the Shriners, Meals on Wheels, the Red Cross, or a literacy project creates social capital by procuring networks of relations which Putnam thinks encourage people to become politically engaged. Such networks of interaction provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and information where individuals share their points of view and hopefully, consolidate and refine their understanding of broader social and political issues (2003, 157). In Putnam’s view, they are “schools for democracy” (2000, 158). Internally, membership in such organizations also contributes to “habits of cooperation and public spiritedness, as well as the public skills necessary to partake in public life” (2000, 157). Here, the theory goes, members learn public speaking skills, how to run meetings, and write letters. They learn to work with others and manage resources. In this way, civic skills may translate into civic virtues that inculcate volunteers into the norms of citizenship and the roster of public duties (e.g., voting) this entails.⁴⁰ These civic virtues include trustworthiness and its corollary, reciprocity.

Putnam describes three primary realms of formal public associational and voluntary activity, namely politics, civic life and religion, but in keeping with his declensionist thesis, in each case Putnam finds these fields or repositories of social

⁴⁰ Putnam has acknowledged that some voluntary associations such as the KKK—while technically sources of social capital—cannot be considered as agents of civically desirable behaviors. He resolves this by noting that not all groups can be considered sources of social capital, only those that “act within the norms of democracy”. See *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000) 159.

capital in marked decline.

Political participation

Political engagement covers a range of activities from joining an electoral campaign, writing letters to or speaking with political leaders, and attending public meetings, although it may also include less formal measures such as talking politics with ones' neighbours or signing a petition (2000, 31). By whatever measure he conceives, however, Putnam finds Americans today significantly less engaged in politics and less knowledgeable about current affairs than they have been in the past. Since the mid-sixties, Americans are 10% to 15% less likely to either run for office or write Congress, 25% less likely to vote, 35% less likely to attend public meetings and 40% less likely to be engaged with party politics (2000, 46). Whereas from 1950 to 1960 the numbers of people who worked for a party grew, since 1968 these numbers have dropped dramatically reaching an all-time low in 1996. His research suggests that political parties are becoming professionalized and commercialized and despite slick campaigns and skilled lobbying, there is less voluntary grassroots participation than ever before. Between 1967 and 1987, membership in political groups was reduced by half, but during the same period financial contributions to parties from "checkbook members" nearly doubled (2000, 40). He concludes that these days, support more frequently means writing a check and not getting personally involved (2000, 39). He also finds that people today are about one-fifth less interested in public affairs than they were twenty to thirty years ago (2000, 37). Whereas from 1940-1970

the younger generation was as informed in these matters as their elders, today, this is emphatically not the case (2000, 36). Despite higher levels of education, which should predict greater knowledge and engagement, the “post boomers” (those born after 1964) were one-third less likely to know basic political facts, such as which party currently controlled the House of Representatives, than their elders (2000, 36). Putnam argues that this decline in political participation has led to a diminishing trust in government and cynicism, not only about the individuals who run for and hold office but also about the integrity of political processes more broadly. Whereas in the sixties, Americans were “strikingly confident in the benevolence and responsiveness of their political institutions,” by the 1990s three quarters of Americans had little confidence the government could be trusted to do what is right most of the time (2000, 47).

Civic participation and community involvement

Americans are still more likely to be involved in community organizations than the citizens of many other nations. Historically they are inclined to participation in groups such as labour unions, fraternities, the PTA, recreational and youth groups and a range of non-profit and charitable organizations. Still, Putnam finds worrisome changes both in the type and degree of commitment to these organizations. He contests data that appears to show organizational vitality expressed in terms of new membership and argues instead that any evidence of strong new associational vitality essentially boils down to “a proliferation of letterhead, not a boom in grassroots participation” (2000, 48-49). The problem is

not that there are fewer card-carrying members of formal organizations, but rather that members are not engaged with each other. For example, in many cases, local chapters that might serve as a nexus of congregating and interactive participation have closed. He shows how the national headquarters for groups such as the American Association of Retired Persons, Greenpeace and the Children's Defense Fund, are not found in the area where the greatest concentration of members reside, but rather in Washington, just a few steps from Capitol Hill (2000, 51).

The types of secondary or intermediate groups that Tocqueville famously observed are giving way, Putnam contends, to "tertiary" groups based on mailing lists, and not active members. These groups tie their members to a common set of symbols and ideas behind which they can rally, but they are devoid of social capital, since they cannot augment the formation of social trust through social connectedness (2000, 52). Another key aspect of declining civic involvement is found in individuals' disinclination to serve as either organizational officers or chair committees. His data show that between 1973 and 1994, the percentage of people taking on any leadership role in a voluntary organization was cut in half (2000, 59-60).

Religious Participation

Finally, turning to the religious sphere, Putnam notes that religiously active individuals as well as those who say religion is very important to them are "unusually active social capitalists" (2000, 67). His evidence suggests that religiously engaged individuals are much more likely than other people to belong

to any type of group and are more likely to vote, perform jury duties, take part in community projects and give money to charities (2000, 67). For example, 75% to 80% of church members give to charity, versus 55% to 60% of non-members. Likewise 50% to 60% of the religiously engaged volunteer, compared with only 30% to 35% of the non-religious (67). Furthermore, these philanthropic acts are not limited to church activities but extend into the secular milieu (67). For this reason, religion rivals education as a powerful predictor of pro-social behaviors. He does not mince words when he says, “faith communities in which people worship together are arguably *the single most important repository of social capital in America*” (66 italics added). This is not surprising given that congregations afford outstanding opportunities for the types of face-to-face interactions he finds so important. In fact, he suggests that on any given day, religiously engaged citizens may talk to as many as 40% more people than those who are not religiously active, which add up to a surplus of social trust (67), but it goes well beyond this. Religious groups not only inspire, but more importantly facilitate socially engaged behaviors. Religious groups support many types of congregational but also community social programs (e.g. food banks, health clinics, housing projects, after school programs) thereby making possible a range of voluntary activities, whether that is feeding the hungry, leading a Sunday school class or working with others through a larger religious charity groups such as the YWCA or World Vision. Furthermore, churches, temples and synagogues often make their buildings available as community meeting spaces, playing host to a variety of groups, of which twelve step programs are but one example.

Although Americans still overwhelmingly tell pollsters that they believe in God and/or the afterlife, Putnam sees nothing but decline, citing studies showing that the percentage of people that claim to have no religion has grown from only 2% in 1967 to 11% by the 1990's. Likewise, while many people say they are affiliated with a religious body of some kind, actual participation in congregational life has steadily diminished. He estimates that in the last decade 25% to 50% of individuals are significantly less involved in religious activities (72). Ten percent of individuals are less likely to claim church membership (72). In the 1950s, about one in four Americans were involved in church activities besides conventional worship (e.g. Bible study groups), but now the figure languishes at one in eight (72). A study using time diaries to track religious activities found that by 1995 Americans devoted a third less time to matters of religious relevance than they did in 1965 (72). He writes:

Seen from without, the institutional edifices [of religion] appear to be in tact—little decline in professions of faith, formal membership just down a little bit and so on. When examined more closely, however, it seems clear that decay has consumed the load bearing beams of our civic infrastructure. (72)

The implication is clear: religious decline has dire social consequences. As usual, he attributes this decline to generational differences with the younger generation(s) less religiously observant than their parents and/or grandparents (72). Younger cohorts are less inclined to join and participate regularly in traditional religious activities and simply do not share the religious enthusiasm of older generations. He cites Wade Clark Roof's early research that two-thirds of boomers who were raised in a religious tradition have dropped out, and even after

taking account of “life-cycle patterns” (e.g. returning to religion after starting a family), less than half return (73). The deeper reasons though are not attributable to generational differences alone, but rather are fueled by a turn away from congregational patterns of affiliation towards privatized forms of religious engagement. He cites the tendency towards “highly individualized religious psychology without the supportive attachments to believing communities” (74), saying privatized religion knows little of communal support, and exists by and large independent of institutionalized religious forms; it may provide meaning to the believer and personal orientation, but it is not a shared faith, and thus not likely to inspire strong group involvement... ‘Believers’ perhaps, but ‘belongers,’ not (74, citing Roof and McKinney 1987, 18-19).

Putnam attempts to minimize the potentially contentious moral overtones of this position by saying that he does not mean “privatized religion is morally or theologically frivolous, or that inherited traditions are inherently superior” (2000,74), only that “unless religious impulses find a home in more than the individual heart and soul, they will have few long-lasting public consequences” (69, citing Martin Mary 1994). Private religion may have salutary effects on the individual, but private religions cannot breathe life into civil society the way organized religions can because, fundamentally, they lack the ability to forge connections between people, across the lines of class, race, gender and generation (2000, 78).

Historically, organized religion has played an important civic role cementing society in ways that likely account for America’s good fortune in

avoiding Tocqueville's less desirable form of democracy—atomistic despotism. Many features of the contemporary religious landscape alarm Putnam however, characterized as it is by the loss of mainline religious groups such as Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and American Baptists. Traditionally, these groups have been strong advocates of social justice and other outreach programs. Although evangelical Christianity is increasingly popular, it is a form of religion that tends to be more exclusive and less compassionate towards the poor and marginalized (76-77). Putnam gives no indication that he thinks privatized forms of religion such as New Age are likely to become highly influential: he is nevertheless disenchanted by any form of religion that displaces the social capital rich bastions of communal worship, with non-communal, individually mediated forms of religious life, prone as they are to dissolving 'habits of the heart.'

Bridging and bonding social capital

Putnam's theory of social capital makes an important distinction between bridging and bonding forms of social capital (2000, 22; 2002, 10-11). Bonding social capital is what accrues from connections with people one knows intimately or well. These are the tight bonds between kin (nepotism is a form of bonding social capital), and members of exclusive groups (e.g., church groups, ethnic groups and fraternal groups). Bonding social capital produces strong ties or "thick" social trust. They arise between people who are in some way alike, or share a distinctive and recognizable collective identity. The benefit of bonding social capital is that such groups can be mobilized by calling on the solidarity implicit in some deeply shared bond. The potential drawback, however, is that such mobilization may be

in service of the narrow interests of a particular group or enclave, rather than the community at large. Putnam notes that although bonding capital may create strong group ties, it also has the potential to fuel “out-group antagonism” (2000, 23).

Bridging social capital, however, emphasizes the connections between people who are not necessarily alike and who are not (well) known to each other. It is epitomized in the value of having plenty of acquaintances whose expertise can be helpful when we need to find information or even a job.⁴¹ Socially speaking, bridging social capital lubricates social life because it contributes to the formation of “broader identities and reciprocity” (2000, 23). Because bridging social capital is not about dense networks in tight, inward looking groups, but rather the possibility of linking to distant, and even unfamiliar people and groups, it uses the power of “weak ties” and “thin” social trust to create solidarity. By emphasizing interaction and cooperation between people who are often strangers to one another, it is particularly valuable for stimulating a strong civil society. Thus while Putnam speaks of bonding social capital as “a kind of sociological superglue,” he views bridging social capital more like “sociological WD40” (2000, 23). Because bridging social capital is associated with connecting to and helping others outside one’s sphere of influence and this is the specific form of social capital that critics think SDNRs lack, my evaluation of the social capital of SDNRs will pay particular attention to the way they create bridging social capital.

⁴¹ It is the ‘friend of a friend’ phenomenon that is making social networking sites like Facebook such powerful public forums.

The limits of Putnamian social capital

Despite the importance of Putnam's research, its theoretical and methodological limits need acknowledging. Critiques of Putnam's work tend to reiterate a list of standard concern as follows: 1) over-versatility; 2) aggregation; 3) circularity; 4) problems with the meaning of social trust; and 5) non-specificity. I will outline these problems briefly here.

Over-versatility

Social capital is a concept that continues to attract considerable research interest, and is frequently invoked as a template for economic, social and political policy reforms and initiatives (for an overview see Foley and Edwards 1999, 148-148; Bezanson 2006, 428). The popularity of social capital as a solution to a variety of social and economic woes, however, means the concept has taken on an increasingly indistinct meaning (Foley and Edwards 1998, 148; Baron, Field and Schuller 2000, 24; Norris 2002, 140-144). The rapid proliferation of studies employing social capital as a research variable means that what is in fact a relatively immature concept has been widely implemented, but often in an ad hoc manner that makes generalizing findings across studies difficult. It has been applied to studies related to social theory, juvenile behavioral problems, education and schooling, community life, as well as democracy and governance and economic development (Woolcock 1998; Baron, Field and Schuller 2000). The popularity of the concept seems to suggest that social capital has illuminated a much needed but previously lacking analytic variable, but critics are hasty to

point out that a concept deployed in so many contexts and further, as we shall see, at so many levels of analysis, runs the risk of being theoretically incoherent (Foley and Edwards 1999, 149; Baron, Field and Schuller 2000, 25; Boggs 2001, 282). Furthermore, as an economic metaphor, “capital” is particularly problematic since “the essence of social networks is that they are built up for reasons other than the economic value to the participants” (Arrow 2000, 4, cited in Baron, Field and Schuller 2000, 25).

Aggregation

Because the concept of social capital is applied to a range of fields and data is collected with different objectives in mind, the social capital dataset is collected at many levels of analysis including the individual, the community, the institution, and the nation (Bankston and Zhou 2000). Nevertheless, as Putnam’s critics routinely point out (e.g., Foley and Edwards 1999; Baron, Field and Schuller 2000, 28)), social capital measured at one level, cannot be extrapolated to another. In particular, they argue that using sophisticated regression analyses to convert or ‘bundle up’ social trust measured at the level of the individual into a national picture of social trust is methodologically unsound, and certainly no basis to conduct comparisons of social trust across generations. Furthermore, using large-scale surveys such as the World Values Surveys and the General Social Survey to determine democratic attitudes and behaviors is problematic because these surveys were never designed to investigate social capital, “a methodological flaw hard to overcome” (Grix 2001, 200). Foley and Edwards are also concerned that

aggregating data in this way makes it insensitive to structural variables. They put it this way:

When social capital is measured at the national level by aggregating survey responses to a 'grand mean' it cruises at an altitude from which differences between contexts are indistinguishable. Put another way, the operationalization of social capital in terms of inter-subjective states measure at the aggregate level renders it impossible to assess the degree of integration enjoyed by a given group, and this despite the emphasis in the literature on the importance of voluntary associations for 'generating' social trust. (1998, 149)

Circularity: is social trust cause or effect?

Another lingering ambiguity in the Putnamian social capital discourse is whether social trust is a "prerequisite of social capital or the product of it" (Grix 202). In short, his methodology fails to explain whether participating in secondary organizations and informal groups of various kinds produces social trust, and therefore social capital, as he suggests, or whether it is, a priori, what brings individuals into these types of social situations. In her study of this precise problem McGill political scientist Dietlind Stolle found that while interacting with a group may cause you to think well of the people you encounter there, it does not mean that this trust automatically extends to the generalized other (1998, 500). Erich Uslaner's research also finds trust to be the cause of social engagement, not the consequence of it: it is trusting people who get involved with their communities, and not, as Putnam asserts, social engagement that create trusting people (2000, 576).

More problems with social trust

Putnam's premise that congregating in secondary associations produce social trust

is open to a number of further criticisms. First, while social trust might be linked to membership in civic organizations, it also correlates with a range of structural factors such as education (Uslaner 2000, 570), personal and national affluence (Foley and Edwards 1999, 150), and age. One analyst puts it like this: “Those who are satisfied with life are trusting and they are satisfied because their income, education, status...and social position and [political fortunes] give them good cause [or opportunity] to be so” (Newton 1999, cited in Foley and Edwards 1999, 150). Second, not all civic organizations produce trust, especially if people do not interact with people different from themselves. As Uslaner puts it, “We socialize with people we already know. We join bowling leagues with friends or at least people with similar interests and most likely, worldviews. You don’t have to be a truster, or an especially nice person to join a bowling league” (2000, 570). Third, social trust and reciprocity are social behaviors that are learned early at home and in school for instance. It is overstating things, then, to argue that social trust is conjured up—and emphatically so—when out bowling or playing cards with friends. Realistically, attitudes concerning social trust are established long before any decision to volunteer, let alone become politically engaged, ever becomes a concern (Bankston and Zhou 2000, 288; Uslaner 2000, 570). Concerning the alchemy of social trust Uslaner wryly notes, “A Scrooge won’t become a Bob Cratchitt if we could just get him enrolled in a voluntary organization” (2000, 575). Finally, while the Putnam thesis makes much of the premise that television viewing is responsible for people’s withdrawal from public life, with the advent of the Internet, television viewing has leveled off and yet, social trust has not

rebounded (Uslaner 2000, 586). Uslaner found that what made people say their neighbourhoods were unsafe was not how much TV they watched, only the levels of true crime in their neighbourhoods (2000, 586). These are just a few examples of the critique of social trust, but they point to the difficulties of using trust—a subjective parameter—as the foundation for measuring social engagement.

Non-specific institutional effects

A further critical problem for the Putnam theory is its inability to clearly demonstrate that trust generated by face-to-face interactions translates into trust in macro-institutional or political structures (Foley and Edwards 1999, 145). In their meta-analysis of the social capital literature, Michael Foley and Bob Edwards find “no reliable correlation between levels of social trust and trust in government across nations” and furthermore, that “both social trust and political trust are only weakly related to involvement in civic associations” (1999, 150). Putnam’s contention that institutional involvement is the key to social capital formation gives the impression that all associations are created equal, that one has merely to belong to a group to drink from the well of social capital. In a chapter called “The Dark Side of Social Capital” Putnam attempts to deflect earlier criticisms that if social interaction is all that is required, then gangs, mafia and the KKK also, therefore, technically repositories of this social elixir (Foley and Edwards 1999, 145). While he is clear that these groups do not constitute the sort of social capital he has in mind, the inconsistency unearthed by this criticism is not so easily overcome, since precisely how group dynamics work to produce social trust, let

alone how this might translate into democratic participation, is left unexplained (see Boggs 2001, 295-296).

Personal versus structural utility

Another conundrum is fixing where the social capital resides. Does it live in individuals or is it an attribute of social networks? Although the term ‘social capital’ implies that it is inherent in social structures, or at least social relations, in fact, the way it is operationalized (social trust) means that it is something inherent in the individual, and is something, therefore, that the individual transports with him or herself from one context to another (Edwards and Foley 1998, 129).

Fundamentally, this makes it a psychological and not a structural variable (129).

Because Putnam’s analysis places social capital in the person and not the social structures and social movements that bring people together, he portrays social capital as a ubiquitous good that anyone can cultivate. His analysis consistently overlooks how social capital is context dependent—the fact that it is available in some contexts more than other (the KKK problem) (2000, 129). As such, Putnam further fails to demonstrate how a range of social inequalities including race, class and gender can easily restrict access to or even just lessen the opportunities to cultivate social capital (2000, 129-130). In terms of religiously unaffiliated spirituality, the issue of gender is important and will be considered in the discussion of volunteering in the next chapter. Liabilities such as those listed here are just some of the reasons why Putnam’s theory is not an ideal instrument for analyzing the social parameters of religiously unaffiliated spirituality. Why use it

then?

Rationale for the choice of social capital as the theoretical basis of this study

Like any groundbreaking work, Putnam social capital theory has proponents and detractors. As American political scientist Russell J. Dalton notes, whatever one makes of Putnam's work, it has received wide attention because it focuses on issues that deserve and require serious study and debate (2008, xiii). For my purposes, the ubiquity of Putnam's theory makes it an ineluctable starting point, an inescapable paradigm for any discussion of social engagement. Furthermore, its emphasis on the role of religion in coordinating social and political engagement makes it a useful theoretical counterpoint. For this reason, Putnamian social capital is the logical theoretical starting point for a preliminary study such as this one. Its' clear empirical measures (volunteering, voting, associational involvement, and to a lesser extent, social trust) make is a relatively straightforward way to operationalize my analysis and gather data that can be used for comparisons. Future research will likely want to consider alternative approaches, but these will have the greatest value if foundational assessments such as this one are in place.

Kurt Bowen

Somewhat surprisingly, Kurt Bowen's description of the role of religion in "fostering an ethic of civility" in Canada neither emphasizes social capital theory in general nor Putnam's theory in particular, though clear echoes of Putnam's

communitarian view of civil society reverberates through this analysis. Drawing on eighteen social surveys conducted by Statistics Canada, World Values Survey, Angus Reid, and Reginald Bibby's Project Canada between 1975 and 1997, Bowen investigates how Canadians' level of religious commitment affects the degree to which they are active in social, political and even family life (2004, 3-4). He argues that the religiously active are distinctive from the unchurched in the "way they relate to their communities, in the political priorities they cherish, and in their general demeanor in the public realm" (21). This is because compared to "Seekers"—those Canadians who believe without belonging—or the "Non Religious," "the religiously committed demonstrate a

preeminent concern with civility that is very much consistent with the distinctively high value the Very Committed place on forgiveness, generosity and concern for others. It is also reflected in their singular commitment to the marriage bond, in the much larger network of family and friends, and their distinctively high rates of volunteering and charitable giving. In both word and deed, a marked commitment to civility is the underlying value that sets the Very Committed apart from Canadians in general and from the Non-Religious in particular. (286)

Bowen takes issue with the "Enlightenment view" that religion is "backward, repressive and destined for extinction" and resists what he sees as the popular view among intellectuals and secular elites that society would be better off without religion (272). Like Putnam, he worries that with patterns of mounting religious disaffiliation, Canadians are bound to experience a diminished civic conscientiousness, with all the negative ramifications inherent in that. His data reinforce the perspective that although Canada was once a very religious nation this is no longer the case. In 1901 more than 99% of Canadians claimed to a

religious affiliation. Canadian churches could seat 72% of the entire population at any given service (15). Since the fifties, however, Canadians have steadily left the church and not returned. The first Gallup polls done around that time placed weekly church attendance in the range of 51% -64%, but by the 1990s the figure had plummeted to a meager 20% (273).

Bowen takes no solace either in any notion that the decline of religious participation might be offset by an increase in seeker spirituality. Although Bowen agrees with Bibby's assessment that spirituality still matters to many Canadians (17), he disagrees that there is any religious renaissance on the horizon. For one thing, while the ranks of the Very Committed have steadily dwindled, the cohort claiming no religious affiliation has steadily grown. Furthermore, even among those who remain interested in religion, the spread of postmaterialist values since the seventies militates against traditional styles of religious engagement (16).

Unlike Bibby, who sees religious vitality (albeit not in the form he prefers) in Canada, Bowen does not. He finds Rodney Stark et al.'s "rational choice" paradigm unable to account for the rise of secularism in Canada. According to Stark, competition in the religious marketplace enhances religious vitality. Just as in the economic sphere, competition creates innovation and vitality, which can be impeded when the state sanctions a religious monopoly, as was the case in Quebec. "Whatever else they may lack," Bowen says, "Canada's churches are not short on choice or diversity" (17). According to this rationale, Canada should be a paragon of vitality since there is burgeoning religious pluralism with no state

endorsement or official control of religion. Yet despite a profusion of ‘religious suppliers’ religious participation in Canada continues to ebb.

The reason why Bowen does not see a viable form of religious vitality on the ground is that he thinks religion has become excessively privatized. He notes how, beginning in the forties, religion has increasingly been pushed to the private sphere. At that time Canada became a welfare state⁴² and the government took over the social service roles that had formerly been associated with Canadian churches. Today, there is little space for religion in public life, he argues. For example the media do not feature stories on religion except in its more bizarre, attention-grabbing forms. Likewise, the educational system is now quite secular with little room for religion (Catholic schools notwithstanding) (2004, 11).

Bowen specifically distinguishes three types of privatization. He associates the first with SDNRs “where believers ‘are left radically alone in their experience of the divine’” (20, citing Davie 1994). He points to ‘Sheilaism’ as emblematic of this form of privatization. The second form is roughly synonymous with overlapping spirituality. Privatized religion of this form tends towards “eclecticism.” This is Bibby’s religion à la carte where Canadians draw selectively on “a mishmash of church teachings and otherworldly notions” (2004, 20, citing Bibby 1987, 1), and is associated with consumer culture where religion is commodified, “a neatly packaged consumer item...that can be bought or bypassed according to one’s consumer whims” (2004, 20, citing Bibby 1987, 1-2). Interestingly, Bowen says that although these forms of privatization are

⁴² In this context, the state comes to act as a “higher power.”

identifiable trends, they are not the version of privatization he emphasizes. Instead, he accepts Peter Berger's understanding of privatization where religion is largely confined to the private sphere and has no voice in the public domain. It is something reduced to addressing individuals' moral and therapeutic needs (2004, 20). Constrained to the private sphere, religion lacks the power to challenge economic and political conditions that threaten to disrupt society (2004, 21). This makes religion largely insignificant to everyday life. Still—and this part of his theory is somewhat ambiguously handled—Bowen specifically rejects the view that religion no longer has an impact. His whole analysis is an effort to demonstrate that religion is an important social resource, but he is adamant that this only extends to those forms of religion that are institutionally mediated, and further, largely applies only to those followers who attend services on a weekly basis. Like Putnam, he thinks that religion is very significant to the wellbeing of society, but it is threatened by marked declines in religious observance (2004, 288).

It is important to note that while Bowen distinguishes three types of privatization he does not single out solid spirituality in his analysis. Rather, it is the dilution of religious integrity through processes of commodification and intermixing of belief systems that primarily constitute his category of Seeker. Seekers are not exclusively the solid, SDNR variety, but include anyone in the overlapping category whose religious participation has been sidetracked by their involvement in unorthodox practices.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the critique of solid spirituality from two perspectives—the therapy culture critique and the social disengagement critique. The therapy culture critique, which has been evolving since the fifties, charges that modernization has fostered a shift to the self and eroded traditional ways of being both social and religious. Critics of therapy culture worry that the increasingly widespread therapeutic ethos is undesirable because it draws individuals into their own inner worlds. Built on the unstable ground of self-importance and brittle confidence, however, these inner worlds are socially inconsequential. A cultural obsession with the inner life is thought to weaken the social structure by discouraging connection with others in outward looking activities that can help pave the way for improved social cohesion. As such, the therapy culture critique dovetails with the social disengagement critique. In both cases, solid spirituality is sighted in the crosshairs as a form of religion complicit with this narcissistic ethos. It is a social liability because it fosters 1) disengagement from institutions, and 2) unfettered individualism.

Putnam and Bowen both offer empirical verification to substantiate the communitarian fear that modernization is creating problems for religion and therefore civil society. Putnam argues that secularization means religion will no longer be as powerful a form of associating as it once was, and therefore, the loss of face-to-face interaction means people will not generate as much social capital. Bowen argues that secularization means religion plays a lesser role in the public sphere—though he does not comment on this explicitly in terms of social capital.

His concern is that as religion is pushed out of public life, it plays a diminished role in civil society. In both cases, religiously unaffiliated spirituality lacks the institutional parameters to shape public opinion and engagement in positive ways.

The remainder of the thesis is an attempt to verify the logic and accuracy of these claims. Does privatized religiosity, such as SDNR, constitute an escape from public life? Do its values encourage self-enhancement at the expense of other-focused forms of social engagement? To date, little research has investigated or attempted to measure the social engagement profile of solid spirituality (Franz Hollinger's study is a notable exception, 2004). The findings of this study, therefore, are important as a preliminary contribution to an extremely underdeveloped discourse.

The next chapter outlines my theoretical and methodological specifications, including a justification for the choice of Putnamian social capital as a construct to measure social engagement. This is followed by a Putnamian analysis of the social capital of SDNRs. In the final two chapters, I advance the theory that SDNRs' "postmaterialist expressivist" social ethic explains their social values and behaviors.

Chapter 4

Methods and Theory: Evaluating the Social Ethic of Religiously Unaffiliated Spirituality

Introduction

The research described here—undertaken during the fall of 2007 and spring 2008—is among a small number of sociological studies, and is the first Canadian study specifically focused on SDNRs. Several scholars have noted this lack of research (e.g. Possamai 2005, 3). This shortage of accurate data is problematic because it hinders accurate conceptualization of this group, which is often subject to highly polemicized judgments based on the largely untested claim that the orientation is narcissistic and socially disengaged.

To address this lacuna in the research, during the fall of 2007 and winter of 2008 I conducted fieldwork to examine the social values of Canadians who describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious.” The Spirituality and Lifestyle Study (SALS) was a two-tiered research project that consisted of an online questionnaire and in-person interviews with residents of the Kitchener-Waterloo area.

Kitchener-Waterloo is a community with a population of about 300,000 and is located in southern Ontario. It is an ideal site for the interview portion of this research. It is a typical Canadian city in many regards. It has a strong economy with healthy employment, with an affordable housing market relative to larger Canadian cities. Several other major metropolitan centers, including Hamilton, London, and most significantly, Toronto are all less than a ninety-

minute car drive from Kitchener-Waterloo. Thus while it is a modestly sized urban center it is by no means isolated and has ample access to the cultural and material resources of larger Canadian cities.

The Spirituality and Lifestyle Study: Questionnaire

The survey for this study was created using software available online from Survey Monkey.⁴³ I used it to generate a 114 item questionnaire that could be sent to potential respondents through an email link. Various styles of questions were used including multiple choice (single and multiple response options), and open-ended responses. Respondents were asked questions concerning the following main themes:

1. Spiritual orientation (questions 4-45)
 - a. Does the respondent agree they are spiritual but not religious?
 - b. Does he/she consider herself New Age?
 - c. Does s/he attend services at a church or other religious institution?
 - d. What type of spiritual literature does s/he read, and how often?
 - e. What type of spiritual practices does s/he undertake, and how often?
 - f. Does s/he use complementary and alternative therapies that have spiritual significance for him or her?
2. Social and Financial profile (questions 46-49)
 - a. Satisfaction with income level and amount of paid work
3. Schwartz Value Survey (questions 50-59)
4. Social Engagement (60-103)
 - a. Voting and involvement with politics
 - b. Knowledge and interest in current affairs
 - c. Group involvement
 - d. Role in civic life
5. Volunteering and Charitable giving
 - a. Friends, neighbours and family
 - b. Social trust
 - c. Outlook/optimism
6. Demographic information (104-114)
 - a. Gender

⁴³ www.surveymonkey.com

- b. Age
- c. Income
- d. Relationship/marital status
- e. Education
- f. Occupation

I designed the questionnaire with two main objectives: first, I wanted to know more about the spiritual beliefs and practices of the respondents and interview informants, and second, I wanted to assess their levels of social capital. The questionnaire was open to any Canadian over the age of eighteen. I realize this does not correspond to the SDNR category that I outlined in chapter two. The main reason is that I had not yet come up with this terminology, but even if I had, the term spiritual but not religious is more familiar to the average person. I knew at the outset that the term ‘spiritual but not religious’ was inexact, but chose it because people often use this phrase and also because I thought it would be an effective way to market the study. In retrospect I think the strategy worked: it was inclusive enough to capture people’s attention, but not so broad as to include data that could not be effectively used. Had I chosen “New Age” (too narrow and pejorative) or ‘spiritual but religiously unaffiliated’ (too academic sounding), I do not think the questionnaire would have been as successful as it was.

Nevertheless, I still had to take some extra steps to distill my final sample. Study participants were asked questions to determine the following: how frequently they attend services at a church, synagogue or temple; whether they consider themselves Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish, Muslim etc.; and,

how important the spiritual side of life is to them.⁴⁴ Those who rarely or never attended church, synagogue or temple, who did not consider themselves a member of an organized religious group, and who agreed that the spiritual side of life was important or very important to them were considered "spiritual but not religious" in the way this study uses the term.⁴⁵ A further question "Do you consider yourself spiritual but not religious" (question 5) was also included to confirm this. Anyone who answered "no" to this question was not included in the study. Those who said they were "not sure" (only 3.4% of respondents or 8 people) were included in the final sample based on my assessment of their responses (e.g., the types of books they had read, the types of spiritual activities they undertook and so forth).

I launched the study by sending the questionnaire to SDNRs I knew personally in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo. This constituted approximately 15% of my sample or approximately 30 individuals who then circulated it to their own contacts. Through this snowball method, over 328 people were recruited. This resulted in 279 completed questionnaires, which I reduced to a final sample of 265 following the procedure outlined below. The greatest number of responses came from British Columbia (47%), followed by Ontario (32%). My sample cannot, therefore, be considered nationally representative, but at least there is a mixture of voices from western and eastern provinces. The questionnaire remained "live" between December 2007 and

⁴⁴ See questions 4-8.

⁴⁵ See question 2.

November 2008 at which time it was closed so that the data could be analyzed. By this time, the survey had gone cold in any case, and very little new data had come in for several months.

Inclusion criteria

As mentioned, 328 individuals started the questionnaire and 279 completed it (although a completed questionnaire simply means they went through the entire questionnaire, not that they necessarily answered all the questions). Of the remaining 279, however, it was necessary to screen out those completed by individuals who were spiritual but not religious in a liquid sense. My objective was to cull responses from the distinct, SDNR, cohort, that is, those with no formal relationship with organized religion.⁴⁶

Using the filtering option available through the Survey Monkey program, I eliminated all respondents who answered yes to following question: Are you a practicing Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Sikh, or Jew? Likewise, the question “How often do you attend services at a traditional religious organization?” was used to eliminate all respondents who attended religious services more than once a week, about once a week, a few times a month, a few times every six months, and a few times a year. In effect, this left only those who went ‘rarely’ or ‘never’.

⁴⁶ This was necessary to ensure that the findings on social capital were not confounded by the social capital effect of belonging—even sporadically or nominally—to a religious organization. Although SBNRs (liquid) are not generally “Christian” in a strict sense, their social capital profile is enhanced by virtue of the fact they 1) belong to a religious group (a voluntary organization), and 2) participate in an organization (as opposed to a tennis club for instance) where they would likely be exposed to messages encouraging them to care for the less fortunate by donating time, money or both. Therefore, I sought to exclude individuals who said they were spiritual but not religious but still attended religious services.

To be rigorous, I decided it would be best to also eliminate all those whose answer to question #7 “If applicable, which religious tradition or denomination do you belong to?” implied that they still held a residual institutional religious identity. As such, the data was also deleted for respondents who said they were the following: Roman Catholic: Catholic, Anglican, Protestant, Jewish, and, United Church of Canada. In this manner, the original sample of 279 was reduced to 265. It is hard to say if this was an unnecessarily stringent screening procedure or not; attending church a few times a year, for instance, does not seem like much of a commitment. Nevertheless, I decided to err on the side of caution.

Spiritual Commitment

As mentioned, Kurt Bowen’s conclusion is that, in myriad ways, the Very Committed contribute more to society than the Less Committed, Seekers, or those who are Not Religious. Part of the aim of this study was to assess whether it can likewise be argued that levels of spiritual commitment—even if they are not institutionally mediated—promote higher levels of social engagement. Although assessing religious commitment is complex in this cohort, given the lack of institutional norms for practice or attendance, I settled on two methods of assessing this involvement. First, spiritual commitment was measured as a function of belonging to a spiritual group that meets on a regular basis ($n=60$). Second, because many SDNRs do not belong to groups or have an ambiguous sense of whether group activities such as yoga, tai chi, dance or drumming for instance qualify as a spiritual practice per se, I also measured religious

commitment as a function of hours per week spent praying or meditating (n=58). Given the limits of the capacity of the Survey Monkey program to cross-tabulate multiple responses, I was not able to get more sophisticated than this without introducing multiple categories for analysis, which I think would be unnecessarily complicated in a pilot study such as this one. Furthermore, as mentioned, I am primarily a religious studies scholar. I am not trained as a sociologist, especially in quantitative research methods, and lack the expertise that would be needed for a more in depth analysis of my data.

The Interviews

The second research method employed was interviews. I interviewed a total of 36 people for the study. I stopped with 36 interviews because little new material was emerging. All interviews were audio-recorded except one, which was conducted over the phone. In all cases informants' names were changed to protect their privacy with the exception of Tanis who requested that her real name be used. The interviews lasted between one and two hours. Most were conducted in the informants' home, however, some were done in an office in the Religious Studies department at Wilfrid Laurier University, and one was done in a restaurant. I took extensive notes during the interviews and reviewed the audio recording later to extract verbatim quotes as necessary. All-inclusive transcription was not done. All interviewees were asked to complete the online questionnaire as a condition of the study, although two people who did not complete it prior to being interviewed failed to do so. Of the 36 interviews, four were not included in the final sample.

Two were excluded because they had regular involvement with a Christian congregation. Data for two others were omitted, one because it was a phone interview and could not be recorded, and the other because the recording device failed during the interview. In both cases, I considered my notes insufficient to reconstruct the key themes at a later date. Both of these informants, however, did complete the online questionnaire and were therefore still part of the study. The objective of the interviews was to go beyond the questionnaire by seeking detailed accounts of the relationship between informants' spirituality and their social, political, economic and environmental attitudes and behaviors.

After some initial fine-tuning (about 5 interviews), the interview procedure was more or less standardized so that the same questions were asked in basically the same order. Generally speaking, informants were asked to describe a typical day and week in their life, their social and political involvements, including volunteer activity and charitable giving, and to articulate a spiritual biography that included their childhood experiences with religion, if any, and routine practices and commitments. Most were asked to define what the word spirituality meant to them.

Interview recruitment

Informants were sought using two primary recruitment strategies. First, I approached seven people I knew in Kitchener-Waterloo to ask if they would be willing to participate in an interview and/or refer people to the study. These were people I met in the course of networking at the university, local shops or through

dance classes I sometimes attended. The source of interview informants is laid out in Figure 5 below.

Potential informants who agreed they were “spiritual but not religious,” however they understood the term, were sent information about the study. They also had to agree that overall, the spiritual side of life was important to them. Continued recruitment was based on the goodwill of those I interviewed to share the names of friends, relatives and co-workers. Fortunately, their enthusiasm for the project provided me with sufficient interview prospects.

A second stream of interview candidates came from the online questionnaire, which asked people who lived in the Kitchener-Waterloo area if they would be willing to participate in an interview. If so, they could fill in their name and contact information. A few times a week I would check the survey responses to see if anyone had signed up for an interview. If so, I would contact them to confirm their eligibility and arrange a meeting time. I was fortunate to recruit eleven informants this way: these were “blind” contacts, people I was not previously acquainted with and who were not connected to anyone I knew. I later realized that four of these individuals were clients of Tanis, a local healer who was eager to support this research.

Because of the recruitment procedures used, the interview cohort is not a random sample, which means that these interviews are not representative of SDNRs nationally. This is a small study and the findings must be interpreted in this context. The extent to which my sample accurately reflects the views of other

Figure 5: The source and relative distribution of my interview samples. (Names followed by an asterix were not interviewed).

Canadians who are SDNR is not known. Future research with large, random samples and a budget for nation-wide interviews is required for more conclusive findings.

Basic demographic information for the interview cohort

The average age of the interview cohort was 46 years, with a median of 45. The average level of education was undergraduate university—an above average educational attainment. All informants had completed high school, and two had doctoral degrees. Twenty-two of the informants were female (69% of the sample) and 10 were male (31%). The median household income range was \$26,000 - \$35,000, with 5 informants reporting household incomes over \$80,000 annually (16% of interview sample). Basic demographic information of the interview cohort

Figure 5: The basic demographic information for the interview cohort. Because of the way this data was collected, these figures are only available as a range of values.

	Pseudonym	Age	Highest level of education	Family Income (range)
1	Alice	55	Undergraduate	100,000+
2	Ashara	45	College	0-16,000
3	Bernadine	65	College	26-35,000
4	Carol	45	College	16-25,000
5	Casey	55	College	200,000+
6	Cathleen	35	High school	16-25,000
7	Dena	55	Undergraduate	51-60,000
8	Devon	40	High school	36-50,000
9	Duncan	25	College	26-35,000
10	Fred	45	Undergraduate	0-15,000
11	Greg	45	Some graduate	51-60,000
12	Helen	55	Some graduate	100-150,000
13	Hope	35	Some university	51-60,000
14	Julia	48	Some graduate	36-50,000
15	Justin	55	Some graduate	60-80,000
16	Kirby	25	Undergraduate	60-80,000
17	Laila	45	Some graduate	100-150,000
18	Madagascar	25	Undergraduate	16-25,000
19	Martin	55	Masters	36-50,000
20	Miranda	55	Other	151-200,000
21	Morgan	55	Undergraduate	0-15,000
22	Muriel	55	Other	16-25,000
23	Nola	40	Undergraduate	80-100,000
24	Patricia	55	Masters	36-50,000
25	Richard	45	Undergraduate	51-60,000
26	Shelly	25	College	26-35,000
27	Tanis	55	Doctoral	60-80,000
28	Trevor	35	High school	80-100,000
29	Trudy	65	Doctoral	100-150,000
30	William	55	High school	51-60,000
31	Yana	55	College	100-150,000
32	Zoe	21	Masters	0-16,000

is provided in Figure 6.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ The reported incomes for the cohort reflect some methodological ambiguities. Although the income range I cite seems low, some of my informants (Bernadine, Alice, Martin, and Greg) reported modest incomes, while living in very comfortable circumstances from what appeared to be a combination of retirement income and the fact they owned their own homes. Morgan lived in a home she owned with her partner, yet in the on the questionnaire she said her income was between 0- 15, 000, which does not reflect the reality of her lifestyle. Overall, with a few exceptions (Fred, Carol, Ashara and Cathleen) most of my informants seemed financially secure, or had good prospects given their young age (e.g. Shelly, Zoe, and Madagascar). In retrospect I realize I was not comfortable asking detailed questions about finances in the interviews, although I usually asked "How are things for you financially?" This is a vague question that did not produce concrete answers. I relied on my questionnaire to provide the financial information I needed for the study.

My relationship to the group under study

Any researcher—myself included—brings a perspective to the material. My interpretations of the phenomenon presented here are constructed out of my pre-existing beliefs and expectations concerning the group under study. It is fair to ask, therefore, what steps were taken to prevent my “insider” proclivities from distorting the findings of the project.

Being an insider makes researcher objectivity difficult at times; yet I think that the research methods employed here have several advantages for mitigating the potential for bias. To begin with, using social capital as a framework to study the social ethic of religiously unaffiliated spirituality presented clear analytic categories. Questions such as “how much did you give to charity,” “how many times did you vote,” and “how much time did you spend volunteering last year” are not subjective questions, but questions with empirically measurable outcomes, within the limitation of “self-reported” data. Furthermore, I did not create the measures of social capital used for this study, but simply followed the research of Robert Putnam. Second, I am not from Kitchener-Waterloo and had no personal contacts in the area when I moved here in 2005. This had the effect of significantly reducing selection bias for this study, since I was not previously associated with a community here. After my initial recruitment efforts, I actively solicited referrals from people I had interviewed to prevent “stacking the deck” so to speak.

At the same time, it is important not to overlook the advantages inherent in insider research. Specifically, my familiarity with a broad range of “New Age”

beliefs and practices meant that informants felt comfortable revealing things to me that would have sounded strange, perhaps, to those unfamiliar with the terrain. Several informants (e.g., Zoë, Bernadine and Nola) reported experiences with paranormal phenomena that they said they rarely if ever talked about. Many of the informants said they were very private about some of their beliefs and only shared this information rarely for fear of sounding “crazy” (e.g., Richard, Trevor, Alice, Trudy, Muriel).

While I realize that outsider research has a role to play in the social scientific study of SDNRs, insider research is also needed to mitigate the harsh judgments that many outsider observers bring to the study of this type of spirituality, especially when it is couched in terms of New Age. It is no exaggeration to say that sociologists of religion have not always been kind in their portrayals of these seekers (e.g., Bruce 2002). Much of the sociological literature in Canada, for example, is polemically charged (e.g., Emberley 2002; Bowen 2004; Bibby 2004a, 2004b). Being an outsider does not guarantee “objectivity.” For example, Bibby, Bowen, Bruce and Emberley are all outsiders, but their judgments about SDNRs are rooted more in theory than empirical observation, and polemics than dispassionate explanation. This research, therefore, can serve as a counterpoint to the routinely disparaging tropes that inform many studies of this group. With that said, what follows is a Putnamian analysis of the social capital of solid spirituality. Social trust and associational life are covered next in chapter 5, while the details of their political social capital are covered in the final chapter. This allows time for the presentation of an interpretive framework in

chapter six, which is essential groundwork for the analysis of political engagement.

Chapter 5

Does Religiously Unaffiliated Spirituality Produce Social Capital? A Putnamian Analysis

Introduction

The central question I want to explore in this chapter is whether SDNRs are as socially disengaged as the critics suggests. Critics like Steve Bruce who think “New Age illustrates the zenith of individualism” might be surprised to learn that SDNRs are involved in a range of formal and informal associations (Bruce 1995, 122 cited in Heelas 2006, 225). In fact, they belong to many more organizations than the average Canadian, and are at least as involved as the Very Committed in many of their social commitments. Because face-to-face interactions are the lifeblood of social capital, there are no grounds, therefore, to argue that being SDNR results in social disengagement.

Yet the matter is more complicated than this. While active engagement with others should in theory be sufficient to put these seekers on the social capital map, the real question that critics are asking is whether they involved in the type of associations that produce *public* benefits. In other words, does privatized religion produce other-directed forms of social capital? An important distinction must be made, therefore, between those forms of social capital that are inward focused and produce bonding social capital, versus those that are outward focused and produce bridging social capital (Putnam 2002, 10-11). To satisfy critics that SDNRs create outwardly focused social capital, one must demonstrate that their actions are directed at 1) caring for (disadvantaged) others, and 2) involve

engaging in formal political processes.

Using data collected in my research, the goal of this chapter is to clarify the social activity of SDNRs. It has two main sections: 1) social trust and 2) non-political associational involvement. It begins with an analysis of social trust (thick versus thin). Here I use my questionnaire data to show how the cohort rates in terms of trusting strangers, as well as how they cultivate forms of thick trust by spending time with friends and loved ones. There is also a brief discussion of the ambiguities of social trust based on material gathered in the interviews. The next section is much longer and deals with the various associational activities SDNRs engage in. Primarily these are 1) spiritual groups, 2) civic associations, and 3) leisure associations. I take pains to discern those activities that constitute outward looking (bridging) versus inward looking (bonding) social capital. Volunteering is discussed in the section on civic associations. Charitable giving, while an important measure of social engagement is a bit ambiguous since technically it does not involve face-to-face interactions. It is examined last. As mentioned, the discussion of political engagement is deferred to chapter seven. This allows time to explore the foundations of SDNR moral reasoning, and describe how this manifests in their particular style of political engagement.

Throughout the analysis I will attempt to evaluate the rate of associational engagement with those of average Canadians and the Very Committed. As described in the methods chapter, I have identified subgroups within my sample to see how social capital varies depending on whether one has a spiritual practice or belongs to a spiritual group. The findings on this point are interesting but they

need to be interpreted cautiously given the small sample sizes involved. In some cases, limited data curtails my ability to provide complete comparisons across all categories.

I will say up front that while my research suggests SDNRs are approximately as involved in civic life as most other Canadians, and in some cases more than the Very Committed, they show much lower levels of volunteering and charitable giving compared with the Very Committed, and even average Canadians. This confirms my hypothesis, outlined in the introduction of the thesis, that SDNRs are drawn to forms of civic life that are more aligned with the liberty aspirations of postmaterialists as discussed by Inglehart and Welzel (2005). Nevertheless, these findings are consistent with the critic's view that these individuals are not much interested in helping others. Balancing these two positions is the aim of the two final chapters.

Social Trust

As mentioned, the heart of Putnam's theory is that social trust creates social capital because when individuals are trusting they participate in groups where they learn the norms of civility and in the process acquire a range of useful civic skills that will lay the foundation to encourage future forms of civic engagement or "habits of cooperation." According to Putnam, social trust is the basis of civil society and the concept is central to his theory of social capital. Trust in other people is what makes it possible for individuals to come together to sustain a vibrant public sphere where individuals are free to make demands, and struggle

for equality, or even power. To reiterate, for Putnam, “people who trust others are all-around good citizens, and those more engaged in community life are both more trusting and trustworthy. Conversely, the civically disengaged believe themselves to be surrounded by miscreants, and feel less constrained to be honest themselves” (2000, 137). Overall, the concept refers to the outcomes of trust between people (Grix 2001, 189). There is a direct correlation, therefore, between social trust and social engagement.

According to Putnam, social trust is determined by the sum of all personal encounters with non-family members, including everything from close friends and neighbours, to the people in the office tower one often sees but doesn’t know, shop clerks, or the possibly helpful passersby. The closer and more intimate the connection, the “thicker” the trust. Thin trust by comparison is the trust of strangers and the “generalized other.” Putnam thinks that ultimately thin trust is more important because it builds confidence in our fellow citizens and encourages us to be honest and fair (2000, 136). As such, this assessment of the social capital of religiously unaffiliated spirituality begins by examining measures of social trust in the cohort.

What does my questionnaire data reveal about SDNRs’ levels of social trust?

In assessing social trust, the main task is to consider how SDNRs compare with Canadians in general, and religiously committed Canadians in particular. I begin with thin trust—trust in the generalized other.

Thin Trust: Trust in the generalized other

Question 99 of the online survey asks, “Overall would you say you trust strangers?” Results for the whole questionnaire sample were as follows: yes (30%), somewhat (56%), not really (12%), and not at all (2%). Thus 86% of the sample were somewhat or very trusting of others. As outlined in the discussion of the study methods, I have created two subgroups from my questionnaire data: those individuals who belong to a spiritual group (n=60) and those who have a regular spiritual practice (n=58). The purpose of this is to assess whether face to face interactions of a spiritual group are linked with higher rates of social capital compared to a those SDNRs who have a spiritual practice but do not belong to a spiritual group.

It should be clear by now that Putnam’s theory predicts membership in a group of any kind will positively affect social capital. In the case of social trust, this is true: those that belong to a group said they trust strangers more than those who have a private spiritual practice (39% vs. 34%). Both the spiritual group and spiritual practice cohorts were more trusting than the whole sample. The results are laid out in the Figure 6.

The critical question, however, is whether SDNRs are more or less trusting than average Canadians in general and the Very Committed in particular. Beginning with the average Canadian, data from the 2005 World Values Survey (WVS) and also from the 2003 General Social Survey (Statistics Canada) asks “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted” or that “You can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” The wording of these questions is

Figure 6: The social trust of my questionnaire and interview cohorts.

Overall would you say you trust strangers?				
	Q/A Whole sample	Q/A Spiritual Group	Q/A Spiritual practice	Interview cohort
N	265	60	58	32
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Percent	Response Percent	Response Percent
Yes	30%	39%	34%	34%
Somewhat	56%	56%	53%	40%
Not really	12%	3%	9%	19%
Not at all	2%	2%	4%	7%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%
<i>answered question</i>	213	57	53	32
<i>skipped question</i>	52	3	5	0

Figure 7: The social trust of Canadians according to the World Values Survey and Canadian General Social Survey.

Social Trust of Canadians		
	World Values Survey Canada, 2005	General Social Survey Canada, 2003
N	2113	25,000
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Percent
Most people can be trusted	42%	56%
Can't be too careful	56%	44%
TOTAL	100%	100%

different than question 99 of my survey. Still, some general observations are still possible. First, many Canadians are cautious towards strangers: when asked if they trust strangers, somewhere between 44% (GSS) and 56% (WVS) of Canadians say “no,” or “not really.” Put somewhat differently, only 42% (WVS) or 56% (GSS) of Canadians think that most people can be trusted.

According to my data, Canadian SDNRs are significantly more trusting than the average Canadian. Only 14% of my questionnaire sample indicated that they did not trust strangers.⁴⁸ The number is even lower for those who belong to a spiritual group of some kind: only 5% of this subgroup said “no” or “not really” when asked whether they trusted strangers. For those with a spiritual practice the figure was still only 12%. In other words, the SDNRs who participated in my study appear to be significantly more trusting than the average Canadian.

I now turn to the question of how the Very Committed—those Canadians who attend religious services weekly—compared to SDNRs in terms of social trust. Bowen does not use the more recent WVS or GSS data I cite, since it was not available when he published his findings. He uses data from a 1996 Angus Reid poll instead (2004, 91). The questions here are as follows: 1) Generally people can be trusted to do what is right, versus 2) It just isn’t wise to trust people these days. According to this data, the Very Committed are less trusting than the Less Committed (63% vs. 68%), and about the same as Seekers and the Non-Religious. Although Bowen argues that being religious has positive social

⁴⁸ As Figure 7 indicates, 2% of my sample does not trust strangers at all. Twelve percent said they did “not really” trust strangers.

Figure 8: The social trust of Canadians based on religious profile. Source is a 1996 Angus Reid, poll (Bowen 2004).

Social trust among Canadians based on religious profile					
	Very Committed	Less Committed	Seeker	Non-Religious	
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Percent	Response Percent	Response Percent	N
People can generally be trusted to do what is right?	63%	68%	63%	64%	2920
It just isn't wise to trust people these days.	45%	50%	41%	46%	1453
It is best to trust people even if they betray your trust.	65%	62%	54%	58%	1457

implications, he does not discuss this in terms of social capital in general, or social trust in particular. Putnam is barely mentioned in his book—a fact I found odd until I did this analysis. Could it be that he avoids social capital theory precisely because the Very Committed do not demonstrate superior levels of social trust compared with the other religious groups he identifies? There is no way to know for certain, but the fact remains that social trust is the foundation of Putnamian social capital, and the Very Committed do not stand out on this scale. The only edge the Very Committed have over the other groups is their somewhat greater willingness to trust others in the face of betrayal (question three in Figure 8), which Bowen attributes this to the more “principled” ethics of the Very Committed (2004, 90).

Thick Trust

Whereas Putnam uses the term thin trust to describe the trust we extend to others

we do not know well or at all, thick trust describes the type of trust that is fostered by close personal relationships with friends and family. It is synonymous with bonding social capital. Thick trust does not make us more likely to trust strangers: just because I trust my friends and family does not mean I am universally trusting. Yet, Putnam thinks that close personal relationships set the tone for trusting social relationships more broadly, and he worries that declining social capital is linked to the fact Americans are taking less time to be with friends and family. As he puts it, “visits with friends are on the social capital endangered species list” (2000, 100). If thick trust is a springboard for trusting social relations, as Putnam argues, it warrants examining what my study revealed about how SDNRs behave with their intimate others.

The 2003 GSS (Statistics Canada) question “How many friends do you have who you feel close to, that is, who you feel at ease with, can talk to about what is on your mind, or call on for help?”⁴⁹ is very similar to the question I asked, namely, “How many close friends do you have these days? These would be people you feel at ease with, can talk to about private matters or call on for help?” On the whole, my data suggest that SDNRs are not shy of close friends: more SDNRs have between 6 and 10 friends than the average Canadian. At the same time, the SDNRs are less likely than the average Canadian to have no friends. Comparing the number of friends the average Canadian has compared with my SDNR sample yields the following: none (6% vs. 1%); 1-5 close friends (63% vs.

⁴⁹ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-598-x/2003001/figures/4067765-eng.htm>. Last accessed June 28, 2010.

58%); 6-10 close friends (21% vs. 30%); and, more than ten close friends (9% versus 11%). These figures are even higher amongst the spiritual practice subgroup, 40% of whom boast more than six close friends compared to only 21% for the average Canadian, and 18% have more than ten close friends compared to only 9% of Canadians.

What about the Very Committed? How do SDNRs compare to this group?

According to Bowen the average number of close friends for weekly church attenders is nine. Monthly church attenders have an average of seven close friends, about the same for those who rarely go (Bowen 2004, 136). Because I collected my data as a range of values, I am not able to make precise comparisons with Bowen's data, though it appears that the Very Committed do have a small advantage when it comes to close friends. Regardless, the data presented here make it clear that there is no basis to suggest that religiously unaffiliated spiritual seekers lack intimate contacts; they may even have significantly more friends than many Canadians.

A final indication of thick trust among the questionnaire cohorts can be found in data concerning how often the cohort typically dines out with friends.⁵⁰ According to Bowen's data, a little over a third of Canadians say they socialize with friends on a weekly basis, and 36% do so monthly (2004, 137). He does not find much difference between the rates of socializing among the religious and non-religious: 71% of weekly attenders and 71% of never attenders report socializing a few times a month with friends outside the neighbourhood (2004,

⁵⁰ Question 98

136). About 78% of my questionnaire sample indicates that they met with a friend or friends for dinner, on average at least once a month. For those with a spiritual group the figure was slightly higher (81%), while for those in the spiritual practice subgroup the figure dipped to 68%. Again we see that being SDNR does not diminish—and may even enhance—social trust, and promote frequent social interaction.

Measuring social trust: some methodological ambiguities

Before closing this discussion on social trust I want to say a few words about my interview cohort, especially since these individuals had a lower rate of social trust compared with the questionnaire cohorts. I usually raised the question of social trust in terms of the response they had provided on the questionnaire since in almost all cases it was filled out prior to the interview. Most of them were eager to qualify their response and were reluctant to take an unequivocal stance as being either very trusting or very untrusting. This is understandable: almost everyone has either been helped or harmed by a stranger at some point in his or her life. For most people—not just those I interviewed—I suspect trust is not a black and white equation, but something circumstantial.

Casey's comments reflect her high levels of social trust. In this quote, her trust of the generalized other is expressed as her sense that people are generally good. When I asked her what makes community she said this:

The kindness of people, people helping each other and starting projects together, each person doing their own small piece. [Do you think people do that small piece?] I think that most people do in one way or another even if it's just minor. I think that people no matter how busy they are

doing something even if it's just picking up a stray dog, or looking after a child after school one day. I mean some people do a lot, but I think that most people do a little.

Cathleen, on the other hand, described trust more in more personal terms. She said, "I think I am generally an untrusting person because I've been let down so many times." This is also reflected in Julia's comments. She likes to take a trusting approach, but

essentially due to past experiences I [don't really trust strangers]. I hate to say this but [it is because I'm female]. I've been assaulted; I've been followed; I've been stalked. I've been sexually assaulted three times. I've dealt with very disturbing people in my work. So no, I don't trust easily. But I have a fundamental—I don't know if you would call it faith—but I look for good in my fellow creatures. I also make sure I'm aware of reality. I try to take a realistic and appropriately cautionary approach to other people, especially those I don't know. But I don't approach people with a hostile eye.

Although she told me "my religion is kindness," life has taught her that unconditional trust is not safe.

Darren's case also stood out for me. On the questionnaire Darren reported that he did not trust strangers: I found this hard to believe when I met him. He was young, energetic, open and very confident. This is someone who had personally contacted all his neighbours a few years ago when his attempt to "naturalize" his yard created the impression he was simply leaving it untended. His neighbours were frustrated with the appearance of his property and he wanted to take steps to remedy that. He told me in the interview that he found some of his neighbours unfriendly, and concluded it was because of his age (Darren was 18 at the time of the interview, and employed full time in an ecology related field). Still he tried his best to be courteous with them and accommodate their needs as far as possible. So

why does he say he does not trust strangers at all?

Like Julia, part of it is circumstantial. Darren had experienced a rough patch in adolescence that contributed to his wariness. “I have seen some sad, sad, scary things,” he told me. However, there were two other factors: first, Darren feels *others* are not trusting. Concerning the episode with his yard he remarked:

We don’t talk about [the problem with the yard]. No, instead the by-law officer comes to see me and tell me your concerns. I want some conversation going on here. I want to know, do you not like fennel seed? Because if you don’t, I’ll move it to the back yard so you don’t have to look at it. Let’s work as a neighbourly community, you know? But I found out that other people don’t want to.

Second, Darren equates trust in people with trust in officials and leaders, and he is not willing to take the authority of leaders for granted. “I am not the type of person to follow the brake lights into the ditch” he told me. In other words, Darren has a highly nuanced interpretation of trust. He wants to trust but finds others wary; at the same time, he does not trust those in power to direct his wellbeing.

I raise the cases of Casey, Cathleen, Julia and Darren to point out that trust is a complex human behavior, and measuring social trust is probably more complicated than asking a simple question on a survey. The complex nature of trust means it is probably wise to question its pre-eminent role in the social capital equation, at least until more exacting measures are found. Still, since I am using Putnam’s framework in this analysis, the summary point is that SDNRs show high levels of social trust compared with Canadians in general, and the Very Committed in particular. If social trust is the catalyst for social capital, then

SDNRs appear to be in good shape. The next three sections explore whether social trust leads to higher rates of associational involvement. I begin by looking at how SDNRs associate with others through spiritual groups.

Associational Involvement: spiritual groups

Commenting on how a sense of belonging is crucial to people's overall health and wellbeing, Warren Clark, a senior analyst with Statistics Canada remarks on the connection between religious participation and social cohesion:

Indeed, analysis of GSS data shows that people who attend religious services on a regular basis were more likely to feel a very strong connection to the community and had a greater number of friends and relatives to whom they felt close. Over one in four regular attenders (29%) in 1998 had this sense of belonging, compared with only one in seven adults (15%) who did not attend services at all. (2000, 27)

Here Clarke echoes Putnam's contention that faith communities are a key source of social capital. Yet, as discussed many times now, the main criticism of religiously unaffiliated spirituality is that it is not communal, that these seekers lack access to congregations and communities of practice. Bowen, for example, agrees with Peter Emberley's observation that the spiritual journeys of Canadian seekers are characteristically "transitory and ephemeral" because they are pursued in "communities of solitude" (cited in Bowen 2004, 19). This concern is frequently predicated by the assumption that this lack of congregational activity is by choice, that SDNR individuals lacks any interest in congregating, preferring to practice his/her spiritual life in relative if not total isolation (e.g., Sheilaism). This is compounded by a further assumption, namely that the ad hoc approach taken by theses seekers condemns him or her to solitary practice; with no agreement on

norms and forms, critics assume that community life is difficult, unlikely or impossible.

Yet there is ample evidence that since the 1970s, SDNRs have continued to create and sustain spiritual groups of many kinds (e.g., Wuthnow 1976; Tipton 1982; Bloch 1998; Wuthnow 1998; Roof 1999; Corrywright 2004; Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Aupers and Houtman 2006; Zaidman 2007). Some of these groups, such as gatherings in people's homes, are highly informal, but others—such as the well-known Harmonic Convergence in 1987— attract thousands (Smilgis 1987). While researching *Spiritual Revolution* (2005), Heelas and Woodhead found that two-thirds of those active in the holistic milieu in Kendal were involved in group activities, which was more than the number who engaged therapists or practitioners one on one (2005, 24).⁵¹ This is corroborated by my questionnaire finding that the majority of SDNRs (80%) think spiritual community matters. Asked how important it is to be in community with like-minded spiritual seekers, over a quarter (28%) said is very important, 26% indicated it is important, and another 26% said they think it is at least somewhat important.⁵²

In this section, I consider the extent to which Canadian SDNRs join together in spiritual groups. I address the following specificities: 1) what percentage belong to a spiritual group that meets on a regular basis; 2) what is the average group size; 3) how often do they meet; and finally, 4) do these groups

⁵¹ This makes sense given that group activities are generally less expensive than private healing sessions.

⁵² Question 38.

take actions to help others. The first question, and by no means a simple one, though, is, what counts as a spiritual group?

What counts as a spiritual group?

As Heelas and Woodhead found when collecting data for the Kendal Project, there is no simple way to define a spiritual group in the context of the holistic milieu. Contrary to what they decided, it seems to me that the individual, and not the service provider, is the best measure of what counts as a spiritual activity or group, though in truth, there is no exact way to sort this out.

According to question 40 on the questionnaire, 28% of the whole sample said they belong to a spiritual group that meets on a regular basis. About 11% said they were not sure if what they did qualified as a spiritual practice. Because this question offered respondents a comment option, we can get a better idea of how SDNRs think about this subject. For instance, one respondent said that band practice was her spiritual group. “I find spiritual connection and nourishment there,” she said. Someone else said, “I’m editor of a [New Age style journal], and there’s usually a pretty constant spiritual content to the group...” Another respondent considers her friends her spiritual group. “We talk about the goods, the integrity of the journey. [It is] very supportive. My friends are miracles personified,” she said.

Sorting through the open ended responses (66 in total), suggests that the following can be considered spiritual groups for some Canadian SDNRs: 1) exercise related groups such as yoga, tai chi, and intuitive dance practices such as

Five Rhythms and contact improvisation; 2) psychic/ intuitive development groups including training programs for various modalities including Reiki, Therapeutic Touch, Craniosacral Therapy, divination (e.g. tarot, dream interpretation), hypnosis, native healing methods and so forth; 3) groups centered on spiritual practices (e.g. meditation), spiritual teachings (e.g., A Course in Miracles); 4) groups that form around the work of a local teacher (e.g., Tanis Day in Kitchener); 5) Twelve step programs and other self-help groups; and 6) friends with similar beliefs. I will say more about this in the discussion that follows.

What percentage of SDNRs belong to a spiritual group?

As mentioned, 28% of my questionnaire respondents belonged to a spiritual group. To learn more about this, I raised the question of spiritual community in the interviews. Overall, 18 of my interviewees belonged to some sort of spiritual group—56% of the sample. I noticed that some of my informants were very solitary in their spiritual lives, or were fine with things being loose and informal, whereas others were well connected with a variety of individuals and/or groups. About a third of my interviewees were well integrated into a spiritual community of some sort: these were all women (n=13) in their forties and fifties. Of the men, Martin, Richard, Darren, William, Kirby and Greg had also created some form of spiritual community, albeit not in the specifically intentional way many of the women did. For example, Richard does several practices with spiritual significance to him (e.g., yoga), but these are not necessarily spiritual gatherings per se. Greg has a dedicated spiritual practice; he periodically connects with

Figure 9: The percentages of respondents who belong versus do not belong to a spiritual community, and the percentage of people who are unsure whether their group qualifies as a spiritual community (question 40 on my survey).

Do you belong to one or more spiritual groups that meet on a regular basis?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	27.8%	60
No	61.6%	133
Not sure if my group/groups qualifies as a "spiritual community."	10.6%	23
<i>answered question</i>		216
<i>skipped question</i>		49

teachers and does trainings from time to time, but for the most part, he prefers to go it alone. He likes the idea of being spiritually self-reliant. This is distinct from Devon, Helen, Yana, Alice, Trudy, Bernadine, Miranda, Tanis, Muriel, Hope and Patricia, for example, who either host or attend spiritual gatherings on a regular basis. Not only do these women have spiritual community in place, in some cases they want more. For example, Muriel has belonged to many different types of groups over the years but is still searching for “the perfect spiritual community.” In our meeting she told me that she is “hungry for something [she has] not yet found [a place where she can speak] at the deepest level about things that are really important and meaningful.” Overall, I found the women were much more proactive about spiritual community than the men were. This is consistent with Heelas and Woodhead’s finding that 80% of the participants in the holistic milieu are women (2005, 94-95).

Generational factors also played a role with younger or less serious seekers often making do with more ad hoc arrangements. The young women were

the most likely to be dissatisfied with their lack of spiritual community. For instance, Zoë has plenty of friends and an active social life, but she does not belong to any spiritual groups. She told me she finds it

hard to be alone spiritually. It's hard to have beliefs when you don't have anyone who's on the same page as you. I'm still young. I think peacefulness will come. But at the same time I still wonder. Who knows, who really knows what's happening? I might be completely off base.

Likewise, Shelly is fine with the fact that she does not have a spiritual community at the moment. She told me that it is “not overly important to [her],” and that she was “fine developing it on [her] own.” But she also said, “I really like the chance to have spiritual conversations with people I know. I find that really interesting. So I would be open to a spiritual community if it was people just sharing their ideas as opposed to going to church and a ritualized sort of thing.” Nola is getting by thanks to her mother, but would also be open to a spiritual community of her own.

My mum has a network of friends who are all very spiritual. There is a New Age bookstore where she lives but I haven't found that here. I'm young too, right? And [people my age] are not on [that path]. You can just sense they [aren't because of how they...] talk and speak and think. I just know they don't have the same belief system [as me]. I'll touch on things like, ‘Yeh I believe in that’. But they're not comfortable you can just tell. I have a few people; I don't see them often...but I don't really have—no-no-no-no. [Fortunately] I'm in a place I don't really need it. I can talk to my mom. But, no I don't have a community. Yeh, it would be nice to have that.

The picture that emerges from my interview data is that many SDNRs are actively, or at least peripherally, involved in some sort of spiritual group. What about the discrepancy between my interview and questionnaire samples

concerning the much higher rate of belonging to a spiritual group (56% vs. 28%)? What is the best way to interpret this? It is certainly possible that the higher figure for the interview cohort is likely due to a selection effect with more serious seekers being drawn to the study. In this regard, the lower figure from the questionnaire (28%) suggests a more conservative gauge of overall levels of involvement. Yet question 39 on the questionnaire suggests higher levels of group involvement are possible, with 59% of survey respondents indicating they had belonged to a spiritual group in the last two years. Contradicting the hypothesis that these seekers are endlessly eclectic, many had only belonged to one (24%) or two (16%) groups in the past two years. Only 9% belonged to three groups or more over the same period. A study that specifically focused on the nature of SDNR spiritual practices (e.g., style, frequency) would be a most welcome addition to the literature. Such a study would also help clarify the exact extent to which SDNR seekers exercise their option to pick and mix. Overall, based on my interviews, my impression is that more advanced spiritual practitioners have more conventional notions of what qualifies as a spiritual group. Those who have invested a lot of energy into their spiritual lives are more likely to have a spiritual group, and one specifically focused on spiritual development at that.

What is the average group size? How often do they meet?

Regarding the size of the religious associations favored by religiously unaffiliated seekers, small groups were the norm.⁵³ The one notable exception is Casey who

⁵³ This was not assessed in my questionnaire.

attends a local chapter of the Unity church.⁵⁴ Helen for instance meets with two small spiritual groups on a weekly or monthly basis respectively, and has done so for over ten years. Likewise, Yana, Devon, Ashara, Tanis and Muriel also belong to groups that meet for rituals, spiritual development and/or support on a regular basis. The groups typically ranged from 4 to 12 people. Tanis told me that her workplace doubles as a

location where people gather. This is a place that feels like a community. There's room there for workshops, sessions, conversation. There is a key available to people. There's a healing practice group that meets there. It's a place where everyone who goes there knows they speak the same language.

Tanis told me her community has a floating membership of about 200.

According to the survey, seekers who belonged to spiritual groups met with their groups as follows: daily (5%); a few times a week (15%); weekly (28%); monthly (28%); and, less than monthly (24%). These are very high figures; 48% of those with a group claim some type of weekly involvement. It is hard to know how to interpret this relative to the Very Committed. Talking on the phone to a spiritual companion is not the same as getting out the door to church, but the figures are suggestive of high levels of commitment and integration into daily activities. This is an important point and reflects how many SDNRs view spirituality as something embedded into the workings of their daily lives, an important fact I revisit in the chapters ahead.

⁵⁴ The Unity Church is based on the teaching of New Thought teachers Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, and is not a conventional Christian religious group.

Are SDNR spiritual groups a source of bridging social capital?

As discussed, one of the critical issues that needs unmasking here is to what degree SDNRs help others. My data suggests that being SDNR fosters an attitude of trust and a desire to connect with others in spiritual groups, but I want to go further and ask how being involved in an SDNR spiritual group might translate into bridging capital, and concrete acts of other-directed social engagement. What are the public versus private effects of the social capital SDNRs cultivate as a result of joining together in community with like minded others? Does it only produce bonding social capital—the kind that strengthens the ties between people who share the same spiritual outlook—or does it go beyond this?

Given the ambiguities of what counts as a spiritual group there are some difficulties with this type of analysis, but observations from my research can help shed some light on the matter. I offer three examples of how SDNRs can produce bridging social capital. This includes the following: 1) The Therapeutic Touch Network of Ontario; 2) groups formed by local healers; and 3) yoga studios. Before discussing these, I want to note that although the more intimate gatherings and small informal groups that create the stronger ties associated with bonding social capital are common with SDNRs, trainings and workshops that take place over short periods of time (e.g., Five Rhythms workshops or trainings, Therapeutic Touch trainings) are an excellent source of weak ties. Weak social ties are akin to bridging social capital and have been found to be an important dimension of social capital (Granovetter 1973; Burt 1980). According to my survey, 64% of the SDNRs questioned had attended a spiritual development

workshop in the past year.⁵⁵

The Therapeutic Touch Network of Ontario

Let's begin with formal spiritual groups with some institutional scaffolding.

Without intending it to be the case when I embarked on this research, inadvertently I found intriguing evidence of how a network of energy healers is providing care in the broader community. Alice—one of the first people I interviewed—is a Therapeutic Touch (TT) practitioner and offered to circulate my online questionnaire to the Therapeutic Touch Network of Ontario.⁵⁶ As a result, several of the people who contacted me to be interviewed belonged to this network (Helen, Bernadine, and Casey). In retrospect, the women who belonged to this network (all over the age of fifty) were quite distinctive in the amount of time they spent caring for others. They were all unusually active social capitalists, to use Putnam's phrase.

Through learning Therapeutic Touch and being affiliated with the network, these women were able to offer treatments to others. Although these women were in a position to charge fees for providing TT in private practice, and in some cases did, they also enjoyed offering TT as a voluntary service. This was facilitated by the TT network, which dispatched volunteers into the community to

⁵⁵ Question 30.

⁵⁶ Therapeutic Touch is an energy modality, developed in the seventies by Dora Kunz and Dolores Krieger R.N. PhD. It is non-dogmatic and does not involve dialogue. Nurses in the hospital and hospice setting often practice TT" as well as those involved in elder care. It is a hands-off modality that is practiced while the client or patient sits or lies fully clothed. It is taught in three levels, in nursing schools or through trained practitioners.
www.therapeutictouchnetwork.com.

offer TT to those in need free of charge. All these women had been TT volunteers although Alice, Bernadine and Helen were no longer actively doing outreach through the network. Casey was still giving TT in the hospital setting. When I asked her what were some of the ways she liked to help others she said this:

Therapeutic Touch! I worked for [a health organization] for a while. I have done some TT in hospice. I do distance healings. I have two women I am working with right now who have cancer. I always try and have one or two people in my practice that I don't charge—it's usually the cancer patients. It's often the people I've started working with. I go to their homes after they have chemo if they are open to that and do the treatment.

Casey gives about two volunteer TT treatments a week. Likewise, Helen gives about three volunteer TT treatments a week, though these days it is mostly to family and friends. Alice and Bernadine were non-specific about their TT volunteerism, except to say they had been heavily involved in the network in the past.⁵⁷

While the Therapeutic Touch Network of Ontario is not an SDNR organization per se, the fact that it is an energy healing modality makes it attractive to liberal religious individuals (SBNRs) and SDNRs. I would suggest that this is because energy-healing modalities are highly compatible with a monistic orientation. The fact that four women in my interview sample were involved with the organization over the course of many years, and used TT as a way to serve others in the community, suggests that it is an avenue of formal volunteerism that produces both bridging and bonding social capital. When I

⁵⁷ Unfortunately, I did not ask these women how long they had been involved with the TT network since the interview was more focused on volunteerism in the past year. My impression, though, in retrospect is that they had been involved with TT over the period of years. Helen, for instance, still attends the conventions and offers trainings.

asked Helen what is the major benefit of belonging to the TT Network she said this:

It is a great comfort. I love what the Buddha Maitreya says when he says that whenever and wherever you create sacred space, through building, or your intention, you are creating a little acupuncture point on the Earth – which then connects to every other sacred space on the planet. Therapeutic Touch practitioners are connected through a very powerful grid work – not only by material means such as directories, the web etc, but energetically. You can feel it and it feels good, safe, loving, and strong.

There are likely many other formal types of organizations such as this that are flying below the radar of social scientists, that could profitably be investigated as a way of understanding the social capital of SDNRs.

Holistic practitioners as local advocates

I admit that at the outset of my research, my perception was that SDNR groups would be exclusively focused on spiritual discussion or rituals. My interviews, however, revealed that these groups do sometimes become involved in community projects. For instance, Muriel's visits to a local energy healer led her to participate in a spiritual group he facilitated. The group met for spiritual development work, but also conducted an ambitious ongoing project that involved shipping containers of goods to a developing country. Over the course of two years, Muriel spent hundreds of hours sorting goods and preparing them for shipment. Likewise, Helen's group raised over \$8000 dollars for a local charity by hosting a fundraiser and silent auction. This was also true for Yana, whose spiritual group raised over \$10,000 for a women's charity in 2007. Kirby was also involved in creating a spiritual group. He was reluctant to share too many details

since it was in the formative stages, but my sense was that it was to be a nexus to bring the local spiritual community together, and not just a place to meet for spiritual development work. Overall, I suggest that some healers use their networks for social advocacy. This is not the express purpose of these groups, but the yoga studio example below shows that having the infrastructure in place creates a greater likelihood that outward looking social capital will manifest.

Yoga studios

Although it has been noted that New Age bookstores operate as a focal point within the SDNR community (Zaidman 2007), it is important to consider how yoga studios are also fulfilling this role. Yoga studios are more widespread than New Age bookstores; they offer the opportunity for regular meetings, and are not retail centers in the way bookstores are (which is not to say they are not pricey). Many SDNRs are attracted to yoga studios, making them a site where SDNRs can meet others who share their values. In fact, about 43% of my questionnaire respondents said that they undertake yoga as part of a spiritual practice,⁵⁸ corroborating Heelas' and Woodhead's finding that yoga was the most common activity in the holistic milieu, with 42% of their sample participating in this activity in any given week (2005, 54).

Yoga studios are potentially conducive to the formation of thick and thin social trust. While I am getting away from my own data, and speaking more from personal experience, the yoga studio where I practice in Waterloo is clearly

⁵⁸ Question 36

attractive to SDNRs. The tone is professional—as are many of the clientele—yet an SDNR feel is announced by things like the “Om” jewelry for sale, and copies of books like Eckhart Tolle’s *Power of Now* and *The New Earth* as well as Yogananda’s *Autobiography of a Yogi*, available for browsing in the lounge area. It is also communicated through the language of “chakras” (the term for an energy centre in the body) and “energy,” words that are often heard in classes and around the studio.

Critics might suggest that yoga studios do not produce thin trust because they do not attract a diverse clientele and I do not disagree with this; however, by the same measure, neither do the bowling leagues, choirs and community groups Putnam endorses (see Boggs 2001). In fact, there are signs that yoga studios do cultivate bridging social capital. Here are three examples based on my personal involvement with two yōga studios—one in Waterloo and one in Calgary.

First, in 2008, an instructor at the Waterloo yoga studio gave several special classes to raise money for the “Kids in Cambodia” campaign, which is part of a larger yoga movement called “Off the Mat into the World” whose mission statement is to use “the power of yoga to inspire conscious, sustainable activism and to ignite grass roots social change.”⁵⁹ In an informal conversation with this instructor she told me that that she raised over \$6500 for the cause through a combination of yoga classes and door-to-door canvassing. Her campaign was covered in the news media, including an article in the Kitchener

⁵⁹ <http://www.offthematintotheworld.org> . Last accessed July 23, 2010.

Record. Second, following the earthquake in Haiti in February 2010 the owner of the same yoga studio announced that all smoothie proceeds would be donated the Red Cross for Haitian relief. This effort raised approximately \$1700. Finally, the studio also helped one of its employees raise the funds to travel to Africa to donate and help rebuild medical equipment. Through an elaborate campaign that included raffles, donations and a buffet—all subsidized by or held at the studio—she raised over \$6000 for the project.

I found evidence of a similar pattern when I visited to a Calgary yoga studio late in 2009. I noticed that they offer two “karma classes” each week. According to their website, the class fee is donated to local charities—currently Wellspring Calgary “a support centre which aims to meet the social, emotional, informational and spiritual needs of individuals who have cancer and their loved ones by providing quality, person-centred, evidence-based supports aimed at healing body, mind, and spirit.”⁶⁰

Although some research has been done (Strauss 2005), ethnographies that specifically document the role of yoga in supporting communal identity or social capital formation among the spiritual but not religious are lacking. My experiences in a very narrow range of studios suggests that it could be much more widespread. Again, I issue the call for further research to corroborate this hunch. More broadly, the critique that SDNR is a solitary and socially disengaged ‘religious’ orientation is questionable. Solid spirituality is not organized and practiced in the same way that organized religion is, but it does not follow that

⁶⁰ <http://www.calgaryhotyoga.com/schedule.htm> Last accessed July 23, 2010

those who embrace it create no intermediate structures. My research suggests that many SDNRs are actively seeking ways to be involved in spiritual community, and further, looking for ways to reach out and help others through these groups.

The reluctance to view small groups or alternative venues such as yoga studios and bookstores as legitimate sources of spiritual community and, therefore, social capital needs to be reviewed. Yoga in particular may offer a type of spiritual solidarity well adapted to our times. Yoga offers a practical combination of physical exercise and stress relief. It can also be undertaken as a spiritual practice for those who so desire. This fluidity is likely part of its appeal.

The phrase intentional informal seems an appropriate way to capture something fundamental about the way many SDNRs approach spiritual community. Many are intentional about community, but it is still informal by the standards of organized religion. Involvement may not be desirable if it is too restrictive or demanding, but this does not mean these seekers are not interested in being in community with other seekers like themselves where they can learn, share and deepen their spiritual lives. Having evaluated how SDNRs associate with each other in the context of spiritual groups, next I examine their involvement in a range of other civic groups.

Civic Associations

Putnam's key premise is that democracy is enhanced through a vibrant civic sphere. Civic associations are important because they are the social soil out of which social capital grows. Still, different forms of associating produce different

forms of social capital, and some are better for social health and democracy than others (Putnam 2002, 7-9). He says:

A dentist's drill, a carpenter's drill and an oil rigger's drill are all examples of physical capital, but they are hardly interchangeable. The same is true of social capital—it comes in many forms that are useful in many contexts, but the forms are heterogeneous in the sense that they are good only for some purposes and not others. (2002, 8)

I want to stay close to the question, therefore, of whether SDNR civic pursuits produce the type of social capital good for the purpose of bridging to others. To do this, we will want to emphasize involvement in other-directed forms of voluntary association. Typically, this will not include bowling leagues and book clubs. While these sorts of groups are valuable to the degree they foster face-to-face interactions, and therefore, are certainly better than sitting alone watching television or surfing the Internet, the more critical question is how involved are SDNRs in voluntary activities directed at improving the lives of others. In other words, how much do they volunteer and give to charity compared to the average Canadian and the Very Committed? These two issues are examined next. I begin with volunteering and employ the excellent comparative data available from Statistics Canada's 2007 cycle of the CSGVP—the Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating.⁶¹

Volunteering

In 2007, approximately 46% of the Canadian population over the age of fifteen engaged in some form of volunteering for charitable or non-profit groups. This

⁶¹ (http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca/files/giving/en/csgvp_highlights_2007.pdf)

amounted to 2.1 billion volunteer hours, which is equivalent to about 1.1 million full time jobs. There was a 5.7% increase in the total number of volunteers since 2004. In part this increase is attributable to a 3.6% growth in the Canadian population over this period. There was also a 4.2% increase in the total number of hours Canadians volunteered, the equivalent of about 84 million hours. The average number of hours volunteers put in remained steady, however, at about 166; the median number of volunteer hours fell from 61 hours in 2004 to 56 in 2007 (2007, 36).⁶²

My research collected data on volunteering through the following questions:

- 1) Have you volunteered in the past 12 months? (Question 79)
- 2) Please list up to three examples of volunteer work you have done over the past 12 months. May include caring for parents, helping others and so forth. (Question 80)
- 3) Please say more about any of your past volunteer activities: What year did you start; what year did you finish; approximately how many hours per year? (Question 81)

While helpful, these questions were problematic in the end because they did not distinguish between formal and informal volunteering. I was concerned that the questionnaire was getting too long, and so opted for shorter questions. This was a mistake and future researchers will want to word questions in such a way that comparisons are easily made. The CSGVP specifically asks respondents what sort of organizations they volunteer for, including sports and recreation, social

⁶² http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca/files/giving/en/csgvp_highlights_2007.pdf; p36.

services, education and research, religion and so forth (2007, 37). It also asks Canadians whether they had “helped individuals living outside their household, without involving an organization” (2007, 52). These types of questions would have been best. Because it is not possible to make accurate comparisons with the CSGVP data set, my questionnaire data is necessarily tentative. Still, of the 185 informants who did volunteer work last year, 107 provided details about their volunteering. By sorting these responses into formal and informal groups, I can estimate what percentage of the cohort did formal versus informal volunteering. I considered formal volunteering to include anything linked to an organization, whereas informal acts were those of a more personal nature (e.g. walked a friend’s dog after surgery, listening to friends in need). The most reliable information, though, comes from my interviews where I collected more detailed information about volunteering. Please note: I will not provide details for the spiritual practice or spiritual group in what follows since this would be stretching the available data far too thin.

Results from my surveys and interviews

My most significant research findings are laid out in Figure 11 on the next page. While the data must be interpreted carefully, it is intended to show the following. First, 70% of my entire questionnaire sample said they did some volunteering last year. The figure was much lower in my interview cohort for reasons that I cannot account for (53%), except to say it might be a sampling error. Second, SDNRs in general do less formal volunteering than either Canadians in general or the Very

Figure 10: Rates and types of volunteering in the interview and questionnaire samples compared to the Canadian average and the Very Committed.

	Q/A Whole sample	Interview Cohort	Canadian Average 2007*	"Very Committed" 2007*
N	265	32	20, 510	20,510
Volunteered last year**	70%	53%	n/a	n/a
Formal volunteering past year	40%	38%	46%	66%
Average # hours	123	47	166	232
Median # hours	80	0	56	n/a
Informal volunteering past year	44%	100%	84%	n/a
Average # hours	106	n/a	n/a	n/a
Median # hours	60	n/a	n/a	n/a

* data taken from 2007 CSGVP

** agreed they volunteered in past 12 months (formal and informal not specified)

Committed in particular. Furthermore, the amount of time they spent volunteering was significantly less than the average Canadian, and especially the Very Committed.⁶³ Third, the rates of informal volunteering are ambiguous. My survey question "have you volunteered in the past twelve months" seems to have inadvertently implied formal volunteering, because in the interviews I found that several informants had answered "no" to the volunteering question, but had done things that would qualify as informal volunteering. In fact, there was not a person in the interview sample who had not helped another person outside their home at least once in the past year, whether that involved pushing someone's car, looking after a child, or giving someone a lift. For this reason, I submit that 100% of the

⁶³ The information in this chart is incomplete because the CSGVP does not provide this data

interviewees did some informal volunteerism in the twelve months prior to our interview. Had I separated the question on formal and informal volunteering in my survey, as CSGVP does, I suspect that the rates would have been much higher.

Overall, my data suggest that SDNRs are not heavily involved in formal volunteering, though they are relatively active helping others informally. In Figure 10, I have not estimated the average or median hours for informal volunteering for two reasons. First, CSGVP does not provide this information for informal volunteering, making comparisons impossible. Second, I find the category for informal volunteering too narrow. I want to suggest that informal volunteering be divided into two categories, namely “casual informal volunteering” versus “intentional informal volunteering.” What do I mean by this?

As I said, every person I interviewed mentioned at least one thing they did for others whether helping a neighbour, babysitting for friends, or assisting a stranger in some capacity. I consider this casual informal volunteering. The acts are undertaken as needed and do not imply or require further commitment. Yet not all informal volunteering is spontaneous. Just because no organization is involved does not mean there are no commitments. Intentional informal volunteering, however, implies some commitment. It is a non-institutional form of volunteering that takes place on a (semi) regular basis. Helen, for instance, spends “at least three hours a week, and that is being conservative” giving healing treatments to others at no charge. Darren also gives at least two free treatments a

month as part of his training to be a healer. In fact, it is common for more serious (which often means older) SDNR seekers to have trained in some healing modality or another. Miranda says, “Well I’m not doing any volunteer work but...I offer my services for things I’ve trained for like Reiki or Bach flower remedies. Listening, you know, encouraging.” Indeed, caring for the physical and emotional needs of others is a priority for many of the people I spoke with. Many times the time commitment was modest, especially for those busy with young families and career pressures, but for others—usually those with the time to spare—it amounted to considerable contributions of time and energy. Take for example, Casey, who told me that

there was a woman I looked after for about 5 years who I used to drive to her doctor’s appointments. I always seem to need to adopt somebody. Now there’s someone who lives close to here who had to give up her car so I’ve been taking her back and forth to her doctor’s appointments. It makes me feel good to do that.

Less dramatically but no less admirably, Alice Martin, a late middle-aged artist belongs to a prayer network. She prays nightly for people she doesn’t know for about twenty minutes before retiring for the evening. When I said to her “Well that adds up to a lot of time” she simply said, “Well not when you consider how many hours there are in a day.” In another case, Devon spent a year job sharing so her friend who was undergoing chemotherapy would not lose her job. Because she owns a successful business, I believed her when she said she did not do this for financial reasons.

In all, ten of my interviewees were trained in some healing or intuitive art—nearly a third of my sample, and all of them gave time to others in that

capacity free of charge. This is likely because my survey was promoted through the Therapeutic Touch Network of Ontario, and also, as mentioned by Tanis—a local healer—who referred many people to the study. It is not clear, then, if this high prevalence of volunteer healing work is common among SDNRs more broadly. Further study is needed to clarify this relationship. Nevertheless, the fact that only 38% of the interview cohort was engaged in formal volunteering likely has something to do with their being engaged with intentional informal volunteering.

Another dynamic that affected volunteerism in the cohort is due to “workplace advocacy.”⁶⁴ Trevor says, “During my work day I’ve done my responsibility—ordered fair trade coffee, promoted better health for people so I think that’s why I’m less involved in volunteering because when I get home I want to relax and think about other stuff.” Likewise, Kathleen says “My job is so draining and I deal with so many people all day long trying to help and counsel them that by the time I’m done I don’t have anything left. I realized that I don’t have the desire to talk to anybody after that. I’m very withdrawn.” Several women who work or used to work for social service agencies expressed feelings of having given back to the community through their work, such as Patricia who used to work in a social service agency. She indicated on the questionnaire that she had not volunteered in the past year. When I asked her why she told me, “In the past I have put in many, many hours of extra time that I did not bill for,

⁶⁴ Wuthnow discusses the ‘nonprofit professional’ that is, those individuals who serve their communities through paid work that addresses particular social problems. See *Loose Connections* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 47-50.

helping clients and being there for them. So, no, I don't volunteer: I feel I have done my part."

Why get involved?

The CSGVP also collects data concerning why people volunteer. The top eight reasons people offer are as follows: 1) to make a contribution to their community; 2) to use skills and experiences; 3) because they were personally affected by the cause the organization supports (e.g. diabetes); 4) to explore their own strengths; 5) to network or meet people; 6) because a friend of theirs volunteers; 7) to enhance job prospects; 8) for religious reasons (48). My questionnaire did not ask respondents to specify what motivated them to volunteer (and future research will certainly want to ask this), although this was assessed during the interviews.

Impressionistically, it seems that age, education and perceived state of good health and/or high level of energy were the main factors that distinguished those who did formal, or intentional informal volunteering and those who approached it in a more ad hoc manner. The top volunteers in the interview sample were typically the oldest and/or the most highly educated. There were exceptions of course. For instance, Fred Simpson—a 41-year-old man with special needs—was very involved in volunteering. Crippled by a polio vaccine when he was 10, he told me he is grateful for his circumstances because it has given him the chance to "be real and help others." Fred turned away from religion when a priest told him that his health problems were a result of something his parents did wrong. Since 1984 Fred has volunteered over 7000 hours for a variety of community

organizations. He adamantly believes “healing happens when we work together.” For him, his spirituality reflects his self-determinism and the desire to live a truly authentic life, despite the challenges he faces. Fred’s volunteerism stems from his personal experiences and most of his volunteer work involves helping others with disabilities. Likewise, Cathleen, who had cancer, volunteered extensively with the Cancer Society in the past (though not in the past year). No one I spoke with explicitly mentioned volunteering to network or improve job contacts; in almost every case it was a desire to either make a contribution to the community (14/32), to use skills (especially healing skills such as massage, Reiki and Therapeutic Touch) and talents (10/32), or to support a cause they felt strongly about (6/32). Two individuals mentioned volunteering because their friends did.

Overall, then, the picture that emerges here is that SDNRs are involved in volunteer work. They do not get recruited through church groups as so many of the religiously committed do, but they respond to requests for help and are, in many cases, eager to share their knowledge, skills and energy with their communities. Critics may say that the spiritual definitely not religious do not live up to the high standard set by the religiously committed in terms of hours of service. Given that the Very Committed contribute an average of 232 hours annually compared to only 123 for my whole questionnaire sample, this fact is not in dispute. Yet it is important to bear in mind that 70% of the questionnaire sample did register some voluntary action in the previous year. Without accurate data for informal versus formal volunteering, though, a precise evaluation of the matter is out of reach. I want to point out, though, that overall, the willingness of

SDNRs to volunteer (albeit likely for fewer hours) does not seem to suggest they are indifferent to various causes. At the same time, there is likely an underlying resistance to institutional volunteerism in any form. While my informants were not able to articulate it in a systematic way, they do seem to resist being hemmed in by any organization with a strong institutional mandate. This is not surprising given their countercultural orientation, but it goes beyond this too.

Robert Wuthnow has studied volunteering in the United States (1998b). He documents the various ways North American social institutions have changed since the fifties, and how looser, more sporadic forms of social engagement are replacing fixed commitments to organizations, especially those of a hierarchical nature such as fraternal clubs (1998b, 5). To keep pace with social change, institutions have adapted to the needs of volunteers by becoming more “porous.” This restructuring permits flexible time commitments and responds to constraints that might not work in the context of two-income families and others with already tight schedules. As he puts it, “loosely confederated structures are better able to adapt to the challenges of uncertain and complex circumstances” (5). Although Wuthnow thinks there is something to the claim that the fragmentation of American community can be traced to cultural individualism, and less willingness to participate in civic life, he also acknowledges that this doesn’t take into account the “institutional realities with which people are confronted” (6). In short, SDNRs, like many North Americans, are caught up in social realities that influence the amount and type of volunteering they do. People like Devon don’t want to be engaged with formal volunteering. “I show up where I think I’m

needed,” she says, “and if I have something to offer I do so.”

What about gender?

During the interview, Alice told me of a dream she had:

I had a dream and it was wonderful. There were all these peasant women. They were all daughters of Mary but they work in silence so you could never know because they just look like average peasant women who walk by you on the street and nobody would ever know all the work they do. And that is how I understand it: You just roll up your sleeves. This is the work that needs to be done and you just do it. You don't make a big issue of it. Just like the peasant women are invisible, you know, it's the same image. We [the SDNR community] are invisible, but we are out there working, doing the jobs that need to be done.

Alice's comment underscores a critical issue underlying social capital analysis in the SDNR cohort—gender. What, I ask, is the relationship between the invisibility of SDNR social capital and the fact that 80% of SDNRs are women? It is imperative that any analysis of SDNR social capital pay attention to the way social capital is constructed along gender lines.

Putnam has taken fire for his contention that one of the reasons social capital is dwindling in America today is because once women returned to the paid labour force they had less time to devote to community and other volunteer activities (O'Neill and Gidengil 2006). While he retreats from this earlier position in *Bowling Alone* and disclaims the idea that working women are to blame for our civic disengagement (2000, 201), he remains concerned that women working full time—whether by choice or necessity—are less involved with their communities than they used to be, which has contributed to an overall decline in social capital (Lowndes 2006, 217). Yet, critics have suggested, by its very design Putnam's

model favours forms of social capital that reinforce masculine forms of identity, relationality and power, and neglects the ways social ties, and therefore social capital, are constructed along gender lines (e.g., Lowndes 2006; Chambers 2006). While he acknowledges that women are more active in associations than men, his model does not consider the differences in the types of organizations men and women join, and how this produces differences in the way they access and accumulate social capital (Gidengil and O'Neill 2006, 2-3). His model is especially poor at detecting informal network ties and affiliations that are central to women's forms of social capital.

Overall, research has shown that women spend more time visiting friends than men (Gidengil and O'Neill 2006, 3), and that their volunteer work tends to focus on caring for others, especially disadvantaged social groups such as the poor, elderly and other women (Caiazza and Gault 2006, 102). British sociologist Marion Barnes, who specializes in issues of care and citizenship notes that care is not highly valued because it is not "associated with masculinist and materialist prioritization of individual autonomy" (61). It is not seen as having equal value to concepts such as rights and social justice largely because it is seen as an activity confined to the private sphere (61). As such, she writes, "normative notions of citizenship do not consider the feminist ethic of care as connected to the general good" (59). The reality is that while high profile acts of citizenship often take place in the public sphere where they are easy to see and measure, caring and the network of informal ties that women cultivate are less visible. Women's forms of social capital are often seen as less valuable in the quest to re-politicize the public

sphere.

Other demographic considerations

Other demographic characteristics of SDNRs bear on their social capital profile as well—factors that potentially offset the gender effect just described. While 64% of those who did formal or intentional informal volunteering in the past year (n=17) were female, 50% had no children, 35% were over the age of 50, 60% had at a university degree of some sort, and 57% had a family income in excess of \$50,000. Nearly 20% had family incomes in excess of \$100,000 annually. These data show that many of those who volunteer are both well educated and well off. Since these factors predict higher levels of volunteering, the high rates of volunteerism in the cohort cannot be evaluated strictly in terms of spiritual outlook or gender (CSGVP 2007, 38-39). In short, the demographics of the cohort should predict higher than average rates of volunteering to begin with. As such, it is very difficult to assess what role the spiritual beliefs and practices of my interviewees play in volunteerism specifically. This in conjunction with the ambiguities of my data make any firm conclusions on volunteering impossible, except to say that the SDNRs in this study are 1) open to volunteering, but 2) do not perform as well as the Very Committed.

Other civic associations

One of Putnam's major criticisms of contemporary associational life in America is that the 'participatory cultures' of yesteryear have been replaced by actions that play up "symbolic identity rather than personal involvement" (2000, 154).

According to two different surveys, he finds that Americans are less involved in local clubs and organizations than they were several decades ago (2000, 61). More often than not, membership in many forms of associations has been hollowed out, making them more “an honorific rhetorical device for fundraising” that allow people to become “consumers of a cause” (2000, 156). In this way, membership is not tantamount to involvement. Putnam’s model of social capital relies on active involvement in face-to-face activities. As discussed, religion is a vital catalyst for many forms of civic engagement in his view, precisely because it fosters contact between citizens. He notes how “religious people are enmeshed in webs of local churches, channels of religious information and networks of religious associations that make them readily available for mobilization” (2000, 162). Furthermore, since the eighties, he finds that it is evangelicals and not the “ideological heirs to the sixties” who demonstrate the strongest evidence of civic engagement (162).

In what follows I will be referring to the data presented in Figure 12. It compares my questionnaire samples with the Social Capital Benchmark Survey (SCBS). The SCBS was done between 2000 and 2001 with a nationally representative American sample (n=3003).⁶⁵ When I created my questionnaire, I used many questions from this survey, which is why I refer to it here. I chose this survey because Putnam was the lead investigator for the study, and it was specifically focused on the issue of social capital. The drawback, I now realize, is that the sample is American. Although the 2003 and 2008 cycles of the General

⁶⁵ <http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/SCCBS.asp>. Last accessed July 2, 2010.

Social Survey (Statistics Canada) assessed civic engagement, I was not able to access data that would allow me to make specific comparisons with respect to organizational involvement. I will make some general observations, however. Likewise, the rate that Very Committed Canadians engage in formal civic associations proved difficult to assess. Bowen's study does not provide this data, perhaps because he is not explicitly commenting on the types of associational activities listed here, likely in part because he is not concerned with analyzing the contributions of the Very Committed in terms of (Putnamian) social capital.

One of the most compelling findings in the data on associational membership is question 84 (the fifth question in Figure 12), which asks whether respondents had participated in a professional, trade, university, farm or business association, but over the past 12 months. Here, the data clearly shows an extraordinarily high level of associational involvement with 50% of the sample engaged in such activities in the preceding year, a figure nearly double the rate of the SCBS sample (26%). This figure climbs to 58% for those involved with spiritual groups. Furthermore, SDNRs are more likely than the comparison group to have served as an officer or worked on a committee of a local club or organization (27% vs. 20%).

The question of whether SDNRs favour groups with a more self-interested focus deserves consideration (e.g. a person sits on a committee as part of their professional development or business commitments etc.). The responses to question 74, "Did any of the groups you are involved with take any local action for social or political reform in the past 12 months?" show SDNRs demonstrating

significantly higher levels of other directed engagement than the comparison cohort (33% vs. 20% climbing to 38% for those who belong to a spiritual group). According to the 2008 GSS, 61% of Canadians belonged to at least one organization, but only 48% participate in these organizations at least once a month. Of these, sports and recreational organizations were the most common, followed by unions and professional associations (25%). Only 8% of Canadians belonged to a fraternal or service club in 2008.⁶⁶ About 40% of Canadians who are involved with organizations participate in them about once a week, 20% do so a few times a month, and 18% about once a month; 15% of Canadians participate once a year, and 6% were had not participated at all in the past year. Participation rates are as follows: once a week (40%); few times a month (20%); once a month (18%); once or twice a year (15%); no participation (6%). 23% were involved in groups where at least part of the interactions were conducted through the Internet.

Overall, my survey did not ask respondents how many organizations they belonged to or specifically ask questions concerning the level of involvement with those activities. For this, I rely on my interview data. Of the interview sample every individual but one was involved in some sort of organization ranging from gyms, political parties, book clubs, spiritual groups, support groups to business and professional associations. On average, the interviewees belonged to two groups; the median number of groups was also two. This means that 97% of the sample was involved with at least one group, which is well above the Canadian

⁶⁶ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-640-x/89-640-x2009001-eng.pdf>. Last accessed July 2, 2010.

Figure 11: Incidence of civic engagement of SDNRs compared with a national American sample ranked from highest to lowest. American data comes from the Putnam's Social Capital Benchmark Study (2001).

Incidence of civic engagement based on SDNRs questionnaire responses compared to a national American sample in descending order.				
My survey questions In the past 12 months have you	Q/A Whole sample	Q/A Spiritual Group	Q/A Spiritual Practice	Social Capital Benchmark Study
	% "yes"	% "yes"	% "yes"	% "yes"
Participated in a professional, trade, university, farm or business association? (Q 86)	50%	58%	51%	26%
Belonged to a society or worked on a special project with others? (Q 89)	50%	44%	55%	n/a
Attended any public meetings? (Q 85)	35%	38%	32%	n/a
Did any of the groups you are involved with take any local action for social or political reform in the past 12 months? (Q 74)	33%	38%	36%	20%
Participated in a neighbourhood association or worked on a community project? (Q 84)	32%	31%	33%	39%
give a public talk, written a letter to the editor, or been interviewed for radio or television in the past 12months?(Q 76)(	30%	36%	44%	n/a
Served as an officer or worked on a committee of any local club or organization? (Q91)	27%	31%	27%	20%
Do you belong to any other kinds of clubs or organizations? (Q 92)	23%	25%	27%	16%
Participated in a parent association like the PTA, or other school support service? (Q 83)	11%	7%	11%	22%
Donated blood? (Q 82)	6%	7%	7%	17%

average. Although I was not sufficiently rigorous in collecting data concerning the exact amount of time spent involved in these groups, their involvement was not typically of the superficial, membership-based types of associations that Putnam looks down on. For example, Richard, belonged to the following four groups: a support group, a dance group, a tai chi group and a condominium association group. He was very involved in the tai chi and support group activities, which he undertook weekly and bi-weekly. Likewise, Bernadine belonged to the healing network, a genealogical society, and a retirees group that had been meeting monthly since 1997. Examples of light involvement were few: only 6 people belonged to things like gyms or Health Associations (e.g. Diabetes Association) that did not require meeting with others on a regular basis. In all, the data collected from the interview cohort does not support the contention that SDNRs are socially withdrawn.

Before concluding, I want to briefly address two final issues, namely blood donation and involvement with Parent Teacher Associations (PTA). While I cannot readily account for the reason SDNRs donate blood less frequently than the American sample, a quick online search reveals that only 3.7% of Canadians donated blood in 2006 (in Ontario, the rate is only 2.9%).⁶⁷ SDNRs perform better than most Canadians on this measure. As for not participating in school support service groups, the SDNRs' low score probably stems from the fact that 54% of respondents do not have children. For a similar reason, my interview data are only

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(http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20060727/blood_donation_canada_060727?s_name=&no_ads=). Last accessed July 2, 2010.

marginally helpful in terms of filling out the picture since only four informants had school age children living at home. Of these, the three who did have children (Hope, Miranda and Nola) were all involved in school support activities.

According to the NSGVP (2001) only 8% of Canadians surveyed said they were a member of or had participated in “a neighborhood, civic or community association, for example PTA or alumni, block parents or neighbourhood watch, etc.” in the past 12 months (98)

Overall, it is important to once again recognize that organizational involvement is strongly associated with education and household income. Among individuals aged 25 to 54, 78% of those with a university degree were involved in at least one organization, while this was the case for 56% of those with high school and 40% of those with less than high school. Similarly, individuals residing in households with higher incomes were more likely to be involved in at least one organization than individuals residing in lower income households. And finally, immigrants who had arrived in Canada since 1980 were less likely than earlier arrivals and Canadian-born persons to have been involved in at least one organization. As with the other measures of social capital examined so far, therefore, the socio-demographics for SDNRs (above average education, above average income and so forth) make it more likely that they will be drawn into associations. A highly skilled worker is more likely to be recruited to sit on a Board of Directors, for example, than a shop clerk. In other words, SDNRs (especially my interview sample) are generally a well-heeled group, which should predict strong community involvement in the cohort. Because these factors

contribute to the likelihood of civic engagement, it is difficult to conclusively determine whether SDNRs are really pulling their weight or not. I would guess that because religious organizations create many opportunities to become involved with one's community—church attendance is in fact already an act of community engagement—the rates of civic engagement for the Very Committed and even the Less Committed will be more involved than SDNRs. Churches also have the latitude to encourage such engagement on moral grounds, which may spur individuals who might otherwise sit on the sidelines into action. Still, one could argue that while churches are definitely a good way to get involved in one's community, it is not the only or the best way to do this. The only reliable way to know for certain, as mentioned already, is through a case matched (age, income, gender, etc.) study of SDNRs versus Very Committed and non-religious Canadians. My data are simply a starting point that suggests SDNRs do get involved in their communities. In many cases they want to be involved and actively seek out ways to meet and help others.

Recreation and leisure associations

Although Putnam contends that American's involvement in many types of traditional civic associations has atrophied over the past several decades, he admits that “the plethora of encounter groups, reading groups, support groups, self-help groups and the like have become important anchors in the emotional lives of millions of Americans” (2000,149). He does not see these sorts of groups, however, as sufficient to reverse the tide of diminishing social capital. In

particular he finds that

self-help and support groups do not typically play the same role as traditional civic associations. Alone among twenty-two different sorts of groups to which Americans belongs, membership in self-help groups are not nearly so closely associated with regular community involvement such as voting, volunteering, giving to charity, working on community problems, or talking with neighbours, as are more traditional civic associations such as religious, youth, neighbourhood, school services, fraternal and service groups. (151)

In retrospect I see that I did not collect much data about respondents' involvement in small groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, because I thought that these forms of civic engagement would not likely impress critics since they are ostensibly self and not other focused. I did find, however, that only 66% of the survey respondents said they belonged to a sports team, recreational group or club (question 88) compared with 77% of Putnam's Social Capital Benchmark Survey (SCBS—see page 194 for details) who said they belonged to such groups.

The interview data however revealed that several of the individuals (e.g., Zoë, Helen, Trudy, Alice, Ashara, Martin, Madagascar and another gentleman who had to be excluded because of missing data) were quite involved in community art, theatre projects or music groups. Ashara who admitted outright she didn't vote or care about politics was very involved in voluntary amateur community theatre. When I interviewed her she was in two plays, and spending 4-5 hours a day, five days a week in rehearsals. She was also part of a local playwright's group that met weekly. Although she described herself as quite introverted by nature, she felt these activities were an important way she connected with and contributed to her community.

Likewise Trudy was very involved with the local arts scene. When I asked her what brings communities together she said the following:

Art! I know that sounds like a glib answer but it's not. In Canada with all the multi-culturalism and all the languages that we have, music is a way to bring people together; theatre can be wonderful as an expression of other people's experience so they can understand one another. I think artwork in a public place where people can stop and talk about it, or where you use architecture, gardening and landscaping to create beautiful places, I think all of those things create community... Last year a small group of three people put together a list of artists from this community [to be honoured once a month by] Waterloo City Council. And it started out with them wondering why we were doing this and towards the end they were just delighted. It drew that community of people together.

A final example is Zoë—the youngest informant in the study—who told me that a few years ago her band put on a benefit concert to raise money for Doctors Without Borders. Although they only raised about \$250, she said they did it because they were “just trying to do something instead of making money for ourselves. If we love what we do we should try to get together and do something for other people.”

Overall, Ashara, Trudy and Zoë are not alone in their desire to serve others and their community through their creativity. In his study of the relationship between art and spirituality (2001), Robert Wuthnow found that “remarks about service and feeling the necessity of what one does occurs frequently in comments about spiritual practice. Although artistic work is generally done alone, just as prayer and meditation are, artists feel that is in a small way serving others, and this is part of what gives it spiritual meaning” (115-116). As such, he thinks that art can be a form of spiritual practice and also a form of service when it focuses people's attention on “questions about what matters in

life” (138). It could be argued therefore, that these individuals are looking for ways to convert very private aspects of their spiritual lives into communally oriented gatherings and projects, which might have some value to the broader community.

Turning to my questionnaire data, we find SDNRs expressing an enthusiasm for the arts in their unusually high positive response to the question “In the past 12 months have you participated in a literary, art, musical, dancing or singing group?” (question 87). Whereas only 20% of those who responded to the Social Capital Benchmark Survey said they belonged to such a group, 45% of my questionnaire respondents did. The figure was even higher for those who had a dedicated practice (54%) and those who belonged to a spiritual group (57%). I was not able to locate comparison data in Bowen’s analysis and therefore I am not able to assess how this compares with the religiously committed. Future studies wanting to explore the ways in which SDNRs are socially engaged will want to focus on alternative forms of social engagement such as those mentioned here, since groups of these sorts not only provide avenues of social engagement, they do so in ways that emphasize self-expression. As such, they may prove to be an influential mode of social integration for this cohort.

Charitable Giving

The 2007 CSGVP survey shows that 84% of Canadians made donations to charitable or non-profit organizations over the preceding 12-month period (14). Likewise, 85% of Canadians donated clothing, toys, household goods and so forth

(14). The net result is that 94% of Canadians made either cash or “in-kind” donations (14). The rate of charitable giving in 2007 was unchanged from the figures collected in 2004 (14), although the amount donated—approximately 10-billion dollars—represented a 12% increase from the 8.9 billion dollars donated in 2004 (14). This is attributable to a both larger contributions as well as a growth in the Canadian population. The average annual donation was \$437 dollars, with a median donation of \$120 (14). While most Canadians make some sort of charitable contribution, a small percentage of donors are responsible for the bulk of the money donated. As the CSGVP notes, “50% of donors who provided \$120 or less accounted for only 5% of the total value of all donations” (15). In comparison, the 10% who gave more than \$1002 contributed 62% of all donations made (15).

I collected data on charitable giving through the following questions:

- 1) If applicable, please indicate which of the following types of organizations have you donated to in the past 12 months? (Question 93)
- 2) In total, how much money have you contributed to these causes in the past 12 months? (Question 94). Answer options were:
 - a. I have not given any money to charity in the past 12 months
 - b. Less than \$100
 - c. \$100 to less than \$500
 - d. \$500 to less than \$1000
 - e. \$1000 to less than \$5000
 - f. More than \$5000
 - g. Don’t know

Compared with the average Canadian, my data shows that 90% of the SDNRs surveyed made charitable contributions in the preceding 12 months, which is higher than the Canadian average of 84% who made cash donations, but lower

than the 94% who made cash and in-kind donations. My survey did not distinguish between these two groups.

Unfortunately, owing to the way question 94 was worded, it is impossible to know the exact amount of money questionnaire respondents donated.

Furthermore, given that the average Canadian donation is \$437 with a median donation of \$120, offering respondents a single option for the donations between \$100 to \$500 (option 'd' above) makes accurate comparisons with either Canadians in general or the Very Committed in particular almost impossible.

Clearly, future research will want to pay attention to the precise wording of questions so that direct comparisons can be made. While it would have been best if these data were more precise, it is still possible to make some general remarks concerning the approximate donations made and the types of organizations supported. We can also get a preliminary sense of differences that might exist between the Spiritual Group and Spiritual Practice subgroups in terms of charitable giving. Fortunately, because I collected precise figures for charitable donations made in the previous year in the interviews I am able to draw on that information here. For this reason, I will focus almost exclusively on the interview cohort in the evaluation of charitable giving. Here we find that the median donation was \$120 and the average donation was about \$447, both of which approximate the Canadian median and average as reported by CSGVP. For those who belonged to a spiritual group the average was \$367 with a median donation of \$90. These figures were considerably higher for those individuals with a dedicated spiritual practice. For this group the average charitable donation was

\$615 with a median donation of \$200. Given the very small size of this sample, these findings are tentative at best. Nevertheless, they contradict the Putnamian perspective that group association alone is the source of social capital, and suggest that for the spiritual but religiously unaffiliated at least, dedication to a spiritual practice is correlated with a social ideal which encourages civic minded behaviors.

According to the CSGVP, the four factors that influence rates of charitable giving include older age, higher income, higher level of education, and being employed versus unemployed. Furthermore, women are more likely to donate than men, and married individuals are more likely than singles to make charitable donations (17). These factors hold true in my interview sample: those who gave any amount below the group median of \$120 (n=16) have an approximate annual income that is half of those who gave more than median. They tended to be younger and have a less formal education. Ashara is a highly dedicated spiritual practitioner who reflects this dynamic:

I would love to give more to the world with the energy of cash currency. At the moment that is not my karma, not my joy. You know, if I had it I would give it. If I have it I do give it, perhaps in excess. Historically I have given to charity but not much since I've spent most of my adult life living below the poverty line. I've never had much to give. I have no savings, no RSP, no plan for the future because if I have it I give it to friends to neighbours to charity. I'd love to give more.

From a slightly different perspective Kirby also limits his charitable giving to focus on caring for his wife and daughter. In 2007, he contributed approximately \$50 to charity. He says, "This summer we found cool sites for Christmas gifts where we could buy chickens for a village or whatever. Other than

that I'm not much for charity. If I had a wealth of money to give I would, but I have to look after me and my family first." Likewise, Darren thinks people don't give more because they are already overextended financially. He finds it hard making ends meet sometimes, and feels the taxes are very high in Ontario. "So it's no wonder," he says, "that people as a whole are saying 'no-no-no-no-no, I've got bills to pay!' Why should I be giving, giving, giving? What if my bucket goes dry back at home sort of thing."

Still, those interviewees with at least an undergraduate degree (n=17) donated an average of only \$505 compared to the Canadian average of \$711. My entire interview cohort also gave less than religiously active Canadians. The CSGVP cites weekly religious attendance as a strong predictor of being a top donor—the top 25% of Canadian donors who donated an average \$364 in 2007. Their data shows that 49% of weekly attenders are top donors versus only 15% of non-attenders (20). Among the entire interview sample only 34.3% made donations in excess of \$364, and though this is still significantly higher than the 15% for non-attenders, it is significantly less than the nearly half of Very Committed religious practitioners who gave this amount. Furthermore, the average donation for Very Committed Canadians is \$1038 annually (23) compared with the \$295 average donation for those who did not attend religious services weekly (23). Even the \$615 average of the interviewees who have a serious spiritual practice is well off the mark of the \$1038 average annual donation by religiously committed Canadians.

Several of the interviewees had negative views of charitable organizations

especially those charities associated with religious groups. Here is what they said:

Shelly:

I guess you would want to do a lot of research if you were choosing a charity to donate to. I always feel a little concerned what they are actually doing with the money...if it's going where it should be going. (No donation in 2007)

Trevor:

I never feel guilty about not giving to charities. I give money to the kids at the door, sure, but I'm not going to give money to cancer R and D until they incorporate complementary and alternative therapies. I'm not giving them money for research that fails to produce results year after year. (About \$40 in 2007)

Laila:

I was watching World Vision on TV and decided I wanted to do that. And that was a very unconscious decision because a year ago, last June, we were driving to Toronto and I saw the World Vision building. And I thought, "I'm feeding that." And I thought, "Yes I'm doing some good maybe because these kids are getting an education, but what else am I feeding? So that was a bad choice, but I'm not going to stop doing it because there's a little girl [depending on me]. But it was just such a shock to see that big beautiful building." (About \$423 in 2007)

Zoë:

I don't like Christian Children's Fund even though it seems like a good, decent thing. [It makes me] think of people going into these communities and saying, "We're Christian, believe in what we believe in. Ignore your traditions"...I just don't like supporting that kind of ideal where to help people they have to be Christian. But anything I can do to help I will. It's usually when opportunities arise. (Less than \$100 in 2007)

Devon:

I am a little concerned about charity and how charity goes because it gets stopped at the top and the people who the charity is for never really see much of it...Those who say the churches do global charity—no. The churches have an excuse to push their dogma on a local level and call it charity. (Less than \$100 in 2007)

Yana:

You have these religions going into these other countries and taking away their cultures and trying to force a different culture on them that doesn't

really work for them and things fall apart. (Prolific fundraising for local women's charities in previous years but no formal donations in 2007)

Generally speaking, these types of responses were more typical of the younger and less educated interviewees. According to CSGVP about 33% of Canadians say they do not give more money to charity because they are not sure that the money will be managed properly (32). From this perspective, there is nothing to suggest that SDNRs are more suspicious than other Canadians in this regard, though based on the high value they place on tolerance and freedom, they are unlikely to support charities that they perceive as impinging on recipients' religious or cultural autonomy. Many of the top donors were not overly concerned about these issues per se. In fact, one of the top donors I interviewed donates almost all the money she makes at a part time job to a well-known Christian charity. She says:

I can't fix AIDS in Africa, but I can support children who've lost parents to AIDS. That I can do. I have that. I do talk to people about World Vision. I now have my brother sponsoring a child, and I have friends who at Christmas, instead of exchanging gifts we buy something from the World Vision catalogue together. I get so emotional when I talk about this. The situation for kids always affects me a lot. I donate to make the world a better place for children. (About \$1725 in 2007)

Likewise, Bernadine is happy to make donations to explicitly religious groups:

I'll put \$10 or \$20 in for the Salvation Army. I really don't care what religion it is. When I was in Hamilton I regularly gave to the Salvation Army, and the Good Shepherd, which is Catholic, and to the SPCA and various other things. Sometimes it was to get a tax [receipt] but many times it wasn't. Many times I've given money that never counted, but that's just the way you do it. (About \$750 in 2007)

Overall, my interview data suggests that the SDNRs donate about the same as the average Canadian, though significantly less than the Very Committed.

Those with a spiritual practice seem to outperform those who belong to a spiritual group. The interview cohort is more mature, affluent and well educated than the Canadian average, factors that should predict higher than average rates of charitable giving. This suggest that perhaps the spiritual but religiously unaffiliated are not pulling their weight, that they have the social and financial resources to make bigger contributions than seen here. The key question to consider here (as with volunteering) is whether it is being religious or being in a religious organization that accounts for the surfeit of charitable giving by the Very Committed. In other words, do the Very Committed contribute more because of situational factors (e.g. because they are regularly exposed to appeals for donations through their place of worship) or ethical ones (e.g. the ethical precepts of religions encourage charitable giving)? There is probably no easy way to sort this out absolutely, but according to the CSGVP, the most common ways Canadians made donations in 2007 were as follows: 1) through the mail (16%); 2) through street or shopping mall solicitation (12%); 3) through a place of worship (11%); and, 4) sponsoring participants in events such as walk-a-thons (11%) (28-29). Furthermore, the CSGVP also asked donors what motivated them to give to charity. Here, 32% said they did so to fulfill a religious obligation (31). There is therefore, a greater likelihood that a religiously affiliated individual will be encouraged to contribute because they go to church, and because they feel it is their religious duty. Interestingly, these figures corroborate my finding that a spiritual practice is more compelling than a spiritual group in terms of promoting civically engaged behaviors. This is a link that future research could profitably

explore, though at this stage, it is still unclear whether these factors are enough to account for the considerably higher rate of giving from religious donors.

The CSGVP does provide some further information about the role religion plays in charitable giving. First, 46% of all donations made in Canada in 2007 went to religious organizations (24). Second, top donors overwhelmingly favour religious causes and account for 91% of the total value donated to religious organizations (24). In fact, 75% of the value of religious donations comes from the top 10% of Canadian donors (24). This means that religious bodies attract high level funding, but they do so from a small number of individuals. Thus, the high average of the Very Committed is dependent on a handful of generous donors rather than broadband generosity among the Very Committed per se. Finally, while weekly attenders make 74% of the total donations to religious organizations, they only account for 26% of the total donations to secular or non-religious ones ⁶⁸ This means weekly attenders direct their charity to their houses of worship rather than supporting secular causes. In fact, 80% of the donations made to secular agencies come from those individuals who are not weekly attenders.

Since the funds religious donors are contributing are being used to provide services that the donors benefit from, it is reasonable to ask whether this type of

⁶⁸ Although the CSGVP does not provide this information, Bowen's earlier data shows that the Very Committed not only give more to religious groups than the Non-Religious, but they also give more to secular agencies than the Non-Religious do (\$32 vs. \$17 median donation respectively) (174). They also have a higher rate of giving than the Non-Religious (78% vs 68% respectively) (174). This, however, does not constitute evidence that the spiritual but religiously unaffiliated are also not involved in secular charities.

giving is as altruistic as it first appears. Because the CSGVP does not give detailed information about the ways religious organizations spend their funds, there is no way to know what percentage of their budgets religious groups spend on in-house programs compared with services for the broader community. Certainly a large budget is needed for the maintenance of 'church' properties, including heat, insurance, lighting, mortgage costs, and so forth. Bowen estimates that this costs somewhere between 25% and 40% of a typical congregation's budget (177). He also makes the valid point that these buildings are not only used by the congregation, but also offer meeting spaces for a range of community groups such as Girl Guides and Scouts, Alcoholics Anonymous and daycare. He says, "Faith communities therefore provide, subsidize and maintain a major part of the physical plant that brings Canadians together and creates community, mutual aid, and civility" (178). It would not be fair to say, then, that just because religious donations go into the maintenance of religious grounds and properties, it is only the religious who benefit. Our communities would not be better off without access to the communal spaces religious communities provide.

In short, there is little evidence to support the contention that the spiritual definitely not religious are as generous as religiously committed Canadians. By the same token, there is also little to support any contention that being SDNR produces generally inferior rates of charitable donation either. A valuable future research project would be to compare the rates and level of charitable giving among case-matched religiously versus spiritually committed individuals. This is really the only way to get a more precise sense of how inherent differences in

religious philosophy and habits of congregating affect this aspect of social capital, especially given that census data cannot distinguish between individuals who are spiritual but not religious, or spiritual definitely not religious.

Conclusion

“Social networks create value for the people who belong to them” (Putnam 2002, 8), and in this chapter, I have explored the type of social networks SDNRs are embedded in, and how this creates value, not just for SDNRs (bonding social capital), but for the generalized other (bridging social capital). My research suggests that SDNRs are generally active and engaged in their communities. They have many close friends and socialize with them often. They also belong to many types of leisure associations as well as more formal, civic ones. There is nothing, therefore, supporting the thesis that they are inherently atomistic, socially disengaged, citizens. They join with others in a variety of groups, and more intimate, one-on-one acts of sharing and kindness. In many cases, they go out of their way to help others.

Yet, while I found high levels of social trust, a fact that did translate—as Putnam would predict—into a host of socially engaged behaviors, this did not extend to volunteering or charitable giving. Notwithstanding the tentative nature of my findings, it appears that Bowen is correct that the Very Committed eclipse SDNRs in terms of the social and financial contributions they make. Because one of my main intentions in this chapter was to see if SDNRs generate social capital rich in public, and not strictly private, benefits this is a significant finding, and

one that must be taken seriously.

At the same time, it would be unfortunate if such a finding obscured or overruled other relevant dynamics that might be playing out. For example, this research has unveiled what I think is the intriguing possibility that SDNRs are finding ways to create outward looking social capital even without the benefit of fixed institutional means to do so. My results suggest this could be happening through formal (e.g., yoga studios) and intentional informal (e.g. Helen, Muriel, and Yana's spiritual groups) channels. Much more research will be needed to confirm how extensive such networks—and their associated forms of social capital—really are. Insiders familiar with the workings of the holistic milieu, which is to say, individuals with a good knowledge of the types of networks formed by SDNRs, and wherewithal to gain access to them, will likely be in the best position to pursue such matters.

In a more theoretical vein, it is also important to keep in mind that social capital is a gendered construct. Putnam's model tends to favour masculinist forms of civic engagement, namely those that are most visible in the public sphere. Given that 74% of my questionnaire sample was female (and that women made up 80% of the holistic milieu, in Kendal), gender issues cannot be ignored when assessing the social capital of this cohort. In particular, I have suggested that much more attention needs to be paid to the way women's informal networks and care giving roles influence the types of social capital they create.

Finally, despite the academic cachet of Putnam's model, there may be better ways to conceptualize the social tenor of religiously unaffiliated

spirituality. While his theory does provide much analytic purchase, its fundamentally bureaucratic nature makes it an unlikely instrument for tapping into the non-institutional mindset of SDNRs, many of whom are content with loose connections when it comes to civic engagement. New theories will be required to clarify and predict the nature of SDNR social capital. This pilot study has suggested that narcissism critique only forestalls this development. Given the possibility that solid and liquid forms of spirituality will grow in the years ahead, it will be important to have a quantitatively accurate picture of their engagement style and predilections. This may seem like rhetoric but considering 48% of volunteering takes place because an individual was asked (CSGVP 2008, 48), SDNRs may be a source of untapped civic potential. If my analysis is correct, and they are indeed a community high in social trust, there is a good possibility they could be more fully mobilized. SDNRs could well represent a valuable social resource that is currently underutilized. From my perspective, the willingness of many of the people I spoke with to be involved, and their level of care and concern for the wellbeing of others, including the planet itself, suggests that the path to engaging these individuals will be relatively straightforward for agencies, networks or causes that speak the language of this cohort. While solid spirituality may not be the “first language” of North American culture (to use Bellah’s turn of phrase), it is certainly an increasingly common dialect, so to speak. Based on my analysis in the first and second chapters, separating SDNRs (and SBNRs) from religious nones, others, or “simply Christians” need not be difficult. It only requires the right questions be asked. The value of my research is that it stipulates

more precisely what those questions should be. With these cohorts more clearly identified, larger scale studies of their social capital repertoire can begin.

In the meantime, I want to pursue an interpretation of the data presented here. In the final two chapters I offer an analysis of their philosophy of social engagement based on their values. Combining Tipton's anthropology of American moral cultures and Inglehart's theory of postmaterialism, I suggest that SDNRs can be considered "postmaterialist-expressivists," a distillation that explains a great deal about their socio-political morality.

Chapter 6

“Countercultural Expressivism:” The Role of Spiritual Values in Engaged Citizenship

Introduction

In chapter two I discussed some of the specific social reasons why solid and liquid spiritualities are increasingly popular today. I described how in the post-War era, rising levels of education changed the social and religious landscape.

Preeminently, there was an increasingly widespread acceptance of egalitarianism, and demands to limit the scope of institutional authority. With these changes, many turned away from organized religion, and began to pursue more autonomous spiritual quests. As we saw in chapter three (the critique of religiously unaffiliated spirituality) these socio-structural changes gave rise to concerns that the concomitant increase in subjectivity was destined to have ambiguous or even dangerous social outcomes.

Many theorists are more optimistic about the way social changes since the counterculture have impacted individuals and society (Roszak 1978, Inglehart 1977, 1997; Roof 1993, 1999; Dawson 1998a, 1998b, 2006a, Heelas 1996, 2006, 2008; Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Inglehart and Welzel 2005, 2010; Thompson 2005; Aupers and Houtman 2005; Chambers 2006; Adams 2007; Dalton 2008). This is not to say that adapting to new cultural and religious horizons after the social dislocations of the sixties has been easy. The social scientific literature contains many descriptions of how processes of modernization have thinned the fabric of social life and made it more complex than ever for individuals to make

meaning and feel secure in their lives (e.g., Bellah et. al 1985; Giddens 1991, Beck 1992, Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994; Bauman 2001; Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Despite these complications, though, many individuals are finding new ways of living productive, meaningful lives. Using my questionnaire and qualitative data, I specifically suggest that SDNR individuals are finding ways to retain autonomy while finding connection with others, and ways to make what they consider important contributions to society. In the next two chapters I want to argue that their sense of what it means to be a good citizen flows out of their combined countercultural and generally postmaterialist orientation. This understanding represents a refinement of Steve Tipton's "widely accepted" analysis of the varieties of American moral culture (Dawson 2006a, 44).

In *Getting Saved From the Sixties* (1982), American sociologist of religion Steve Tipton argues that after the sixties, biblical morality (Bellah's first moral language) ceased to be prescriptive for masses of Americans. Discontent to adopt a strictly utilitarian moral position, many Americans who became involved in NRMs did so as a way to innovate moral solutions that made sense given the facts of their social and personal realities. As such, they created hybrid moral systems that combined the new expressivist countercultural morality with pre-existing moral systems (1982, 232, 280).

To a great extent, my research findings corroborate Tipton's premise. I find plenty of anecdotal evidence that my informants resonate with the countercultural expressivist morality he describes. Tipton's premise, however, is not that countercultural expressivism is an independent moral system. Rather, it is

something that complements more widespread, enduring moral cultures. While I agree with Tipton's analysis for the most part, my sense is that SDNRs do not quite fit comfortably into any of the analytic boxes he describes. Granted my cohort is much larger than the three groups he specifically studied, but given my research aims, a better solution for me is to take Tipton's analysis in a slightly new direction by arguing that SDNR spirituality represents a conjunction between countercultural expressivism and postmaterialism. In other words, I want to think about the normative stances as "materialist" and "postmaterialist" rather than biblical or utilitarian, as Bellah et al. (1985) and Tipton do.⁶⁹

I begin this chapter by discussing Tipton's analysis of American moral cultures and then, drawing on my interview material, show how SDNR worldviews embody his description of counterculture expressivism. The next chapter extends this by considering how this countercultural stance merges with another value orientation, namely postmaterialism. Taken together, the two perspectives afford a fuller picture of the social ethic of religiously unaffiliated spirituality.

Before embarking on this analysis, however, I want to acknowledge the strong similarity between countercultural expressivism and postmaterialism—that is, countercultural expressivism encompasses the postmaterialist ethic to a large degree. It is reasonable to ask, therefore, if much is to be gained by conflating these categories in this manner. My rationale is as follows: Tipton's categories

⁶⁹ Tipton also refers to "regular morality," as I will discuss.

help refine a subgroup of postmaterialist seekers whose distinguishing feature is what he calls “acosmic monism.” In short, SDNR is a specific way of being postmaterialist. As a political scientist, Inglehart does not focus on the spiritual parameters of postmaterialism; it is predominantly a theory of changing social values based on economic changes in the post-War era, and the social implications of that. As such, “expressive postmaterialism,” introduces a new and potentially valuable analytic category.

NRMs as a response to value changes since the sixties

Sociologists of religion commonly equate the emergence of NRMs in the seventies and eighties with a shift of values (Bellah 1976; Wuthnow 1978; Tipton 1982; Roof 1993; Heelas 1996; Kent 2001; Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Dawson 2006a). These scholars have all addressed the correlation between the emergence of NRMs and the changing moral climate in the wake of the counterculture and its associated socio-political dynamics.

In the early seventies, Bellah and his colleague Charles Glock initiated a research project in the San Francisco Bay area (Bellah 1976, 333). Their objective was to understand the “religious dimensions” of the countercultural upheavals (1976, 333). Bellah’s interpretation of the sixties was that this was a “deeply negative” event that constituted a major “erosion of the legitimacy of the American way of life” (1976, 341). In the end the political movements and the counterculture did not even survive the decade (1976, 333). What did survive, though, he argued, were a variety of NRMs (successor movements) that

responded to the needs of many who had nothing to show for their dreams and revolutionary fervor other than “anxious concerns for survival—physical and moral...” (1976, 342). One of the functions of NRMs in this context was to provide moral solutions, which manifested as a series of “ingenious compromises between the status quo and some other alternative state of affairs” (Dawson 2006a, 40).

Tipton’s study expands Bellah notion of successor movements through a study of three alternative religious movements in the San Francisco Bay area.⁷⁰ His study focused on how members of a born again Christian sect, a Zen Buddhist centre, and est training seminars (a training for maximizing one’s potential innovated by Werner Erhard) joined NRMs as a way to resolve the ambiguity of their countercultural ideals. Specifically, these groups each presented a unique response to the tension youth felt as a result of standing against some forms of culture and politics (e.g., the war in Vietnam) while simultaneously needing to operate within the system to establish themselves in functional ways. *Getting Saved* shows that the NRMs helped youth reestablish meaning and order in their lives.

In what follows I argue that solid spirituality is fundamentally a successor movement. The moral logic of the new spiritual trajectory (solid and in many cases liquid) is captured in Tipton’s delineation of the countercultural expressivist ideal. Tipton’s research provides a way to think about the moral culture of SDNR,

⁷⁰ Tipton was a graduate student of Bellah as stated in the introduction of *Getting Saved From the Sixties*

and get a clear sense of the values associated with this spiritual orientation.

This chapter begins with an overview of the moral systems Tipton describes, namely biblical, regular, and utilitarian.⁷¹ Most of the discussion is devoted to the utilitarian and expressivist forms since they are the most significant for the purposes of this analysis. Furthermore, biblical morality has already been covered to a large extent in my overview of Bellah's critique of therapy culture. I will then introduce material from my interviews to show how SDNRs reiterate the key features of the countercultural expressivist ethic he describes. This will lay the foundation for the discussion in the final chapter of this thesis, which integrates the value horizons of the countercultural expressivist ideal with postmaterialism. The analysis is arranged in this manner to provide indications of the strongly postmaterialist orientation of SDNRs, and consolidate my argument that their political engagement style is consistent with that orientation.

Steve Tipton's typology of American moral culture

Biblical morality

Biblical morality produces an authoritative style of ethical evaluation; its keywords are duty and obedience (Tipton 1982, 3). Acts are right because God commands them. God's moral authority extends to those institutions, which embody the will of God such as the church, or in some cases, the state. Freedom

⁷¹ Morality is a social phenomenon: our social reality necessarily requires a public system of behavioral norms and values, which can reduce or eliminate harm to others. Values are shared, relatively general beliefs that define desirable behaviors, whereas norms are more precise rules governing how members of a society should behave (e.g., how close to stand next to a stranger) (Hewitt et al. 2008, 38-39). Because it is informal, morality—unlike laws—is subject to interpretation.

here is not the freedom to do as one pleases, but the freedom to choose the actions God has commanded (5). As such it is a deontological theory of right action, where doing one's duty is tantamount to fulfilling one's moral obligations. Since the end of the Second World War, biblical morality has lost its status as the prevailing cultural norm leaving individuals with fewer ways to construct their moral identities. It has been challenged primarily by what Tipton calls "regular morality."

Regular morality

The second moral culture is also connected to biblical morality but is not based on God's revelation, but rather on reason. Tipton calls this "regular morality" and it produces a rationalistic form of moral evaluation. An act is moral because it accords with rules and norms established on the basis of reason (5). This morality influences liberal strands of Christianity and Judaism, as well as philosophical humanism. It also informs the American legal system (5).

Utilitarian morality

The third moral culture is based on utilitarian individualism. Here the individual pursues goals based on satisfying his/her personal objectives (7). An action is judged as good based on the outcomes it produces. The best acts produce the best outcomes. Self-interest is what determines right action and so freedom is conceived as the freedom to pursue one's given aims; it is freedom from constraint (7). This produces what Tipton calls a consequential style of ethical evaluation that is based on calculation of outcomes, the quantification of goods.

Tipton states that “the efficiency of agents in maximizing the satisfaction of their wants is the cardinal virtue of this ethic, not their obedience or rationality” (7). There is a close relationship between the moral logic of utilitarianism and the principles of the market. Because the social ethic of religiously unaffiliated spirituality is frequently assessed as being utilitarian (e.g., spiritual teachings as tools to become wealthy) I want to say a bit more about this ethic before looking at Tipton’s fourth “expressivist” moral culture that emerged with the counterculture.

The genesis of the utilitarian ethic is linked to the emergence of modern capitalism that arose at the end of the Middle Ages and coincided with the emergence of the middle class. As the pre-existing feudal system of land-bound vassals in service to land owners broke down, social identity came to be determined according to what one did in the world (8). Social contributions were determined on the basis of particular skills and the good(s) they produced, which traded freely in the marketplace based on demand. As such, social status was increasingly earned rather than socially ascribed (8). Tipton remarks, “like radical Protestantism, the utilitarian viewpoint dismissed feudal social identities and exposed every individual to the same standards of judgment” (8). Capitalist philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) was the first to build a political theory starting with the individual. He saw society as the collection of individuals whose primary motivation was self-preservation (8). In such a scenario, individuals were not motivated by a rule-based moral system, but rather by what permitted them to maximize their chance of survival, which of course, included maximal success

and prosperity. A utilitarian social morality naturally raises the question of how one balances the needs of the individual with the demands of social cohesion. What sort of society emerges when there is no common standard of moral evaluation, where “utility becomes the principle governing social relationships, rather than duties...defined by revealed commandments, moral rules and traditional social statuses?” (11).

According to Tipton, the “calculus” invoked here is that of mutual indebtedness. One gives and gets in equal measure; one does not give because it is enjoyable or moral, but rather because it is necessary to do so in order to get the things one needs in return (11). This is directly at odds with the Christian view of reciprocity where “social relations manifest the *virtue* of charity” versus “social relations manifest as the *contingent fact* of reciprocity” (11, original italics). This creates a type of “privatized morality” that is mediated by strong government, which is now required to stipulate the rules of conduct that are implicit in the biblical/authoritative or regular/rationalistic moral worldviews (11). In such a social order, behavior is not determined by adherence to prescribed biblical virtues, with its “fixed set of commandments and derivative rules” and whose ultimate objective is to live in a religiously constructed moral system, but rather by a social order determined by the aggregate of the wants and needs of the individuals who populate it (12). The deontological system of morality based on duty is here replaced with a moral ethic where rights are seen as natural (John Locke) (13).

This short description is provided to point to the complex social, historical

and political dimensions of utilitarianism and to segue into the key point Tipton makes, namely that neither the utilitarian nor biblical systems have proven adequate moral wellsprings in the late modern period. Specifically he argues that since the sixties, a new competing moral system that grew out of the romantic tradition emerged to “repudiate” the prevailing moral norms of biblical morality and utilitarianism. Tipton calls this expressivist morality, which arose as a counterweight to the norms of mainstream culture (14). It challenged the norms of utilitarianism, questioning the value of maximizing gains in the form of money and power, and sought a new conception of what is good. Instead of the ‘good life’ defined in terms of middle class priorities based on the accumulation of social and financial merit, the counterculture youth sought a morality whose touchstone was self-awareness and self-expression (14). The guiding principle became “always do the act that produces the greatest amount of love and awareness for all beings—the most good vibes” (15). Its prerogative was to encourage people to be present, be real (expressive), and avoid harming others. Slogans such as “hang loose,” “let it all hang out,” “be here now,” and “love everybody” speak to its ethical stance. The ethic produced by this moral system suggests few hard and fast rules, and in this sense, it seems to parallel the consequentialist utilitarian ethic. It is mitigated however, by the crucial differences in what it counts as good.

Expressivist morality

Expressivist morality is based on the fundamental assumption that “all is one”

(14). This “acosmic monism” is the distinguishing characteristic of this moral system and stands in stark contrast to biblical religion’s notion of a distant separate godhead or the implicit dualism of the utilitarian framework that sees material reality as something separate, something to be conquered or at least mastered (14). Unlike the utilitarian ethic and its drive to maximize rewards, expressivism does not condone just any behavior provided it produces the desired ends, even if those ends are self-determined. Its fluid, intuitive *modus operandi* makes its ethical foundations somewhat abstract to be sure, but what prevents it from tipping into anomie is the combined desire to avoid harming others and, likely, the implied understanding that harm to others translates to harm of self.

The proper course of action in a given situation is often determined by the “ethic of situational appropriateness” (15). An act is not necessarily intrinsically good or bad; what matters is the context. What is appropriate for one individual in any given situation does not necessarily apply to all individuals in the same situation (15). What is appropriate in a given situation? This is left for the individual to discern based on knowing “what feels right.” This moral system equates freedom with the ability to operate without arbitrary or dogmatic external constraints. To behave authentically, one must be free to choose his course or action in a given situation (16). Since one’s self requires the freedom to decide what is true for him/her and act according to that, this gesture must be extended to others thereby fostering—in theory at least—an attitude of tolerance and sensitivity for the feelings of others (16). This view assumes the inherent goodness of people, their inherent ability to choose what is right without explicit

prescriptions from external authority.

In terms of community, the countercultural ideal “leads [the] individual toward greater, more intimate and more sensitive affiliation with others, rather than coming at the expense of it” (19). Although the critiques examined in the foregoing chapters argue that the therapeutic ideal leads individuals into cocooned disconnection, Tipton argues that the counterculture ethic is profoundly relational. The self-aware, self-knowledgeable individual is motivated to seek out others and encounter them “face to face” (17). The objective of the counterculture youth was to harmonize with others not utilize them:

In this ideal society persons relate to one another as ends in themselves not as reciprocal means to the satisfaction of their own individual ends. For all the individual impulse and expression it allows, this society is intensely communal. Indeed, self-expression is felt to cement such communal relations. The social structure of the community is egalitarian (18).

The important point of Tipton’s analysis for this study is that my research with religiously unaffiliated spiritual seekers corroborates the principle elements of the expressivist moral culture he describes. That such a moral horizon has been described and reconfirmed here challenges the criticism that privatized, self-centred, spirituality produces an exclusively utilitarian morality. As Tipton writes:

At first glance the antinomian character of the counterculture’s expressive ethic seems to make it antithetical to moral evaluation...But given the premises described above, it can be experienced as just the opposite. If we assume that the self and other are one, that human nature is good, and that the human personality can fluently express a pure and true inner self, then we can reopen human ends to moral evaluation. There are needs instead of wants, subject to intuitively shared moral standards and evaluations. Stemming from love instead of self preservation, these needs are thematized by social life instead of the solitary psyche; for intimacy, understanding, friendship with others; for community; for a clean and

green physical environment; for simplicity of life and so on. The litany implies a list of moral and social virtues however psychologized its formulation. (17)

In what follows I explore how these themes emerge in my conversations with Canadian SDNRs. The interview material I collected shows that these seekers are galvanized by a more-or-less consistent set of social morals that reflects the counterculture ethic to a high degree. In the final chapter, I will show how it meshes with postmaterialism to describe the socio-moral outlook of SDNRs.

SDNR as a contemporary expression of the counterculture ethic

The expressivist moral culture of the sixties was a rejection of corporate capitalism, the interventionist state and the oppressive regimes of religion and normative social morality. Although it is over forty years since the counterculture revolution, many of the same sentiments persist today. We see, for instance, the counterculture ethic alive and well in the contemporary ecology, holistic healthcare, and non-traditional spirituality movements. It manifests as well in the social ethic of religiously unaffiliated seeking, which should be viewed as a facet of ongoing culture criticism that resists deontological social morality. Roof's research highlights this dynamic. In *Generation of Seekers* (1993), he determined that what made boomers stay involved in or drop out of organized religion was their degree of involvement with the counterculture (169-70). He writes,

Those most caught up in the value-shifts were not just more likely to drop out, they are less likely to have returned to the churches and synagogues. Less than one-third of the dropouts who were highly exposed to the counterculture have returned, as compared to almost half of the low

exposure dropouts (1993, 171).⁷²

In other words, those boomers who internalized the new values of the counterculture era were more likely to drop out of organized religion, even if they had been regular attenders as children (171). These individuals “were touched in ways that carried over into their adult lives and have continued to sustain negative attitudes toward and less involvement with organized religion” (171). As discussed in chapter two, many of these disaffected seekers took up privatized spiritual quests. Sixty percent of Roof’s informants said they preferred to explore various spiritual teachings versus only 28% who said they preferred to stick to one faith. Likewise, 53% said they preferred to pray or meditate alone versus 29% who said they liked worshipping with others (71). Overall, Roof finds that the quest culture that emerged from the sixties represents the failure of mainline religious institutions to provide a spiritually meaningful response to the social changes of that time. This produces a lingering revolutionary current or arc runs that persists in the social values of most of the religiously unaffiliated seekers I spoke with. Even the popular phrase ‘spiritual but not religious’ invokes this ethic. I take religion, therefore, as my point of departure for discussing how institutional resistance manifests among the SDNR individuals I interviewed.

Opposition to institutional religion

By defining themselves in opposition to religion, spiritual but not religious seekers announce “Yes I am religious but not in the way the institutions mandate.

⁷² Roof defined exposure to counterculture in terms of 1) smoking marijuana, 2) having little or no confidence in the country, and 3) being opposed to American involvement in the Vietnam War (1993, 189),

I am doing it my way.” Twenty-two year old Zoë expresses this well:

I think of New Age in terms of spirituality versus religion. New Age is not believing in the norm—not believing what we’ve been told to believe; not following [but] forging our own way. I perceive myself as New Age. I think that thirty-three and under is the New Age. It’s this new generation of free thinkers.

Zoë is too young to remember or identify with the 1980s New Age movement, and she uses the term to refer to her commitment to freedom and autonomy. Her spirituality is one way she demonstrates she is a free thinker. She told me about being raised Catholic, and the story of Job negatively impacting her faith.

I broke away from religion when I was sixteen. I decided I don’t want to be part of that anymore. I lost faith in God. I didn’t understand why I was praying to Jesus for being a sinner. I mean, I don’t think I’ve done anything so wrong. But apparently we sin every day according to what the Bible says. I don’t believe that [anymore].

Zoë also dislikes organized religion “because it’s always like ‘you’re wrong and we’re right, they’re going to hell and we’re not, that kind of thing. Come on now!’” For her, “spirituality has a lot to do with trying to love everyone and realize that we are all part of the same thing. “We are all one,” she chants like a mantra. She doesn’t understand how “you can hate someone just because they are different than you, and destroy communities because they don’t have the same religious values as you—don’t have the same belief system. You know?” She thinks we must learn to accept other people and accept their views:

You don’t have to agree with them, you don’t have to, that’s the beauty of having free choice—you don’t have to say ‘I’m right and you’re wrong’. You can say, ‘OK, I believe it like this and you believe it like that and let’s leave it at that. I don’t understand what it is so hard to be tolerant of other people and their beliefs... That is why I don’t like [organized religion].

Another young informant named Chad also finds organized religions divisive:

[Religions] are always trying to put down another religion to build theirs up. Theirs is right, oh, and this is wrong. If they just realized they're talking about the same energy, it's the same concept; it's a way of life. Religion is one of the reasons there is so much segregation in this society.

The view that organized religion is a source of division that perpetuates fear-based thinking was common in my interviews. Casey, a woman in her mid-fifties, is an avid spiritual seeker. She grew up in a strict religion, but dropped out of it when she was in her late teens. When I asked her to tell me the difference between religion and spirituality she said spirituality is "seeing people as whole beings and understanding that we are all part of one big, unified force, [that] we are not separate and there is no being sitting up there judging us." While she thinks that "religion does bring people together, and does help people feel more secure in their lives" she notes that religion "brings out a lot of fear: do this or you're going to hell."

Well educated and articulate, 54 year old Trudy told me she loved attending church as a child and was very involved with her congregation until she was in her twenties. She was part of a youth group working for reforms, which were met with such resistance that in the end she felt she was "pushed out" of the Church. Since then she has quietly forged her own way spiritually. In our interview she told me how she felt alienated by the hierarchies and power structures implicit in Western religious traditions:

One of my big beefs over the years with the churches is their notion of hierarchies. Celtic Christianity doesn't do that. The rock is as important as the person, as important as the fish or the rabbit or the star. The cosmology

is much more inclusive, more like the Natives where everything has its place and nothing is more important than anything else; that things are interconnected, interlinked. And see, I think that's what deep spiritual searching makes you aware of actually, the interconnectedness of being.

Even though her parents were not religious, Bernadine felt drawn to the church as a child. “When I was five years old I crossed the street and went into the Sunday school because I wanted to go (by myself!). I went into the church because I wanted to hear the singing and the organ.” Yet Bernadine has always insisted on developing her own spiritual understanding and is put off by what she regards as “religious legalism.”

Yoga is a scientific method of meditation. Its object is to know God. That should also be the objective of religion, but religion as practiced is a series of rites and a series of dogmas. You know? I believe in this and I believe in that. Many of the people I've met who are Christians are told, “These are great mysteries. You cannot question them!” Well I'm a questioning person, but I've had friends who get very upset if you try to discuss these things.

Another common theme—particularly with the women I spoke to—is their dislike of the chauvinism of traditional religion. Patricia is a late middle age woman with a serious spiritual practice; she is intelligent and open-minded. She told me “If I went to a church it would be Unitarian. I find [church] just to be too confining. The idea that creation was literally seven days, the idea that Christianity is the only way, the anti-female approach...I don't have patience for this anymore.” Muriel puts a finer point on this, arguing that traditional religions are divisive and fear based because they are patriarchal:

We've had thousands of years now of the patriarchal religions doing all this 'good' and where's the world at? What good have they really accomplished? Because most of these sad and horrific issues are

happening as the result of those [religious] organizations saying "we're right you're wrong so we're going to fight you and kill you. And instead of working together to just get along and love and make sure everybody is happy and in a state of wellbeing I think they've actually brought it to this. And I think there are many good Christian, Jewish and Muslim people and whatever, but the fundamental organizations of these religions is [what has] brought it to this now. That's my feeling. The patriarchy has brought it to this because its not a wisdom path—it is a path of right and wrong, good/bad, judgment fear ignorance and denial and it has brought the world to the condition that it's in.

Zoë would agree with Muriel's view that organized religions are patriarchal and demean women: "Religions are written by men" she says, "so of course they [advocate] the submission of women, [and describe] how we are supposed to be subservient. I hate that." Hope also criticizes religion for its patriarchy and homophobia.

Now I think one of the problems I have when I look at organized religion is that they're very anti-feminine. Now that wasn't always the case, I mean the church wasn't always anti-feminine, but it was taken over. But in some cases they can be anti-human; I mean they're anti-gay and things like that so that bothers me.

Spirituality is mature religion

From an SDNR point of view, then, religion contributes significantly to what is wrong with society. In a total reversal of the critic's view, these seekers think that organized religion is immature, and not those who have dropped out of organized religion in favour of a do-it-yourself spiritual path. This is because spirituality—religiosity freed from its institutional anchorage—can only be practiced by mature, critical, self-responsible individuals who are capable of thinking for themselves and practicing independently. For instance, Richard says:

I believe in reincarnation so I believe that my soul has been around for a while. So I have developed a sophisticated relationship with the divine. I

think...new souls need more guidance and I think that is where religion comes in. There are people that need the structure of religion. But I don't need that structure anymore because it's already instilled within me. I don't need an external structure to guide me.

Not all the people I spoke with necessarily share Richard's specific view concerning new souls, but it is clear from the foregoing comments that these seekers do not regard religion as the gold standard by which to conduct their spiritual life. These seekers are not worried, either, that they will get it wrong and fall by the proverbial wayside. For example, Trudy admits that having a spiritual guide is "incredibly important" but she also thinks "we grow out of some of those guides and the instructions." The best method one has to determine whether they are on track does not come, therefore, from listening to an outsider's opinion but listening to your own inner guidance. As she puts it;

You have to test [spiritual truth] by an inner bell whether it seems valid or it doesn't instead of trusting or relying on someone else to make that judgment for you. [How do you know if your bell is true?] I just know...but I also think there is a testing along the way.

Invoking the same imagery, Shelly told me that her litmus test for spiritual truth is "whatever rings true for me and whatever feels right." She continues:

I've never felt like I was going down the wrong path so to speak as far as my spirituality is concerned. I always felt like I was exploring, you know, and checking out different things, but I never really thought of anything as the wrong path for example. I think it's a process you're just discovering what you believe in so you just go by what makes sense, and what feels right, and what feels good. That's how I judge it.

Casey is confident that she just knows what her spiritual truth is. "I have investigated a lot of things" she says, "and some [of them] just don't feel right...There's a path I'm on and when I get off—and I have dropped off a few

times—it doesn't feel right. I get a knot in my stomach or something.”

In other words, the SDNRs I spoke with do not put stock in organized religion, and prefer to follow what Greg calls the “inner guru” to discover what is spiritually meaningful. The mature seeker is one who is able to follow the internal guidance, to follow their truth. Because this denotes a clear connection to Source energy, these seekers consider it not only preferable, but in many cases, as a hallmark of their spiritual maturity. Martin puts it bluntly when he says “I don't need a category called religion to tell me what I think: religion is as individual as your thumbprint: I'm religious, but I am only interested in the religion of Martin. We are all our own conduits to God.” When I asked Devon what she thinks about the critique that spirituality outside religion is undisciplined she responded in a loud mocking voice “Oh God forbid! Oh terrible! What would I say in response to that? *Yaaaayyyyyy!* Everything they think is a bad thing I think is a good thing. So I say great! I am glad there is no discipline in my spirituality.” Patricia adds, “I want the freedom to talk about what I'm experiencing and the freedom to process it without having somebody impose ‘that's not right, it should be this way.’ Yana thinks that “just because organized religion has a big structure doesn't mean they are any closer to the right answer.” Citing the etymology of religion as “religare—to tie up again” she commented ruefully, “I don't see the benefit of tying people up or restraining them.”

Although I have shown that my informants have quite specific reasons for challenging the authority of institutional religion, the truth is that the ethic of anti-institutionalism runs deep and is not confined to religion. Why is this the case?

Why do SDNRs resist mainstream institutions?

It is important to realize that opposition to organized religion is only one facet of a more far-reaching cultural critique amongst those who hold to the counterculture ethic. But why are they so resistant to institutional engagement in the first place? I suggest it is because they not only see institutions as unreliable, but in many cases they consider them immoral. That being the case, there is no benefit to engaging with institutions as a way to create a better society. My research supports Heelas' observation that New Agers (in this case SDNRs) tend to view mainstream institutions as "devoid of existential significance" (1996, 144). There is marked resistance to authoritarian regimes of any kind; institutions in particular are perceived as obdurate—cold, mechanical, unflinching (144). SDNRs would agree with Weber's sentiment that modernity is an iron cage of rules, regulations and bureaucracy, and that these systems are fundamentally dehumanizing (144).

Yet, this does not mean that these seekers wantonly reject the authority of science, medicine, religion, government, even parents and educators—they do not. In the late modern context, social existence requires some level of institutional engagement (e.g., with universities, banks, hospitals, the passport office and so forth), and SDNRs participate in them like everybody else. The difference is that they are very cautious about giving them their unbridled support and tend to resist confederating with them. Overall, institutions—especially religious ones—are considered threatening because they can separate the individual from his or her true self.

Heelas says that a characteristic feature of New Agers is that they believe that they have been “brainwashed” by authoritative social programs (1996, 18). The belief is kept in play by popular spiritual (but not religious) writings that suggest the media, the healthcare system, the educational system, parents, friends and lovers are not reliable resources for understanding the true nature of the human experience. Socialization is not viewed as a benevolent process, but rather something that separates the individual from the truth that comes by way of personal knowing. Common metaphors for losing oneself in social dogmas include being asleep or being in a trance.

For example, Ronald S. Miller in collaboration with the editors of *New Age Journal* says “we need a wakeup call to rouse us from our culturally induced trance like state” (1992, 2). That call comes in many forms, including “mystical prayer in Christianity and Judaism; Earth cherishing Native American practices; transpersonal therapy; guidance from mythology and dreams; new forms of feminist and masculinist spirituality; and Twelve Step programs that fight addictive behavior using prayer and meditative practices” (2). The late New Age spokesperson, Marilyn Ferguson thinks that “whole brain knowing” is important because it shows us the “tyranny of culture and habit” and restores our autonomy, so we are able to critically evaluate and when necessary challenge cultural assumptions. Ferguson believes that “psychotechnologies help break the ‘cultural trance’—the naïve assumption that the trappings and truisms of our own culture represent universal truth or some culmination of civilization” (1980, 103). Spiritual practices, therefore, are the primary resource that helps these individuals

achieve their vision of a better society.

One of the most influential spiritual but not religious teachers today is Eckhart Tolle, so it is no surprise that several of my informants were reading his most recent book *The New Earth*, or had read his best selling *The Power of Now*. Tolle's basic teaching is that the ego constitutes the single greatest obstacle to enlightenment. He describes the egoic mind in terms of compulsive, involuntary thoughts that perpetuate "opinions, viewpoints, reaction [and] emotion" (2005, 59). He tells his readers that it is conditioned by "the past, your upbringing, culture, family background and so on" (59). For its existence, the ego upholds the notion of "the other," for the "conceptual I" can only exist in relation to "the conceptual other" (60). The ego, then, is the programming we all carry that left unchecked, separates us from our true nature, as well as from each other. Devon echoes this idea when she says, "It's very easy to take in a lot of spiritual information. You can read and read, but it only goes into your head. You have to get past your ego and let the information into your heart. That is the true path to [self] knowledge."

These descriptions not only point to the idea that the late modern individual must be wary and guard against the undesirable effects of social programming, but also that society is in a troubled state; in this case, only those in a trance would uncritically accept mainstream social values. The notion that one must follow an inner compass so that the ego will not lure him or her into inauthentic habits of thought and action can be heard in the narratives of my informants. With regard to their spiritual development, for instance, most of the

interviewees were like Nola who doesn't want anybody telling her what to believe, or Bernadine who told me "I can read a [spiritual] book but that doesn't tell me anything: I believe in the [truth of things] because of my *own* experiences." More emphatically Devon thinks, "there are as many paths to the divine as there are human beings and everybody is different." She advises, "don't do something because you're told to do it: Check it out and see if it feels right". Hope thinks that her intuition is more valuable than what institutions tell her is right or wrong for her. She says: "I think you need to trust your intuition and you need to trust yourself."

In the next section I want to briefly describe the "theological" blueprint of SDNR spirituality. As described in the second chapter, one of the characteristic features of solid spirituality is its monistic orientation. This religious philosophy did not emerge in the counterculture; it has been on the fringes of Western religious life for centuries. Understanding that SDNRs are united by practices that share a strong family resemblance helps undermine the "Burger King" critique. While SDNRs value the freedom to choose their spiritual repertoire, these choices are mediated by a fundamental acceptance of the principle of monism (Aupers and Houtman 2006).

SDNR "theology" and the cultural critique

Distant origins

In the 14th century, the great Renaissance philosopher Marsilio Ficino translated the ancient writings of the ancient sage Hermes Trismegistus under the patronage

of Cosimo de Medici. Unbeknownst to most SDNR seekers today, this body of work—the *Corpus Hermeticum*—was the first instance of a Western alternative religious discourse emphasizing monism and the God within in the early modern period. In particular, a Hermetic text known as the Emerald Tablet contained the phrase “As Above So Below,” reflecting the notion that there is an inherent correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm; it spoke to a fundamental unity between the transcendent God beyond the physical universe, and an imminent or indwelling God in each person.⁷³ It negated separation between heaven and earth, spirit and matter, and held that the visible and invisible worlds were inexorably and intimately linked (Miller 1992, xi).

This essentially monistic view has persisted as the core premise of the Western Metaphysical (or monistic if you prefer) discourse (Ellwood and Partin 1988 Faivre 1998; Albanese 2007). While for centuries it languished on the fringes of conventional religious life, in retrospect, it is easy to see how advancing modernization has steadily enhanced the appeal of its central message “ye are gods” (Heelas 2008, 25-59), gaining momentum as cultural conditions shifted in favour of autonomy and personal worth, both of which germinated in the strengthening sunlight of market capitalism. Religious individuals who are associated with the Western Monistic Tradition include Paracelsus, Emmanuel Swedenborg, and Anton Mesmer (Fuller 2001). As well, a monistic philosophy is easily discerned in the writings of the New England Transcendentalists,

⁷³ For a fuller discussion see Robert Ellwood and Harry Partin’s *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America* (Prentice Hall, New Jersey 1988) 30-73.

Theosophists, and more recently, the New Age movement and its progeny. My point is that monism is not new to the West, although it is certainly the case that it has been suppressed by the predominance of monotheism, which is to say—Christianity. This all changed rather dramatically in the sixties, and the Western Monistic tradition has been growing steadily since.

The counterculture as hinge moment in the Western Monistic Tradition

In effect, the counterculture was the “hinge moment” for the Western Monistic tradition, a time when the controlling hand of authority and tradition was pushed back so that individuals could experience and interpret their religious lives in new, and in many cases, wholly unconventional ways. What appealed to many seekers of this generation was what Tipton called “acosmic monism”, a this-worldly focus or sense of the divine as continuous with all life. Acosmic monism is inherently incompatible with religious institutions, especially their hierarchical notions of the godhead. It could be said that religious institutions have consistently failed to minister to the baby boomers’ deeper subjective needs, largely because they did not view subjective needs as inherently important. Then as now, autonomously oriented seekers found it increasingly hard to embrace organized religions, which taught that they should look outside themselves to authority and tradition as their primary source of meaning and significance. Hungry for new maps of consciousness, new ways of securing an authentic sense of self and a corresponding sense of meaning, they turned away from traditional religious institutions, towards spiritual teachings and modalities that fostered

unmediated access to the divine. What ensued was an experimental mood where individuals searched for “God” by turning within. LSD and other psychotropic stimulants came to the aid of many, painting spiritual experience in prismatic hues of alluring oneness. More soberly, the monistic ideal was galvanized by the influx of Buddhist and Hindu teachers, who amplified its appeal with an irresistible combination of exoticism and ancient authority. At the same time, the Civil Rights movement which sought to overcome segregation and separation contributed its leitmotif to the notion that divisions, whether between Blacks and Whites, men and women or God and humans were inherently damaging. The times, therefore, encouraged a type of spirituality that was not the traditional quest for purity or perfection, but rather one that could integrate and reconcile the dualities of sacred and profane (Miller 1992, 3).

Contemporary SDNR theology

Today the Western Monistic tradition takes its purest form among practitioners of solid spirituality. It has infiltrated mainstream religious organizations (liquid spirituality), though it cannot take root firmly there since monism is theologically incompatible with monotheism. SDNRs like the one’s I spoke to, do not support forms of religion that perpetuate dualism, those that “separate above and below into antagonists” (Miller 1992, 2). Why? Because they are monists: the monistic worldview—the concept that humans are continuous with the source and all life that exists as an interconnected and interpenetrating whole—militates against it. Monism, then, persists as the basis of the SBNR worldview and as we shall see, it

is the core spiritual philosophy that molds their social values.

Monism: Everything is connected

The theme that everything is connected was prominent in all the interviews. Julia expresses it well:

Everything is interconnected—*everything* (she says this with emphasis). I mean I'm no scientist, but I'm getting more interested in trying to understand at my own kindergarten level, the phenomenal physics that underlie it. Somehow I get it though, without understanding it all.

Many informants use the metaphor of a universal energy to express this notion of being connected to everything. For instance Shelly thinks, “everything is made of energy—energy that can’t be created or destroyed.” She told me “I look at everything in terms of energy, all matter and thoughts and God.” Trevor also acknowledges this, saying “we are all connected and there is a great energy that exists in everything.” Zoë puts it this way:

We're all energy. Every living thing is energy. When things die that energy leaves this physical manifestation and goes to the sphere where the energy is. Then, you know, we become one; pieces of that end up going back and becoming new souls, new energies and that's how we are all connected. We all come from this same thing. We all have pieces of one another in us.

Casey also thinks that “we are all part of the same energy field, and this in its entirety is what we've chosen to call God... We are each part of the divine being. We have that power within us but we are not conscious of it or the implications of it.”

When I asked Helen if she could explain how we are all one - or part of the one - when obviously we are all separate individuals she said this:

We are created equally – in that we ultimately come from the same source of creation. Then we differentiate. We are one in the body of humanity – yet there is endless diversity. To celebrate our diversity, without falling prey to the illusion that we are separate – would do a lot to facilitate peace and good will on earth. So shift the word separate to different – and you have the beginning of the equation. Dr. Chopra teaches that all of our cells come from our DNA – but they differentiate to play their parts in one body. Each human is a differentiated part of humanity and that is how we are all part of the one.

Many of the ethical precepts shared by SDNRs can be traced to their monism. As Julia puts it, “The other is me and I’m the other...everything is one. The way through all our troubles is to recognize the fundamental interrelatedness of everything, and everyone, and every being.” My informants not only use characteristically monistic language and imagery to describe the sacred canopy so to speak, it is the philosophical heart of their social ethic.

The social implications of monism

According to Bellah, “much of the countercultural criticism of American society is related to the belief in nondualism. If man and nature, men and women, white and black, rich and poor are really one, then there is no basis for the exploitation of the latter by the former” (1976, 347). This notion was pronounced among the people I interviewed. For instance, when I asked Justin why he devotes large amounts of time volunteering for an environmental conservation group, he couched his explanation in terms of his “huge spiritual moment up in the Arctic.” High on top of a mountain where he could see the coastline, he was suddenly able to see the energy field of the earth:

[I] could see the coastline—the land, the ocean—and there was an aura all around the land, almost like a fluorescent aura. The other person I was

with, they could not see it. [What meaning did it have for you?] It was basically telling me that the earth was alive; not just life on earth, but the earth [itself] was alive...Everything is interconnected. Physicality is nothing more than a form of energy, and the interconnection is through energy. And because of the interconnection...we have a united interest in our continuance. It is not the individual, I feel, who is important: it's the planet. For without the planet there is nothing for this life.

Yana also spoke about her social values in terms of being connected to an intelligent universe or "Gaia." This inclusive orientation informs the way she understands her responsibilities to others:

We are a product of life force energy and the molecules of Gaia—the earth. And we are not separate from that. We are not distinct from that. We are that. Gaia is part of the dust of the cosmos. We are that. We are all there is, we are divine, we are God...we are totally interconnected with every other being, every other part of the cosmos...Life is always evolving because it's the way the cosmos gets to see itself. When I look at the stars I am the cosmos recognizing itself...I don't need a god, I don't need a divine being [to inspire me]. I am in total awe and wonder at the majesty of this, of the cosmos, of the energy of this evolutionary force...I think that once you fully understand and appreciate the interconnectedness of all things, then you act like that. It's not about my team versus your team. Religions tend to do that a lot, like I'll be good to the people on my team but not to everybody else; but in a universal perspective, we're all children of Gaia, you know, take care of each other.

Monistic overtones also imbue Shelly's explanation of how her spirituality helps her make sense of issues such as social inequality:

I believe that we're all a part of God and we're all connected. So if you think that way, it's pretty difficult to ignore other people, their problems or think of yourself as separate from other people in society. [How does that translate into action?] If you believe that [we're all connected] you're more likely to have compassion, and care, and want to help other people.

When I asked Zoë why she cares so much about the environment and social justice issues she reiterated, "Because we are all connected." She continues:

We are all part of each other. We all come from the same thing. All of us!

And no one deserves to suffer while someone else sits and eats lobster dinner. You know? ...I do feel a connection between my spirituality and my social values. My spirituality has a lot to do with trying to love everyone and realize we are all part of the same thing. We are all one, you know? That is how I feel about it.

Monism and the importance of self-nurturance

The foregoing comments imply that a monistic orientation leads to an ethic of caring for others because when you are one with another, there is a vested interest in maximizing their wellbeing—at least in theory. Yet, the individuals I interviewed were unequivocal that nurturing others requires—a priori—self-nurturance. According to William, a single, fifty year old retail consultant “To help others you have to help yourself.” Kirby also told me he thinks “the greatest thing we can do to help other people is to love ourselves. If there is one more individual who is caring in this world [then] every individual we touch feels that whether they know it or not.” In our conversation Shelly also told me she thinks “it’s really important to take care of yourself; you can’t do it for anyone else as they say.” Connecting her ethic of self-care to caring for others Helen—an energetic and successful life coach in her mid fifties—says

It’s your own personal responsibility to be happy. That’s where you start. That’s the first service you can do—to be happy and healthy. After that...we’re all one. If I hurt you I’m really hurting myself. That’s how I live. If I am healthy and as peaceful as I can be then I’m in a point where I can serve, and the service is to anybody I meet. There is no me and you—just we. A dear friend worked to cut out world hunger. The slogan was ‘think globally, act locally’. Well absolutely right! I hope my being strengthens everyone.

Similarly, Richard thinks that his spiritual practices contribute to a better world.

“You change the world by changing yourself,” he says. This is because

the more balanced, healthy, energetic you feel, the more you can serve others. That is the difference between church groups and my approach. Because every moment of the day I have the potential to help someone. Whereas a church group [is confined to an institutional setting], I am going about my day helping others whether giving directions or assisting a handicapped person. These are things I do because I feel good. There is a 'trickle down' effect to others.

Cathleen is a young woman with a serious chronic illness; out of necessity she has had to focus a lot of energy on maintaining her health. Because of this, questions about caring for other are particularly poignant to her. As much as she wants to be altruistic, in the end she had to admit, self-care comes first. “How can you help others if you can't help yourself?” she asked rhetorically. Her solution is to “make [herself] a better person [so] that will ripple out and affect other people more positively.”

Monism as a rationale for the importance of sending out “good vibes”

Oftentimes, the notion that one's wellbeing is linked to the wellbeing of others is expressed in terms of energy, or to use Tipton's rhetoric—“good vibes.” For instance Muriel thinks that because everything is interconnected, the biggest gift she can give the world is to maintain her frequency of joy, appreciation and gratitude. “Then without doing anything,” she says, “you have actually shifted the energy of the world. What greater gift could you really give?” Ashara expresses something similar when she talks about why it is important to be happy. She is not talking about “the type of happiness that comes from winning a million dollars,” but happy because she is living an authentic life. She says that when she does this she is “filled with joy such that [her] energy output to those around [her] is

expanded. How much more of a gift in the world is that than being all bowed down and depleted and martyred because ‘I’m being of service’?” she asks. She does not equate this with being selfish or self-centered even, because when she is feeling good about being on the planet, she has “lots of energy to offer out in service.” As a final example consider Greg, an experienced meditator and serious student of *A Course in Miracles*, who thinks,

there’s an effect that occurs from meditation that happens not only for yourself, but to your environment and so there is a positive outflow of energy. Do I do it because of that? No—it’s just a byproduct...[So] on the surface, the person carrying [a protest placard] may appear to be having a greater impact [than a person working solely at a spiritual level], but underlying all of that is that the individual that is emanating ‘m-fields’ or creating a different morphogenic environment: that person may have a greater influence.

Monism as a metaphor for sacralizing the ordinary

One of the most overlooked aspects of the monistic social ethic, I think, might be the high value these religiously unaffiliated seekers place on sacralizing the ordinary. I do not mean to suggest that traditionally religious individuals do not carry their spirituality into their daily lives, only that the SDNRs I interviewed deliberately infuse the everyday with an aura of the sacred. This is the logical extension of their belief in the interconnection of all life, the belief that the divine is not something one connects with at religious services once a week, but like a hierophany, something that can break through in the course of daily life, something capable of being experienced through multiple aspects of creation. Thus we see nearly three quarters of questionnaire respondents (74%) saying, for instance, that self-enhancing complementary and alternative therapies have

spiritual significance for them at least some of the time.⁷⁴ It also manifests in the responses to question 36 of the questionnaire that showed 63% consider communing with nature a spiritual practice, while 92% felt the same about simply spending time alone.

In a very different way, Tanis talked about some of the ways she spiritualizes her life. For instance, she and her partner will often sit on a park bench near their home and meditate with the specific intention that whoever sits there that day will benefit from the positive energy they built up there. Overall, she strives to integrate her spiritual practices into every aspect of her life:

When I am driving from home to work I always have a meditation practice that I do in the car, so it's not like I go and sit in my meditation room for half an hour because [my practice] is completely integrated [into my routine]. I don't start to drink my tea without a prayer of gratitude on the inside. I like to live as though my body is a God portal that spirit flows through.

Tanis also talked about what she called her “ongoing project in the world,” namely making spiritual contact with children. She recounted a story of sitting in a fast food restaurant waiting for her son to come out of the restroom when a mother and her one and a half year old toddler came in. “He looked utterly lethargic,” she said. Tanis looked at the boy but he did not appear to notice her, so she “connected with her higher energy fields” and when his eyes grazed across her next time he jumped up and started waving to her. Tanis refers to this as “spiritual activism.” For Tanis, her ability to perform “energy healings” on others as she goes about her day is a form of service. In this capacity, she feels she is

⁷⁴ Question 45.

spiritually “active all the time no matter where I go or what I do.” In a slightly different way, Helen told me a story that reflects how spirituality infuses her life. One year she went to a reunion at her childhood church. Five of the ministers she grew up with were there, and one of them asked her what church she was going to. She said, “I really don’t go to church very much now,” and he was horrified and angry and gave her a lecture. Still upset by the episode she said the following:

He didn’t give me the chance to tell him I actually feel like I spend more time in direct communion with God, and that instead of just going to church on Sunday, I really had church every day in my own life, and that instead of community service affiliated with a church, I did community service with people who were like-minded. I never got the chance to tell him that and that hurt. I just felt judged.

Nola is also conscientious about integrating her spirituality into her daily life. She says, “spirituality is how you live your life on a day-to-day basis. What are your actions towards other people? Towards your children, towards your husband, those you connect with on a daily basis? Do you speak nicely with them? I think that's the fastest way to evolve as a person.”

Monism, the perennial philosophy and tolerance of diversity

Overall, the belief that all creation is infused with divinity gives rise to a very tolerant view concerning the rights of others, particularly their right to choose their spiritual outlook. In our interview, Patricia gave voice to a belief common amongst SDNRs, namely that in their highest expression, all religions serve as a path to spiritual truth.

I remember when I was first thinking about these things and looking at religions and coming to the conclusion that the major religions really put forth two ideas. The one was how to be happy here on earth and the other

was how to make a connection with God. And all of them did this in some way. The other piece is that all of the religions are part of the one body of knowledge.

Tanis also believes that

all the religions are tapping the same spiritual truth. There is only one spiritual truth. It doesn't matter who has talked about it and in what kind of way. So that truth can only be found inside the individual. It's not a truth that's made up of thoughts; it's a truth that comes from deeper inner knowing.

When I asked Fred, to tell me what spirituality means to him, he framed it in relativistic terms:

Spirituality is when each person takes time in themselves to collect their thoughts and commune with what they feel is a Higher Power, and converse with the Higher Power whether a tree or an actual entity or whatever they feel. Some people may want to worship a TV set. I don't mean to be disrespectful...it's just different things for different people. When you are left laying down alone at night, it's just you and your spirit you have to answer to answer for.

Ashara also told me that “there's enormous perfect truth in all the religious streams,” which accounts for her willingness to allow others the freedom to seek out their unique spirituality without judgment.

What's worse—selling crystals for two bucks or little bronze Jesus?' Who cares! It what our culture does. It sells shit. It may not turn my crank and give me the heebie-jeebies but that's my bullshit because then I'm judging. Anything that helps people feel happy and inspired in their life is great...There's a way for everybody to pray that works for them.

Likewise, Trudy finds ways to tolerate the things she doesn't like. For example, she thinks that *The Secret*⁷⁵ “is terrible because it's all based on materialism, the big SUV, [and] all the money you want...” Still, she allows that “for some people

⁷⁵ *The Secret* (2006) is a somewhat controversial but best selling New Age book by Rhonda Byrne. It explains how to use the Law of Attraction to create material wealth.

perhaps that is the agenda, that what they need to be doing, and we don't need to sit in judgment on that.” In the end she finds solace in knowing that she is always free to say, “that's not my path.” In her colourful way, Devon puts it like this:

My spiritual understanding is that everybody is exactly where they're supposed to be, doing exactly what they're supposed to be doing. So if that means being led astray by a strange crystal merchant then you're off to learn your lessons that way. And that's just fine.

Everyday spiritual activism

The foregoing discussion has suggested that monism produces characteristic values in SDNRs. Because it is inherently non-dualistic, monism tends to encourage connection and continuity. In particular, it emphasizes everyday activities as spiritual opportunities. Before concluding the chapter, I want to explore how this everyday approach conveys an everyday tone to their ethic of civic engagement. We have already seen that SDNRs are frequently drawn to informal modes of engagement. In part, I suggest that this owes to another precept of SDNR theology—the notion of critical mass sometimes expressed as the ‘hundredth monkey effect.’

The 100th monkey effect

In the mid-seventies, New Age theologian David Spangler (1976) proposed that an influx of cosmic energy was ramping up to provide the energy needed to reify the New Age social vision. A popular metaphor for this transformation became the “hundredth monkey effect” (Myers 2004, 604). Lyle Watson first wrote about the hundredth monkey phenomenon in *Lifetide*, but the best-known version is Ken Keyes Jr. *The Hundredth Monkey* (1981) which sold more than a million copies in

just two years (Melton 2007, 86). The story, as Keyes tells it, concerns the habit of Japanese monkeys who learned to wash sweet potatoes. When scientists first introduced sweet potatoes to the monkeys, only a few washed them before eating them. However, when a certain threshold was passed—the proverbial hundredth monkey—all the monkeys spontaneously engaged in the behavior, even those who were not connected to part of the local group, including those on other islands.

The hundredth monkey effect has contributed to a key New Age theme, namely that not everyone has to awaken to bring about cultural change or a “paradigm shift” (Ferguson 1980). Just a small group of sensitive or conscious individuals are needed to initiate a “critical mass,” which will generate the momentum needed to produce a collective shift in consciousness.⁷⁶ Although the scientific legitimacy of the hundredth monkey phenomenon has since been discredited (Melton 2007, 86), the concept has retained its appeal. It cropped up in the narratives of several of my informants. For instance, Casey told me,

I want to stay focused on what is good so I can be one of the hundred monkeys. I want to help be one of the people that transforms the thought processes of the planet that will help us transform the negativity that is happening. So I focus on what's good, and if I do hear or come across something that is negative, I try to see what the bigger picture might be.

Likewise, Muriel acknowledges she is one of the hundred monkeys:

I wonder if people who are on the very far extreme of the sensitivity scale and feel energy and the pain of the collective, no matter how hard we work to shield ourselves and not take it on, I am not sure if we can be

76 The hundredth monkey concept ultimately stimulated a number of group gatherings, the largest of which was the Harmonic Convergence, which took place in 1987. In his “Open Letter to 144,000 Rainbow Humans” New Age visionary Jose Arguelles petitioned individuals to come together from all corners of the globe to participate in “creating a complete planetary field of trust” (Arguelles, cited in Lewis, 2004) 588.

successful. But I hope with the 100th monkey when enough of us get on board and more positive harmonious balance there may be a huge shift in frequency.

Justin admits he sometimes finds problems like global warming and world hunger too big to take on. Still he says, “The one thing I can do is address the environmental concerns where I am. You know, the 100th monkey effect.”

The 100th monkey concept is part of SDNRs rationale that the individuals’ transformed consciousness is what transforms society, and because more individuals are getting on board, the critical mass threshold is approaching, at which time there will be a big shift. As a serious, longtime student of New Age, Muriel’s speaks with some authority when she says the following:

And it’s by changing our perspective, our thoughts, feelings, attitudes, our ability to love in a different way without all this ‘I’m going to fight you’ kind of thing. Love’s gonna change it. It just looks ugly in the process because it looks like we’ve [the New Age community] abdicated for a while. But it’s really a shift, a really essential necessary shift. And actually I think the New Age community takes a lot of heat because we’re not still in there trying to do it the way the old paradigm says it has to be done. But [those methods] are not working; they never worked. It’s not empowering anyone. So I think what we’re learning is we can empower ourselves and as we’re able to do that and hold the new vibration, we’ll serve as an example to others that they can gain power, that there’s light in the dark. The more people that do that the more this world is going to change to a place of mutual trust and harmony.

Ashara thinks spiritual eclecticism is part of a breakdown of tradition that will precede the coming changes:

Part of the benefit of having an eclectic path is the growing realization for many, many years that what I believe is that we’re coming to a shattering of the old paradigms. And in order to do that we have to start breaking rules.

Kirby thinks there is an “accelerating mass awareness,” and that “more and more

people every day are becoming aware of who they truly are and eventually those numbers are going to turn into a majority [within the next 2 years].” Tanis expresses it in terms of bringing light energies to the planet:

The more love we bring in and the more dark we kick out [the faster we will transform the planet]. It’s like a spiritual revolution is coming. And what it feels like, at least in the western world is the whole new consciousness or new age. Like I said, the Oprahs and Chopras are making it more mainstream. Now is the time for spiritual awakening.

Trudy thinks that this shift is going to be possible because “the veil between the spiritual and material world is thinning, it is becoming more permeable the whole time...because of all the work that so many individual people are doing...” As such, SDNRs like Miranda think, “peace is only a matter of time” because

people are connecting more and more to each other globally [creating this] great energy. And I think also the male/female energies are becoming more harmonious. There was a lot of male dominated energy in the past thousands of years you know, you hear about the Spanish Inquisition, but now the female is back to merge with the masculine energies.

Darren said what makes him fundamentally optimistic about the future is that there is a pending earth shift. He said,

I want change. I want change big time. I used to look [at the mess of the world] and say I want tornados and hurricanes and I want to see the ground fall apart. Now I want change. If it comes with earthquakes and tidal waves and a meteor falling from the sky—fine. So long as we change and grow. Because that stagnating pool we’re sitting in (trailing off)... our babies deserve more. A shift in consciousness is coming

Carol puts it more simply: “Something more is going on. There is a new level of awareness [emerging] and hopefully it will create a better society that is more integrated.”

What facilitates the shift in consciousness? Small, deliberate acts. Again,

Muriel puts it very well using the analogy of being a player in a symphony:

I don't want to get pulled into the fearful projections because that is not going to do any good. I won't be in denial. I see what is happening and I see the possibilities. I just feel that if I take care of something that is right in front of me that I can do something about, and if each person would do that little bit that was right within their grasp to do, this would be an amazing place. And if we're not putting our life energy into worry and projecting fear...if we stay present and connected, we'll be given little tasks like we're a big symphony, right? And if all were aware what part we play nobody would be asked too much and everybody would just "ching" (making a chiming sound) when it's time for him to "ching" and rest when there is time for that. It requires a lot of inner focus to pay attention to the cues you're getting instead of just taking on whatever opportunity comes to you willy-nilly. It takes great consciousness to know when you are really being called to do something.

As such, everyone is called to make a unique contribution. This may be big or small depending on the individual. Fred said, "We are here to do the best we can with what we've been given. When you work with life, life works with you."

Trudy put it poetically. Quoting Gabrielle Roy she said, "If a person is in prison, there are the people who work to get them out and there is a bird that sings at the window...and one is as important as the other." Julia said, "We've seen again and again that one very ordinary person can make an extraordinary difference as long as the intention is there and one acts from that intention no matter how small the act is." Ashara put this somewhat differently:

I went through a number of years thinking there was something wrong with me because I didn't want to march on City Hall, because that's what all the good hippies do: 'The world has to change, and you have to change it kind of thing'. And I've come to the conclusion that if I'm meant to march on City Hall I'd want to. I'm an introvert; I'm an organizer and I work better by myself. What do I do in the world? I sit and write and talk to people. Maybe I [persuade] people who are dying to march on City Hall, but it hadn't occurred to them to go and do that. I don't want to sound arrogant but it's all the ripple effect. We all have our own way and

the greatest effect we're going to have on earth is to honour that... I will make a difference in my backyard.

Likewise, when I asked Hope if she thought she could make a big impact in her life she said, "I would hope so. I think by doing little things people can have a big impact." Her comment is linked to the 100th monkey notion that, a small effort conscientiously applied by many people is all that is needed to bring about big changes. This applies to SDNR notions about how to bring about social change.

Darren describes it well:

That butterfly effect (or whatever they call it) where a butterfly flaps its wings in Japan and a tornado hits somewhere in the States. I look at it the same way energetically. The more love I feel, the more it will spread around. I really agree with sending money to other countries to help, but for me my global world is what can I do right now, right here. How can I contribute to my own small part of the world? If everybody cleans their own room in the house, the whole house is clean, right?

Helen describes how the individual works to change collective realities using the metaphor of becoming a "whole note":

I like to think of it as a note in a song. And it's our individual responsibility to be as whole and as strong as we can be. And sometimes the only way to become whole and strong is to retreat. There are some people who need to be a hermit to be able to hold their light but they would still be serving. When somebody is a whole note, a strong pure note, they're not contributing to the noise. They're contributing to the harmony.

These comments reflect something fundamental about how SDNRs' envision social change. This is not a community likely to engage in 'one size fits all' activism. If my hypothesis is correct, their approach to politics mirrors their approach to spirituality, which is to say it is non-hierarchical, personalized, and highly integrated into the fabric of their daily lives. Being part of the harmony, as

Helen puts it, means being self-aware enough to understand one's optimal contribution. From this place, action is taken because it is personally compelling to do so, not because it is mandated. The SDNR ethic is fundamentally self-governing in politics as in matters of spiritual formation.

This is not to say that self-awareness is a substitute for action. As many of the foregoing narratives suggest, SDNRs are acutely aware that significant social and environmental problems exist and that some form of engagement is required. As Casey says, "I think many people just sit back and say I am going to pray for it and it's going to be okay. But there is that piece of action that has to happen as well." Likewise Richard acknowledges that

there is a danger you can become preoccupied with only developing yourself, but there comes a point when you have to take that meditation (or whatever) out into the world. You have to start walking your talk, as it's called. When you hit that point—and it took me a while—then the internal work helps you with your external work.

Yana puts it like this:

[Being spiritual] is a beginning but you have to go beyond that. It comes down to the whole things about what's spiritual. There's a difference between being nice and being spiritual. I don't believe you can call yourself spiritual unless you have a spiritual practice. And if you say you're nice to people on your way to work, well I'm sorry that doesn't cut it....Thinking about spirituality is a beginning but should lead to discussion with other people or lead to creating something like putting ideas together and giving them back to the world in a new form so there is some fruit to your thinking. It needs to be more than la-la-la-la. There is too much of that, and it's a cop out. That's like sitting playing your game boy.

My impression is that the SDNR ethic of self-responsibility necessitates accepting a role in creating a better society. They don't form systems because they don't trust systems, so they must act out their social values in more

grassroots ways. In this they differ from the Very Committed whose more traditional values are not at odds with institutional programs of social reform. My interviews suggest that at minimum, making the world better starts with transcending the artifices of social programming—the ego—and rising to a level of authentic awareness where one can act with integrity in one’s daily affairs. The highest action is the one that is most personally authentic, not one based on obligation or duty.

Conclusion

My aim in this chapter has been 1) to introduce Tipton’s analysis of the different moral cultures in the United States, and 2) to suggest that contemporary SDNRs demonstrate a moral logic consistent with what he calls expressivist counterculture morality. Although critics often suggest being a religiously unaffiliated spiritual seeker does not constitute a moral position, the analysis done in this chapter suggests that while these seekers are culture critical, and tend to distrust religious, corporate, governmental, institutions on the grounds they threaten their individual wellbeing, they are conscientious of their connections to others. Whereas critics of religiously unaffiliated spirituality typically argue that the value of traditional religious ethicality for creating a strong, cohesive society is being undermined by subjectivized spiritual seeking with the net result that society is worse off than it was three decades ago, I have argued that religiously unaffiliated spirituality has the potential to promote social cohesion by supplying a moral framework for masses of individuals unable to reconcile traditional or

conservative religious morality with the demands of modern living. This is because, as Tipton points out, expressivist counterculture morality is monistic. As a theological or philosophical position, monism—the idea that everything is connected—produces a distinctive type of morality. In particular, monism is linked to a preference for nurturing and non-hierarchical relationships. Thus, while Putnam thinks institutions are the best way to consolidate and integrate a society, SDNRs such as the ones I interviewed question the efficacy—even the morality—of collective entities that have the capability—and in many case the reputation—for misusing power. It is highly problematic, then, to assess the social morality of SDNRs by emphasizing institutional engagement as Putnam does. Reconciling the social capital of individuals belonging to a cohort of “institutional resisters,” therefore, is the goal of the final chapter. Specifically, I return to complete my analysis of their social capital by examining how countercultural expressivism meets with postmaterialism to shape their style of political engagement.

Chapter 7

“Expressive-postmaterialism:” SDNRs and the new sub-politics of autonomous engagement

Twitter user: Life's short. Love yourself, fight for your future and never give up! Chase, your passion, not, your pension!

Introduction

In the past decade, human values have become an important variable in social science research (Davidov 2008, 34). Not only have values become a critical public concern attached to a discourse about liberalism and conservatism (Kilburn 2009), values are a significant research area because of their ability to predict attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Rokeach 1973, Inglehart 1977; Schwartz 1992; Feather 1995). Unlike norms that refer to rules that govern behavior in specific situations, values can tell us a great deal about how people can be expected to behave individually and collectively. At the individual level, values are abstract standards or ideals that guide a person's life and help them make important decisions, by helping evaluate what is desirable versus non-desirable behavior (Schwartz 2010, 222). At the cultural level, values shape the structure of society (Weber 1958) and govern patterns of mass behavior (Inglehart 1977, Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Many studies have confirmed the relationship between values and patterns of cultural variation (Kluckhohn 1951; Hofstede 1980, 2001; Triandis 1995; Inglehart 1977, 1990, 1997; Inglehart and Welzel 2005).

In this chapter I want to examine whether the hypothesis presented in the introduction of this thesis is correct, namely that the postmaterialist values of

SDNRs prompt them to elite challenging acts of political engagement. As such, I end where I began, by considering what my survey and interviews say about the specific ways being SDNR is connected to forms of political engagement that can enhance the health of democracy. But I go beyond this.

I also deepen the exploration of postmaterialism as a platform for interpreting the social ethic of religiously unaffiliated spirituality by introducing the results of the Schwartz Values indicators, which I collected in my survey. Not only does this data confirm that my cohort is populated by postmaterialists—with all the socio-political implications inherent in that—it also allows me another vantage point from which to assess SDNR social and political values. In effect, I combine Tipton’s countercultural-expressivist moral orientation with Schwartz and Inglehart’s value orientations, to create a composite that has considerable utility for describing the social ethic of this cohort. I call this distillation of values “postmaterialist-expressivism.” I propose that postmaterialist-expressivism is a new way to understand the value orientation of SDNRs, one that captures the nexus of their spiritual beliefs, and their psychological (individual) and social (cultural/postmaterialist) values. As such, postmaterialist-expressivism helps explain how SDNRs conceptualize and enact their social obligations.

The chapter begins with an examination of the political logic of postmaterialism, followed by an overview of social psychologist Shalom Schwartz’s research, which I use to consolidate the link between the specific personal values favoured by the SDNRs in my research sample, and their postmaterialist orientation. Confirming that the values of SDNRs are consistent

with the postmaterialist ethic allows me to hypothesize what sorts of alternative political behaviors might be found in the cohort. I conclude by presenting evidence from my research that confirms the degree to which this is actually the case. In describing the political habits of SDNRs, this chapter completes my analysis of their social capital.

Cultural values: Postmaterialism

According to Inglehart and Welzel, certain mass attitudes, are powerful predictors of democracy (2010, 552).⁷⁷ Specifically, they argue that the growing prevalence of postmaterialist values in postindustrial societies is leading to cultural, sociological and political change (Inglehart 1977, 1990, 1997; Inglehart and Welzel 2005, 2010; Welzel and Inglehart 2008). Based on Abraham Maslow's (1954) premise that self-actualization only proceeds once basic survival needs are met, Inglehart's theory assumes that there will be an ongoing transformation of society when individuals in affluent postindustrial countries are no longer constrained to work merely to secure their material survival, but have the freedom, and the means, to pursue more psychologically enriching lives (1977, 28).

According to Inglehart, values are established in childhood (Inglehart and

⁷⁷ Ronald Inglehart has been developing his theory of culture change since the seventies. In many regards, the key pillars of his argument have been remarkably consistent since that time. Later he began collaborating with Christian Welzel who introduced the concept of the human developmental sequence. Overall, though, Inglehart's fundamental premises have remained unchanged. From my readings, I discern no appreciable difference between the work of Inglehart versus Inglehart and Welzel. If there are divergences, they are not significant in the context of this discussion. As such I sometimes use Inglehart, and Inglehart and Welzel interchangeably.

Welzel, 2005, 37-38). Those who come of age in affluent circumstances are more likely to be postmaterialist, whereas those subject to material deprivation are not.⁷⁸ Because values are socialized, and are not a matter of personal choice per se, generational replacement is what drives shifts in mass attitudes.⁷⁹ In other words, mass shifts of social values come about as a postmaterialist generation replaces a materialist one, not because individuals shift from being materialist to postmaterialist at some point in the life cycle.

In *Silent Revolution* (1977) Inglehart began developing his theory of value change based on an analysis of two large public opinion surveys conducted in Europe and Great Britain administered in 1970 and again in 1971 (32). Among other things, respondents were asked to select two of the four items as being the most important to them as follows:

- 1) Maintaining order in the nation;
- 2) Giving people more say in important government decisions; (postmaterialist)
- 3) Fighting rising inflation;
- 4) Protecting freedom of speech (postmaterialist).

Inglehart found that those who selected “maintaining order” were twice as likely to select “fighting inflation.” Those who picked “freedom of speech” were twice as likely to pick “more say in government decisions” (1977, 29). He adopted the

⁷⁸ He refers to this as the socialization hypothesis (2005, 98-99).

⁷⁹ Zygmunt Bauman has also argued that the process of modernization has led to a shift in values. They are based on the individuals’ interpretation of his/her needs. Where Bauman and Inglehart differ, is that Bauman views values as contingent on more immediate circumstances whereas Inglehart, as mentioned, considers that they are established in early socialization, and persist almost unchanged through the life course. See *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 21-36.

term postmaterialist to describe those who selected items one and three, and materialist for those who chose items two and four as most important to them. Respondents who chose any other combination were classed as “mixed” (1977, 133).⁸⁰

In the intervening years, Inglehart’s research has consistently demonstrated that, postmaterialists value freedom, self-expression, openness to innovation, social equality, inner harmony, intellectual satisfaction, aesthetics (e.g., beautiful cities), a sense of community, and belongingness (1977, 46, 60; 1990, 9, 138; 2005, 56, 97-105). Postmaterialists are less tolerant of bureaucratic structures, and less likely to be motivated by material rewards alone (Inglehart and Welzel 2005, 56).⁸¹ Materialist values, by contrast, concern a comfortable life, maintaining order, family security, and economic stability so that material progress and prosperity are realizable ambitions (2005, 56; 1990, 137).

Although Inglehart and Welzel think that this shift—or “silent revolution”—is now supported by “a massive body of evidence [that] demonstrates that an intergenerational shift has been taking place in the predicted direction” (2005, 97), the theory that continued socio-economic development produces a shift to

⁸⁰ Whereas the four-item index was an attempt to capture enduring elements of one’s outlook, Inglehart acknowledged, “Its most serious weakness is the simple fact it is only four items. Consequently, it may be excessively sensitive to short term forces” (1977, 39). Therefore, in 1973, a more broadly based, twelve-item index was also used. It included the original four questions plus eight additional questions, and was designed to elucidate the dimensions of Maslow’s hierarchy (1977, 40). Six of the items were intended to tap postmaterialist needs, six tapped materialist needs (1977, 41). Based on the expanded questionnaire, Inglehart was able to expand the scope of materialist and postmaterialist attitudes.

⁸¹ Although Inglehart finds that the longer test is a stronger predictor of attitudes, he stressed, however, that both the four and twelve item surveys yielded comparable results (1977, 52-53).

postmaterialism is not without its critics. Bowen, for one, thinks, “proclamations of a postmaterialist or postmodern revolution appear premature” (2004, 219). Some scholars find evidence for this pattern (e.g., Taniguchi 2006; Wong and Wan 2009;) whereas others do not (e.g., Brym, Veugelers, Butovsky et al. 2004; Majima and Savage 2007). Some researchers think Inglehart’s forced choice questionnaire is too deterministic, that measures of postmaterialism and materialism do not operate in exclusion of one another (Bean and Papadakis 1994, Wilson 2005). They object to Inglehart’s notion of a single continuum with materialism on one end and postmaterialism on the other (Braithwaite, Makkai and Pittlekow; 1996 Giacalone, Jurkiewicz, Deckop 2008). Giacalone and Jurkiewicz find that an interactive model (materialism x postmaterialism) has greater explanatory power (2004). Similar to the problem of social trust in Putnam’s research, critics have also suggested that aggregating individual level attitudes to the collective, societal level is not feasible (Seligson 2002, cited in Inglehart and Welzel 2010, 555). Inglehart and Welzel dismiss this particular criticism on the grounds that social scientists have been using aggregated data (e.g., fertility rates and per capita income etc.) for a long time, and that there is no reason not to extend the practice to subjective data (2010, 555). They say, “Although measured at different levels, we find remarkably strong linkages between individual-level values and the societies’ economic characteristics” (2010, 558).

It is beyond the scope of this analysis to critically evaluate the legitimacy of these critiques. Inglehart and Welzel’s theory is simply useful in the context of

this project—as is Putnam’s—to the degree their hypotheses can be confirmed or refuted on the basis of the qualitative and quantitative data collected. In this regard, this study is an interesting test case of their theoretical premises. Furthermore, the World Values Surveys, which have been conducted since the eighties, provide a comprehensive measurement of materialist and postmaterialist values.⁸² The fact Inglehart’s theory has been researched in large surveys in consultation with recognized collaborators (including Schwartz) gives plausibility to his claims.⁸³

What is the link between SDNR and postmaterialism?

In recent decades, Canada and almost all other affluent democratic nations have begun emphasizing self-expression values (Inglehart and Welzel 2010, 557). Data from the 2005 World Values Survey shows that Canada is one of the most postmaterialist nations in the world. Thirty one percent of the population is postmaterialist—higher than the U.S. (18%), Australia (22%) and Great Britain (24%). Despite this, Bowen positions the Very Committed in opposition to this trend. “What Committed Christians of all stripes share in common,” he writes, “is their relative lack of attention to postmaterialist values” (2004, 219). Bowen’s research suggests that while the Committed place a high premium on “rigorous environmental laws” and have high approval levels for the “ecology, anti-nuclear,

⁸² http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs/articles/folder_published/article_base_54. Last accessed July 21, 2010.

⁸³ Inglehart has published seven books (some co-authored) and over thirty articles. This information is from his website <http://www.psc.isr.umich.edu/people/profile/674>. Last accessed June 30, 2010.

disarmament and human rights, these are not their priorities (219). Improving communal and family relationships are (220). Although they are generally committed to progressive political causes, Bowen finds that the main political difference between the Very Committed and other Canadians is that they are “singularly reluctant to attach great importance to the postmaterialist priorities of autonomy, personal development and quality of life...” (220).⁸⁴

My research confirms that SDNRs do not have the same social values as the religiously committed. Unlike the Very Committed, SDNRs are strongly postmaterialist. Echo’s of the postmaterialist ethic are heard throughout my informant’s remarks. Julia, for example, objects to this culture’s rampant materialism, and the overemphasis on what she calls “the ethic of doing.”

We live in a society that has gone insane with doing, you know, frenzied, crazy completely out of control. The philosophy of the cancer cell is unchecked growth and that is exactly the philosophy of the capitalist culture... [it’s] the norm of this crazy culture of do-do-do-do-do-busy-busy-busy all the time. It’s crazy.

More pointedly, Zoë is highly critically of capitalism. In our interview she explained why she is planning on living in France for a year:

I’m tired of being in this kind of culture. It’s not like that there and I find I like that. I like the socialist aspects of France... [Why?] Well I think everyone deserves a leg up if you need it. And it’s not fair to say ‘everyone for themselves’ when in the Western world so much of success is based on your previous situation. Money makes money. You have to have money to make money and it just makes me sick. I can’t stand it. In France they’ve built these co-op homes where they house the homeless and give them jobs.

Alice’s postmaterialist orientation also came through when I asked her about

⁸⁴ Given that 50% the Very Committed were over the age of 52 in 1997 when his data was collected, and therefore part of the pre-boomer, materialist cohort, this is not very surprising (47).

politics: “I don’t like the redneck element of politics. I get tired of the old-boys network. The environment is important to me. I get tired of the rich being so rich and other people struggling. Yeh, I’m more socially inclined.” Kirby also thinks that “there are more important things than working 12 hours of overtime—go spend time with your family, you know, just little things that make the world a little bit better.” In a similar way, Trevor’s expresses his postmaterialist outlook through a “ladder of comfort” metaphor:

When we get to a certain level of comfort, [the] things that concern other people, [don’t affect us] because we’re comfortable. It’s like a ladder and you keep moving up a rung at a time on the level of comfort, and things get easier—to get a car say—so the idea of taking the bus becomes less appealing. I think for things to rest in the middle, many of us have to start coming down a rung at a time on this ladder of comfort and say, “I’m willing to give up this or this so that other people can get a few things so they can start moving up a little bit.” I think it’s a challenge for [those living in] affluent nations to say ‘What can I do in my own life that can start to make a change? What things can I make a little less comfortable?’

Cathleen told me that she spends about \$500-\$600 a month on medical expenses, and that she needs a certain level of success because “I’m the one that needs to handle that.” At the same time she told me,

I don’t think I am going to feel satisfied just one day having a lot of money. That’s not going to do it for me. I have to feel the whole, and to have other things that are fulfilling. I need to have others that I care about—and the cat—I really enjoy having animals around. There’s a lot more important things to me than making money and being successful.

Glen had the same insight as Cathleen, only his came after a big success in business.

I was 24 years old and I had tremendous business success...I got paid a lot of money, but it was a let down. There was nothing. It was like ‘okay, what is this all about?’ You know you get to the point and it’s like ‘I’m

here!’ but it wasn’t that great. It was just okay. I knew I wanted more.

In an email sent after our interview, Muriel describes the material and social repercussions of her lifestyle choices. Postmaterialist overtones resonate in her self-understanding:

This path is lonely and filled with anguish much of the time. My ego would never walk this path, but my spirit compels me. I would love to have more fun, more comfort, more pleasure, to fit in better, to be popular, to be supported by society, to be understood and respected. Instead I am living in a world that, for the most part, looks down on me...because...I am called to a different way of life than the norm. The vast majority of my time is spent in research, in exercises to expand my consciousness, in meditation (prayer), in workshops, in reading, in contemplation, in healing, in speaking, in learning and growing and evolving. There is no value placed on this in our society...It requires the ability to detach from everything we thought we knew, everything we cling to, everything that keeps us safe and secure.

As explored in the previous chapter, self-expression and authenticity are also important to these seekers. Miranda told me that her philosophy of life is “do what brings you joy.” When I spoke to her, Cathleen was in the middle of a career change. She said, “I need to change and learn something different. I really need to pursue something that’s closer to my heart—[be] more creative, more expressive.” Trudy thinks of her work in terms of helping others find their unique expression. She says, “I like promoting art, I like supporting artists, I have always taken pleasure helping people find their way to their own expression, their own voice if you like.”

In the upcoming sections, I will return to my interview material to highlight the postmaterialist ethic of my informants. In the meantime, I want to draw on my questionnaire data for a more empirical assessment of the

postmaterialist orientation of this group. I will do this by examining how they rate on the Schwartz Values indices. Because Schwartz's values overlap with Inglehart's postmaterialist indicators, this is a viable way to measure the degree of postmaterialism in my sample. Given the complexity of the values literature this is necessarily a brief offering, intended only to support the broader discussion of postmaterialism.

Schwartz Values Indicators

In 1992 the social psychologist Shalom Schwartz introduced a comprehensive new theory of human values, designed to reflect universally important goals.⁸⁵ Incorporating elements of earlier values theories (e.g., Rokeach 1973, Inglehart 1990) he proposed ten motivationally distinct values as follows: 1) self direction; 2) universalism; 3) benevolence; 4) tradition; 5) conformity; 6) security; 7) power; 8) achievement; 9) hedonism; and 10) stimulation). He proposed that these ten values were interdependent and in some cases mutually exclusive (2010, 225). It is not possible for example, to value dominance over others while simultaneously valuing their equality. As such, the values exist on a circular continuum where similar values are adjacent to one another, and dissimilar or incongruent values are on opposite side of the wheel (Figure 9).

⁸⁵ Since its introduction, Schwartz's model has received enormous research attention and has gained widespread confirmation and acceptance. Schwartz Values indicators have been collected as part of the WVS and the European Values Survey (ESS) since the Nineties, providing ample empirical verification for his approach.

Figure 12: Schwartz's four values priorities.

These value clusters are organized to reflect two primary and distinctive value priorities, namely, 1) openness to change versus conservation, 2) and self-transcendence versus self-enhancement.

Schwartz defined values as being linked to affect. For example, those who value freedom become aroused when their freedom is threatened. Values also motivate behavior. To continue the example, people who value freedom will act to preserve their freedom. Schwartz also considers values to be stable over time. They serve as enduring standards helping individuals to determine and evaluate courses of action. Finally, values are not all equal but rather are arranged hierarchically. It is the relative weight of a value that determines its psychological and behavioral outcomes (2010, 223-224).

Based on my questionnaire findings, the following percentage of SDNRs

rated the Schwartz values as between important (5) and of extreme importance: (9): Tradition, 38%, Conformity 45%, Security 67%, Power 24%, Achievement 72%, Hedonism 77%, Stimulation 88%, Self-direction 98%, Universalism 94%, and Benevolence 96%. This means that the cohort is high in the openness to change and self-transcendence and low in conservation and self-enhancement values. This reinforces the analysis done in the preceding chapter. Based on what was said there, we would expect to find SDNRs high in value orientations favouring autonomy (self-direction) and environmentalism (universalism), and low in those that either oppose egalitarianism (power), or endorse obedience (tradition and conformity). This is, in fact, precisely what the data show. Furthermore, because researchers have confirmed a correlation between Inglehart's traditional/secular and survival/self-expression values, and Schwartz's hierarchical/egalitarian and autonomy/embeddedness scales (Braithwaite, Makkai and Pittlekow 1996; Wilson 2004; Schwartz 2007), it is reasonable to argue that SDNRs are postmaterialists.⁸⁶

In theory, knowing the cultural (Inglehart) and individual (Schwartz) values of SDNRs should predict their social and political attitudes and behaviors. In what follows I consider what those attitudes and behaviors might be, and then review my research data to see whether these attitudes and behaviors are present

⁸⁶ A simpler way to confirm that SDNRs were postmaterialist would have been to include Inglehart's questions in my survey. Unfortunately I did not do this. At the time I was not aware of his earlier work and the questions that he had used to create his typology.

Figure 13: Ranking of Schwartz Values in my questionnaire sample. Percentages are those who said that this value was between five (important) and nine (very important) on the scale.

Schwartz Value	Weight	Description (as stated in my survey)
Tradition	38%	Accepting your position in life, devoutness, humility, respect for tradition, moderation, detachment
Conformity	45%	Obedience, honouring your parents and elders, politeness, self discipline)
Security	67%	National security, reciprocating favours, social order, family security, sense of belonging, cleanliness, health
Power	24%	Social power, authority, wealth, preserving your public image, social recognition
Achievement	72%	Success, ability, ambition, influence, intelligence
Hedonism	77%	Pleasure, enjoying life
Stimulation	88%	Being daring, variety, an exciting life
Self-direction	98%	Curiosity, creativity, freedom, choosing your own goals, independence, self respect
Universalism	94%	Protecting the environment, unity with nature, a world of beauty, broad mindedness, social justice, wisdom, equality, a world at peace, inner harmony
Benevolence	96%	Helpfulness, honesty, forgiveness, loyalty, responsibility, spirituality, true friendship, mature love, meaning in life

Is there a relationship between SDNR values and their prosocial behaviors?

A Schwartz's Values approach

Schwartz has studied how his value priorities promulgate prosocial behavior, specifically 1) participation in prosocial organizations, 2) political activism, and finally 3) voting (left or right) (2010, 229-237). Using data collected from 21 national samples of the European Social Survey, Schwartz measured participation (donations, volunteerism, and activism) in organizations connected to the environmental movement, peace movement or animal rights movement. He found that only education predicted participation in these activities more than universalism (positive correlation) or security and tradition values (negative correlation) (2010, 235).

Figure 14: Correlations of the ten basic values with socially significant behavior. Source, Schwartz 2010, 236.

Regarding political activism over the past twelve months (boycotting a product, participating in a demonstration, contacting a politician, displaying a sticker), he hypothesized that because these acts “largely support causes aimed at improving the general welfare,” they should correlate with universalism, which is connected to values such as social justice and environmental protection (2010, 236). In the same way, universalism was positively, and security negatively, correlated with political activism. As he points out, these protests activities are “prosocial behaviors whose targets are outside the circle of ingroup members” (2010, 237). In other words, they are consistent with what Putnam calls outward looking social capital. I hypothesize, therefore, that because SDNRs score high in universalism (94%) compared with tradition (38%) and security (68%) values, we should see high rates of concern for social justice and environmental protection.

My survey showed that environmental protection was the number one cause supported by my respondents, with 47% indicating they gave money to an environmental organization in the past year,⁸⁷ astronomically higher than the Canadian average of only 8% (CSGVP 2007, 27).⁸⁸ This was followed by homelessness and housing (41%), international relief (36%), and health causes (35%). The importance of protecting the environment also came out in the interviews. As described in the last chapter, the monistic belief that all is one, gives SDNRs a sense they are connected to the natural world. This is the attitudinal basis of their environmental values, which were pronounced in the

⁸⁷ Question 93.

⁸⁸ Unfortunately, this information was not available for the Very Committed.

views of all nearly all my informants.⁸⁹ Justin and Darren both work in environmental related fields, and Trevor, Cathleen, and Shelly work in the healthy living industry, which emphasizes using natural and organic products as part of a healthy lifestyle. While for many of my informants the issue of protecting the environment was implicit in their monism, or was not articulated in a powerful way during the interviews, some of my informants were more vehement. Cathleen puts it succinctly: “I really feel we’re sharing the planet with all the animals. You can’t just assume you’ve got the right to make a big mess.” For Madagascar,

An environmental footprint is unavoidable but there’s lot of small things a person can do and if everybody did them, we’d be able to conserve a lot of stuff. I mean obviously recycling and making sure that you don’t use lights when you don’t need to. Even in public washrooms I have little tricks to try and conserve [energy like] turning off the lights when I leave...I prefer to go to the market; I try to bring bags. I don’t have a car.

Indeed, many informants are very conscientious about their environmental impact. Casey, now in her fifties and self-employed in the holistic health sector told me that “I don’t buy anything with a chemical in it. We certainly don’t spray our lawn!” Martin is a well-educated man in his mid-fifties. He speaks strongly about environmental issues. He thinks that while “mining, and cars and oil and moving electricity around the planet” are all bad, agriculture is the leading cause of environmental imbalance because it promotes “desertification.” He finds it ironic that the biggest influence on climate change is “something we consider benign.” In mocking tones he adds:

⁸⁹ William, Fred, and Tom were notable exceptions. I can offer no explanation for this. William said he rarely recycled and the others did not express reverence for the environment or nature in our interviews the way the other informants did.

Taming the wild forests of southern Ontario! Creating wonderful farmland! The history of industry and progress!” C’mon, really? It’s the history of the death of a section of our planet.

Martin thinks “the world is going to hell in a hand basket” because, among other things, humans do not understand their place in the created order; they act as though they are a superior life form.

Man has always been the despoiler. [Throughout history] our agricultural practices have created deserts. We’re like some fungus on the face of the earth. For some reason we think we’re special...we think we’re more important than the rest of the universe somehow or other and it’s not the case. We may just be a cold our little section of the universe caught.

Zoë is very politically active, and very knowledgeable about politics, especially for her age. A few years ago she hit the front lines and actively campaigned to protect the environment, specifically to help preserve southern Ontario wetlands, which she thinks are “so important to our ecology.” She attended a city council meeting, and later a march, to oppose some tabled legislation but “it ended up making no difference” because the government still passed the bill. “Man, my voice was not heard” she said.

Social justice causes were next on my informants’ list of efforts they donated money to confirming their postmaterialist value orientation. In our interview, Patricia told me “I wish there were more good programs in place for housing.” Furthermore, she thinks the Harris government’s twenty percent cut to welfare was “outrageous. I actually think Harris should be jailed, that he is a criminal,” she said. “He has many deaths on his head starting with Walkerton, but there’s lots of others.” Also recall that Zoë played a benefit concert for Doctors Without Borders, and Muriel prepared containers for overseas relief. In the

upcoming sections, I will suggest that SDNRs act on their social justice values through political consumerism, but first I want to consider how SDNRs' postmaterialist values translate into prosocial behaviors, especially political ones.

The politics of postmaterialism

According to Inglehart, the proliferation of postmaterialist values is related to “a shift in the balance of political skills between elites and mass” (1977, 293). He says, “[t]hese changes have important implications for established political parties, labour unions, and professional organizations, for mass politics are increasingly apt to be elite challenging rather than elite directed” (1977, 293). Because of their different value sets, postmaterialists have different priorities than materialists. Unlike materialists, they are particularly concerned with issues of gender equality, environmental protection, and the empowerment of ethnic minorities (2005, 52-56). Furthermore, their priorities are associated with new forms of political engagement including citizen activism and new social movements (1997, 211). This includes “1) joining in boycotts, 2) attending lawful demonstrations, 3) joining unofficial strikes, 4) occupying buildings or factories” (1997, 211). According to their analysis, data from the World Values Surveys show that postmaterialists are two to four times more likely to undertake unconventional forms of political action than materialists (1997, 211).

Critics argue that the emergence of new styles of political engagement is weakening traditional forms of political engagement (Putnam 2002). While Putnam acknowledges that the downward arc of social capital may be at least

partially offset by an “increase in the relative importance of informal, fluid, personal forms of social connection, what Rothstein calls ‘solidaristic individualism’ and what Wuthnow calls ‘loose ties,’” he questions the strength of the data advocating these new forms of social capital. He admits that, in part, this is because informal groups do less official record keeping. Still, he says that evidence does not appear to support the theory that new forms of social capital are replacing more traditional ones (at least in the US) (2002, 412). Writing on behalf of his colleagues, Putnam says,

most authors in this volume fear that new individualistic forms of civic engagement may be less conducive to the pursuit of collective goals...the newer forms of social participation are narrower, less bridging, less focused on collective or public- regarding purpose...the newer forms may be more liberating, but less solidaristic—representing a kind of privatization of social capital. (2002, 412)

On the contrary, Inglehart argues that the rise of postmaterialism, and new forms of socio-political engagement, are positively associated with democracy. Inglehart and Welzel argue that 70% of all cultural variation in areas of life ranging from religion, to sexuality, to politics, can be reduced to two broad value dimensions: 1) traditional versus secular religious orientation, and 2) survival (materialist) versus self-expression (postmaterialist) values orientation. Further, their research suggests that cultures marked by widespread self-expression values will have the most effective democracies (2005, 200-201). “Since postmaterialists emphasize individual freedom and self-expression,” he writes, “it is not surprising that postmaterialist values correlate with democratic values” (1997, 211). Inglehart and Welzel argue that

[w]hile for many years voter turnout has been declining throughout postindustrial societies, and there has been widespread speculation that declining social capital is producing politically inert publics (Putman 2000), we disagree with this diagnosis. Instead we find two divergent trends. On the one hand, bureaucratized and elite-directed forms of participation such as voting and political party membership have declined; but intrinsically motivated, expressive, and elite challenging forms of participation have risen dramatically. (2005, 116)

In particular, they say postmaterialism is associated with 1) valuing liberty, 2) supporting democratic norms, 3) advocating for rights, 4) supporting dissent and opposition, 5) supporting competitive elections, and 6) being politically tolerant (1997, 210).

Overall, Inglehart and Welzel distinguish between two different conceptions of democracy, namely “electoral democracy” and “liberal democracy” (Welzel and Inglehart 2008, 126). Whereas electoral democracy emphasizes voting and the electoral process more broadly, liberal democracy is based on “mass voice in self governance” (2008, 126). “The emergence and survival of democracy,” they argue, “depends on social preconditions such as the wide distribution of participatory resources and a trusting, tolerant public that prizes free choice” (126). As such, “postmaterialists view democracy as something that is intrinsically desirable—and not just a possible means to become wealthy and successful” (1997, 210). In this context, self-expression is not just something associated with a feeling of subjective satisfaction because one has many thrilling or meaningful experiences, or is able to find ways to express one’s inner self. Instead, it denotes a tolerance of diversity, and the increased demand to be part of decision-making processes at the heart of economic and political life

(2005, 56; 1977, 46-46). Although self-expression can be associated with the dark side of therapy culture, in Inglehart and Welzel's theory, it is a potential agent of social and political transformation.

In what follows, I consider two main questions. First, do SDNRs participate in routine political behaviors (e.g., voting, campaign activities) as much as other Canadians and the Very Committed? Second, to what extent do they participate in alternative forms of political participation or elite challenging behaviors, namely, petitions, boycotts, and political consumerism? If Inglehart and Welzel are correct, my data should confirm that SDNRs favour participation in elite challenging forms of political behavior.

Modes of SDNR political participation

SDNR participation in electoral politics: Evidence from my research

It is axiomatic in the political sciences that "informed political participation is the foundation of democracy" (Nakhaie 2006, 363). Yet as discussed in chapter five, the norms, values and beliefs of SDNRs flow out of a sense that institutions cannot necessarily be trusted. This is reflected in many of the comments I heard during the interviews, such as Shelly who put it succinctly: "I trust the government about forty percent," she said. Casey told me she has not voted in three years because when she listens to politicians talk "they all seem like big liars."

None of them strike me as having any credibility. So I just can't bring myself to vote. I do listen to the debates carefully but when is someone going to run whether local or federal who I can look at and say, "Yes I believe you?"

Likewise Zoë said the following:

I don't think the government really cares about people. I think they care about themselves. I think they care about the economy. I think they care about corporations and money and factories and oil. I don't think they care about the environment and I don't think they care about humanitarian issues and the inequalities and power differences we have in our society. Especially Steven Harper. I can't stand the guy.

Devon has had numerous struggles with the municipal government. She told me

I always feel slightly at odds with the city of Waterloo. I don't feel as if I've got common ground with the city of Waterloo. I feel more at odds with it. Like the battle of trying to get my sign on the front lawn, the battle of trying to get students to stop trashing the place at night. They are the ones with the rules and regulations [but] it's the rules and regulations that always seem to get in the way of independent thought.

Yana is very politically engaged, and not overly cynical. When I asked her whether she trusted the government she said, "I wouldn't have absolute faith in them, just like I wouldn't have absolute faith in my doctor. I would always be checking, you know?" Hope is more pessimistic and told me that she "hardly trust[s] the government. I am dismayed that the government just seeks instantaneous results rather than long term thinking." Justin also votes and follows current affairs. He reads several news publications regularly and always listens to the news. During our interview, though, he told me that—quite contrary to the Putnam thesis—"voting doesn't necessarily make you a good citizen...politics is simply another form of religion but without any spirituality at all." Kirby expresses this sentiment even more dramatically. Kirby does not trust the government at all. He never votes because he is opposed to the political system. Still he thinks he is "the ideal citizen." I asked him why:

I care for my family, but also for others. I never take more than my share and always give all I can afford to give—not just monetarily, but energetically. I am not too outspoken, but I am not afraid to speak my mind. I’m completely non-political. I’m opposed to the whole political system. Like completely. I think they are the non-ideal—politicians that is. For example, I’ll be watching hockey and I’ll see an ad for the Liberal Party and instead of saying all the wonderful things they can give the world, they say all these bad things about someone else...And in the end, what they say actually never happens.

In one fell swoop Kirby has dismissed the key premise of liberal democracy—the right to a voice in political decision-making, yet Kirby thinks non-participation is evidence of his exemplary citizenship: it is something he feels good about because he rejects the integrity of politicians and the efficacy of the political system.

Does this cynicism result in SDNRs withdrawing from routine political activities? To assess this, I asked questions in the survey concerning voting and participation in political activities. The results are laid out in Figure 15. Drawing on Nakhaie’s analysis of the 2000 NSGVP⁹⁰ data (2006), we see very high rates of political participation amongst the Very Committed: 89% of who voted in the last federal election compared with only 70% of SDNRs.⁹¹ Still this is considerably higher than the Canadian average of 59%. The fact the Spiritual Group cohort showed the highest rates of voting compared with either the Whole Sample or the Spiritual Practice groups (78% vs. 70% and 67% respectively)

⁹⁰ The acronym is for the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating and was referred to extensively in the analysis of social capital in chapter five.

⁹¹ My survey collected information on voting in questions 65-67. The way I worded the question is different than Stats Canada since I asked how many of the past four federal, provincial and municipal elections respondents had voted in. For the purpose of this analysis, I assumed that anyone who had voted in at least three of the four previous elections was likely to have voted in the past election. The fact that this is not a precise comparison needs to be borne in mind. Future research can easily correct this oversight.

Figure 15 The comparison of the rates of electoral and political campaign activities for SDNRs, the Very Committed and average Canadians

Politics and current affairs					
	Canadians over the age of 18	Very Committ ed	Q/A Whole sample	Q/A Spiritual Group	Q/A Spiritual Practice
Voted in the previous federal elections(GSS 2008)	59%	89%*	70%	78%	67%
Voted in the previous provincial election (GSS 2008)	n/a	87%*	67%	78%	67%
Voted in the previous municipal election? (GSS 2008)	n/a	78%*	53%	62%	54%
Somewhat or very interested in politics or current affairs (WVS 2005)	53%	62%	68%	71%	62%
Attended political meeting or rally in past 12 months	n/a	n/a	20%	19%	13%
Belong to a political party (WVS 2005)	17%	23%	12%	17%	11%

supports the general claim that face-to-face social engagement stimulates political engagement. Unlike volunteering, we should not expect to see a gender effect here, since there is no difference between the participation rates for Canadian men and women in terms of voting.⁹² Still, as with the other measures of social capital examined, the high educational levels of the group(s) should predict strong performance on this measure. Fewer SDNRs belong to a political party than the Very Committed, and the average Canadian (12% vs. 23% and 17% respectively). Paradoxically, though, my data shows SDNRs being more interested in politics

⁹² <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-640-x/2009001/tab/tab3-1-eng.htm>. Last accessed August, 3, 2010.

and current affairs than the Very Committed or the average Canadian (68% versus 62% and 53% respectively). As I argue in the upcoming section, this anomaly could be explained by the fact SDNRs are more interested in alternative forms of political engagement than either the Very Committed or average Canadians.

Summing up then, it would be inaccurate to cast SDNRs as indifferent to politics.

If they decided to abstain, as with Kirby and Casey, it was a reasoned decision.

Still, most were willing to engage in the system. Madagascar told me he always tries to encourage others to vote around election time. He thinks that to influence government “you have to try and change the system from within.” Likewise,

Shelly thinks,

it’s better to vote and voice your opinion, and be involved. But it can be frustrating. Sometimes it feels like it doesn’t make a difference. I know a lot of people feel that way, but I think it does make a difference. It’s better to be involved than not at all regardless of how much influence you have. It’s better than just giving up and saying ‘Well what does it matter anyway, it’s not doing anything’.

Finally, Devon told me she always votes, but always for the “underdog.”

There was a party that came along a while ago that said if they got elected they would start transcendental meditation and raise the vibration of Canada (laughing). I voted for them because I always want to make sure we have alternatives, you know? So our alternatives don’t disappear like they did in the States...I’m happy to split the vote [as a] way to support freethinking.

Devon’s incentive to support freethinking is characteristically postmaterialist and invokes the elite-challenging stance inherent in her decision-making. In what follows I pursue this question of elite challenging political behaviors to investigate whether SDNRs are really as inclined to these acts as Inglehart and

Welzel predict. I begin with a look at petitions, and then move to consider an emerging arena of research interest—political consumerism.

SDNR postmaterialism expressed as elite challenging behaviors

Petitions

Tanis has signed four petitions in the past year. She told me that, with some stipulations, she usually signs “whatever is going by.” Like several of the others I spoke to (Alice, Miranda, and Muriel), she often signs online petitions circulated by Avaaz.org.⁹³ Avaaz and other online campaigns such as TckTckTck, epitomize the shift away from elite directed initiatives, to global communities linked through what are proving to be formidably powerful social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter. Andrew Male, communications director for TckTckTck, was quoted in the Guardian as saying the following:

What is so exciting about this kind of online campaigning is that it's about giving people a set of tools and letting them do whatever they want with them. It's not about controlling people and telling them what to do, it's about creating a space and frame and having individuals, groups and communities let their imagination and passion take them somewhere⁹⁴

His comments sum up the appeal such online petitions have for postmaterialists: they are non-hierarchical and as Avaaz is demonstrating with the success⁹⁵ of its

⁹³ <http://www.avaaz.org/en/media.php>. Last accessed August 6, 2010.

⁹⁴ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/blog/2009/sep/22/climate-summit-new-york-online>. Last accessed August 6, 2010.

⁹⁵ For example, the most recent Avaaz campaign is to prevent Sakineh Ashtiani from being stoned to death in Iran on charges of adultery. In only 12 hours, over 33,000 individuals around the world donated money to run full-page ads in newspaper ads in Brazil and Turkey. As a result of the outcry, she may be offered asylum by the Brazilian president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. Avaaz receives no money from governments or corporations. http://www.avaaz.org/en/stop_stoning. Last accessed August 20, 2010.

campaigns, powerfully elite challenging. The importance of challenging elite power structures came through my discussion with Devon. In our conversation, she told me she had just signed a petition at the health food store, and further, that she was considering starting a petition on behalf of Mark Emory, to prevent his extradition to the U.S. on drug charges.

I [am] very tempted to print out a petition so people could start signing it. [What was it for?] That would be for the gentleman Mark Emory who is being extradited to the States for selling marijuana seeds. And they (the Americans) want to put him in jail even though he's been selling seeds for twenty years and paying income tax on the money he is getting!...He's made millions of dollars and donated it to all sorts of things [but] according to the American government he is the worst and most evil drug lord on the entire planet, and is destroying the fabric of their society (mocking laugh). Can you believe it? So there is a petition I am thinking of taking action on...If anything should be outlawed it's alcohol. People die of alcohol every day.

On average, 74% of the interview cohort signed a petition in the past year.⁹⁶ The average number of petitions was for the interview cohort was 1.4. Data from my survey showed that 77% of respondents had signed at least one petition in the past twelve months, which was, as Inglehart would predict, higher than the Canadian average of 73% and the Very Committed 72%. These figures suggest many would agree with Duncan's enthusiastic endorsement for the power of petitions to bring about change.

I think they're a great idea, a wonderful beautiful, perfect idea. You get a thousand people on paper saying "I agree with this" that's power. You get one person on a podium with a microphone screaming, its one person, right? But you get thousands of people, hundreds standing up saying no or confirming on that piece of paper 'this is what we believe' to me that's true power because you actually have a physical representation of where

⁹⁶ Question 77

peoples values are.

Still, not all my informants were unequivocally supportive of petitions. Laila does not like to sign them because she feels like it is “feeding the negativity of the situation.” Likewise, Alice said, “generally I am not a petition person. Like I won't do the ones that come through the email...I might pray that there's greater understanding for the situation. But I will also talk about issues with others, like, I really don't agree with this or that....” Richard also told me,

As a rule, I don't sign petitions. Here is my reasoning. To be blunt, I don't think they do much on the international scale. I think they have an impact on the local and possibly countrywide scale. My approach has always been to change society you have to change your everyday behavior. In the long run, what will hurt a negligent or toxic company or country more? Don't buy their stuff!

Richard's comment is an interesting one, and segues into the next topic—boycotts and buycotts.

Political consumerism and “everyday making”

Given that we live in a consumer culture, it is not surprising to find consumer protest gaining popularity as a form of social and political activism (Euchner 1996; Bang and Sorensen 1999, Stolle and Micheletti 2006; Sandovici and Davis 2010). Generally speaking, political consumerism is defined as “a consumer's choice of producers and products based on a variety of ethical and political considerations.” Political consumers choose particular products or services because they want to change objectionable institutional or market practices” (Stolle and Micheletti 2006, 48). In short, political consumerism is people voting for social change with their dollars either by spending it on products, and

therefore companies, that promote their social aims, or alternately, withholding it from companies with bad business ethics. Such choices may reflect a commitment to values such as 1) personal wellbeing (e.g., buying organic food because it contains no pesticides), 2) the welfare of those involved in production (e.g., farm workers exposed to pesticides), or 3) protecting the environment.

Political consumerism is not new though it has been on the rise since the eighties when a “massive growth of corporate power, with its [subsequent] colonization of the public sphere and every aspect of social life” in conjunction with the rise of global telecommunications technology—and globalization more broadly—led citizens to search for new forms of protest outside traditional governmental channels (Boggs 2000, 288-289; Stolle and Micheletti 2006, 48). Because political consumerism is difficult to measure decisively, it is hard to say for certain how widespread it is, although research shows boycotts were four times more common in 1994 than in 1974 (Stolle and Micheletti 2006, 52).

Danish political scientists refer to this kind of involvement as “everyday making;” it is a type of citizen initiative that is grassroots, hands on, local and practical (Bang and Sorensen 1999; Stolle and Micheletti 2006, 65). Stolle and Micheletti remind us “...issues of globalization, consumption, and even concrete consumer goods such as coffee, jeans, toilet paper, and tropical woods should be considered as everyday maker concerns. They should not get lost in our tallying of important citizen activities” (2006, 65).

SDNR everyday maker activities take several forms. These include traditional boycotts. For example, Trevor told me,

I used to like pop, but I read how Coke was taking a lot of the groundwater from villages in India so that residents had to travel farther and farther for their water since their water was being sucked up by Coke to make their product. So after that I stopped drinking Coke. I made a very conscious decision not to buy it....Maybe there will come a time when we all have to do more, keep the pressure on to make change happen.

Likewise, Madagascar said,

I look for products of Canada and buy as few that aren't from Canada as possible. I don't buy that much stuff except music and art supplies. My clothes are second hand. I try not to use the car...and I try and encourage others ' don't turn on your heat yet, it's not cold; you don't need to use your car, you can walk there' that kind of stuff.

Richard told me that he does not want to support giants like Microsoft. His solution is to contribute to the development of alternative software solutions:

In North America we're developing into a technologically advanced society and there's quite a discontinuity between rich and poor. I really like what's called open source software where a community of people get together to build software to be used by everyone, and if you can make [the software] better you can contribute that back to society. I would like to contribute to these types of organizations.

What is interesting, though, is that according to my survey, about a quarter of SDNRs said they "participated in boycotts, demonstrations or marches in the past 12 months." This is not a very high figure. According to the World Values Survey (2006) 23% of Canadians have boycotted something, and 26% of the Very Committed have. Why are these rates not higher if, as Inglehart suggests, postmaterialists are inclined to elite challenging behaviors? The only answer I have for this is that my question was not phrased to focus on boycotting specifically. I think a more plausible explanation, though, is that SDNRs focus more on items they do purchase (buycotting) rather than ones they don't

(boycotting). There was no question on the questionnaire that addressed boycotting (and the term would likely be unfamiliar to many in any case), although I find evidence of it, for example, in their high expenditures on organic food, and frequent use of complementary medical therapies.

Purchase of organic food

Whereas 60% to 70% of Canadian consumers are concerned about chemicals and preservatives in their food, according to 2007 census data only 5% of Canadians buy organic food. By contrast 21% of my survey respondents report that they buy organic food “almost always” and a further 50% buy it “whenever possible”⁹⁷

These are very high figures, and reflect a distinctive feature of SDNR consumer behavior—one that makes sense in the context of their environmental values.

Hope articulated this well when she told me why she buys organic food. Part of the reason is because it contains no pesticides, but it went beyond this:

I consider it a way of supporting a different way of doing things, a different way of thinking; it's a different way of viewing how we live, not just agriculture. I mean we share this earth with a lot of different creatures so trying to be aware of those creatures, even the bugs that are viewed as bad things; there's a whole ecosystem out there and hopefully if you're buying organic that whole ecosystem is being supported as opposed to mass produced food... The environment is a very big concern. I am not as environmentally conscious as I would like to be but we try to use fluorescents, we've changed all our toilets to low flush, efficient furnace... I try to be more aware—use cloth bags, use rain barrels to water the garden. We compost.

Likewise, Ashara expressed her everyday maker values—including the purchase of organic food—when I asked her if she considered herself a good citizen

⁹⁷ Granted the way this question was worded gives rise to certain ambiguities that future research will want to control for. It is not clear, for instance, what percentage of their groceries are organic. See question 46 on questionnaire.

One can be a good citizen of one's neighbourhood, one's city, one's country or one's planet. I am probably not a good citizen of my community or my country in a traditional, municipal [sense]. I don't vote. I don't get involved in local politics. I don't set out to lend my energy to making a difference for the recycling program or volunteering, the bloodbank or any of that stuff because I don't feel I want to and I am okay with that. But by accepted traditional definitions that makes me an irresponsible citizen. But by my definition, I do my best within my means and my own physical energy levels to recycle, and eat organically which is expensive and I can't always do it.

Complementary therapies as an everyday maker forum

Everyday maker values also manifest in another form of political consumerism found among SDNRs, namely the high use of complementary and alternative medical therapies (CAM). Most of the people I interviewed regarded these therapies as highly effective, a fact reflected in the questionnaire where informants reported that they had at least tried the following: acupuncture (57%), aromatherapy (56%), energy healing (71%), reflexology (55%) and, vitamins (80%).⁹⁸ Given that 75% said they used these therapies "to preserve good health" compared with only 18% who used them because "conventional medicine had no cure for their condition," these alternative healthcare modalities can be seen as an element of their self-governing lifestyle where the choice to use complementary therapies decreases their reliance on institutional medicine. In effect, using CAM therapies can be seen as boycotting pharmaceutical products. Madagascar probably speaks for many when he says "there is no reason to give money to pharmaceutical companies" when "there are so many awesome plants with proven healing abilities." They are "way more effective" he says "and [you] feel better

⁹⁸ See question 43 on my questionnaire.

when you use them.” In more jaundiced tones, Devon, tells me that she thinks hemp is illegal because it promotes local economies. Precisely because it has medicinal properties (e.g. “it’s the only oil in the world that has all the amino acids your body needs to produce protein”) she thinks there is a huge lobby out to block it.

Hemp is grown and harvested locally so it threatens national conglomerates like the pharmaceutical companies that do not want people growing [this natural pain reliever] in their back yard and sharing it with their friends. No, because then you wouldn’t buy Tylenol [even though] Tylenol and Aspirin kill more people every year than all other illicit drugs combined.

Future research could profitably explore organic food and CAM use as typical everyday maker activities among SDNRs. This is especially true since political consumerism is often practiced by women, many of whom do the bulk of family shopping (Stolle and Micheletti 2005, Sandovici and Davis 2010). The main observation that I want to make here is that boycotting is too narrow to capture the way political consumerism functions as an elite challenging behavior in this cohort. Buycotting offers a route to change that is not directly confrontational, yet potentially effective given the importance of consumer behavior for directing social outcomes. In this quote, Alice expresses how she sees the connection between her spirituality and her lifestyle, and the acts of political consumerism inherent in that:

My spirituality has become my lifestyle. [It] is difficult to separate it out from my everyday life. We recycle, have low flush toilets, don’t use incandescent bulbs etc., do things that help improve the environment and assist our friends. I think one of the big things about my spirituality and the spirituality of the people I know is the intent. The intent behind each

action is so important. The intent is always for the greater good and to put positive healing energy into the world in anything we do.

Before closing the discussion of political consumerism, it is worth acknowledging a critique, that yoga, aromatherapy, and macrobiotics have merely become the stock-in-trade of the leaders of big business (e.g., Lau 2000, Carrette and King 2005). In particular, Lau argues that as part of their rhetoric, companies such as Aveda manipulate the consumer into thinking that purchasing alternative lifestyle products amounts to political participation. On the contrary, Lau asserts, this is a meaningless mode of cultural critique not only because these forms of consumption are in effect status symbols but because they wrongly appease the consumers' conscience while ignoring the global reality of mass inequality and injustice (132- 135).

Stolle and Micheletti however, emphasize that political consumerism needs to be better understood as a form of sub-politics before any such conclusions can be made. They write the following:

A point that needs emphasizing, especially in response to the debate about the decline of social capital, is that [political consumerism] should not solely be understood as a flight from politics, a cocooning retreat from public concerns, or a defense for a self-oriented and self-interested private life. Rather, it is quite possible that that self-orientation or individualization apparent in subpolitics is about taking responsibility for the wellbeing of themselves and others by means that differ considerably from those of conventional political representation and participation. (2006,66).

Stolle and Micheletti's argument is particularly interesting in the context of the identification of a huge market sector known as LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability) that explicitly frames the purchase of body-mind-spirit

as connected to a matrix of conscious consumerism. LOHAS is a potentially rich source of data on SDNR political consumerism, although it has not been investigated as such. I expand on this briefly below.

LOHAS as an SDNR political forum

Since 1999, the term LOHAS has been in use to describe individuals who purchase goods and services based on the following core values: 1) environmental sustainability; 2) social justice; 3) sustainable economic practices; 4) complementary and alternative medical practices (CAM;) and, 5) personal growth and development through alternative/holistic practices linked to healing body, mind and spirit (Ray and Anderson 2000; Emerich 2006). These values should now be easily recognizable as the postmaterialist expressivist values of SDNRs. Although it may appear that these sectors have little in common, according to LOHAS market segment research, it is the interconnections between these elements that constitute the holistic worldview of the LOHAS consumer.⁹⁹ In other words, the purchase of body-mind-spirit products is part of a value constellation, not an end in itself. This does not imply that everyone associated with the LOHAS market sector practices alternative spirituality. No doubt secular or materialist interests motivate some LOHAS consumers. Still, preliminary research shows that many people associated with the LOHAS category do have a non-traditional spiritual orientation (Emerich 2006).

In 2005, LOHAS spending amounted to \$209 billion USD in the United

⁹⁹ <http://www.lohas.com/about.html>. Last accessed June 2010.

States alone, and of this, the personal health sector (natural organic products, nutritional products, integrative health care, and Mind Body Spirit products) accounted for over half of the gross spending equal to \$118.3 billion USD. What LOHAS points to is that rather than being exclusively focused on the personal domain of the self, many of these spiritual seekers are galvanized by a moral agenda, which is clearly reflected in their consumer choices. LOHAS can be conceptualized as an index of the prevalence of everyday maker values among SDNRs, though much more research is needed to elaborate on the efficacy of this as a form of alternative politics.

Discussion and conclusion: Democracy in crisis or a new politics of engagement?

There is a strong consensus in the political sciences that democracy is at risk (Pharr, Putnam and Dalton 2000; Putnam 2000; Putnam and Goss 2002; Macedo et al 2005). Descriptions of citizen disengagement are not confined to Putnam, but make up part of the political science discourse that sees citizens failing to take an active role in routine aspects of political life (Sirianni and Freidland 2001, 10-11; Torcal and Montero 2006, 3). Since high levels of citizen involvement in such activities are considered essential for the health of civil society and political governance more broadly, Putnam's theory that there is widespread civic malaise is considered an indication that serious socio-political problems are imminent.

An alternative discourse, however, argues that new forms of civic engagement are augmenting the norms of electoral politics (e.g., Euchner 1996; Schudson 1998; Sirianni and Friedland 2001; Boyte 2004; Dalton 2008). This

includes the new types of political engagement described in this chapter, such as petition signing, boycotts, and buycotts (political consumerism), as well as forms not mentioned, such as blogging (Pole 2010). This thesis sits within the discourse of alternative political participation. While the political social capital of SDNRs is better than the Canadian average in terms of voting and participating in political campaigns, they do not perform better than the Very Committed on these scores. I contend that to appreciate the full extent to which SDNRs engage in civil society, as informed and active citizens, one must be willing to look beyond traditional measures of political engagement. To elucidate this, I have included a chart reproduced from political scientist Charles Euchner (1996) that outlines the characteristics of public versus private politics (Figure.16). What is striking about it, is how well many of the points could also refer to the characteristic differences between organized and privatized religiosity. I want to infer that there is remarkable synergy between the dynamics of privatized religions and alternative political ideals, and that this is a very good way to pursue investigations of their socio-political capital. For while political engagement will persist as the most obvious measure of the strength of political society, the nature of civil society appears to be shifting as it adjusts to ever-changing political, social, technological and economic currents. Today, being a responsible citizen means being alert, even skeptical and critical of government, not just voting, and certainly not putting ones unquestioning faith in political officials (Dalton 2008, 162; Putnam 2000, 47). Political scientist Pippa Norris points out that today the parameters of political engagement have all changed: who is involved, how they are involved,

Figure 16: A table juxtaposing the parameters of “ordinary” and “extraordinary” politics with organized religion compared to solid spirituality. Adapted from Euchner, 1996, 22.

Ordinary Politics (Organized religion)	Extraordinary Politics (Solid spirituality)
Acceptance of regime’s legitimacy	Challenge to regime’s legitimacy
Relations based on consent	Withdrawal of consent to regime
Regular interaction of participants	Episodic relations of activists
Action occurs in formal structures	Action occurs outside formal structures
“Rule of game” established, clear	Rules for political conflict improvised
Participants recognized by regime	Marginal participants demand recognition
Specialization by political actors	Participation by motivated “amateurs”
Predictable issues for debate	“Non-issues” forced onto public agenda
Formal systems of accountability	Uncertainty over responsibility
Deliberation and closure	Open-ended debate and discussion
Specialized authority	Key actors
Hierarchical	Egalitarian/non- hierarchical
Clear public/private distinction	Public/private distinction challenged
Stability of issues, actors, tactics	Instability of issues, actors, tactics
Stability, order, certainty	Flux, disorder, uncertainty

and the targets of protest and engagement have all shifted (2002, 190). In many cases, political campaigns focus awareness on foreign governments, multinational corporations and international agencies such as the World Trade Organization (Norris 2002, 193). It is not uncommon to find that individuals participate in a range of social and political activities, including direct action strategies, loose

coalitions, Internet advocacy and informal associations (Dalton 2008, 162; Norris 2002, 190). People today are leaning towards increasingly loose forms of political participation and ad hoc mobilization efforts (Stolle and Micheletti 2006, 45-46). This implies that being a responsible citizen today means looking beyond the local or even national domain. Globalization and privatization effectively mean that one's wellbeing and that of others is determined by a complex chorus of events taking place transnationally (Beck and Willms 2004). What post-industrial societies such as North America need today are new categories that can apprehend "non-nation-state forms of society" (Beck and Willms 2004, 13,19). As sociologist Ulrich Beck argues, "the idea of pre-given collective identities that are provided by a small number of large collective groups has less and less empirical relevance to a society that has been structurally transformed by the ongoing process of individualization" (2004, 30).

In short, whether it concerns religion or citizenship, the republican, biblical first language is a model of civic virtue that does not uniformly address the needs of those faced with the complex reality of life in a profoundly individualistic society. This is the value of Tipton's insight, namely that hybrid moralities arise because citizens needed new moral logics to achieve congruency in their social, political, religious and economic worlds. Inglehart too recognizes that values are subject to change, contingent on shifting economic and moral horizons.

This thesis is premised on the concept that SDNR social morality is distinct from the Very Committed and even the average Canadian. Expressive

postmaterialism is advanced as a theory of SDNR social values not to diminish the communitarian critique, but rather engage it more meaningfully by drawing on research advances across the disciplines of sociology, political science and psychology. To progress in understanding SDNRs requires pulling away from the popular view that solid spirituality is a narcissistic outgrowth of therapy culture, to seeing it as an inevitable outcome of social and religious change since the fifties. I see SDNR as a complex religious response to the globalizing, individualizing tendencies in modernity (Dawson 1998, 2006b), and predict that since the social conditions that reinforce solid spirituality are intensifying, the phenomenon will likely grow in the years ahead.

The idea that solid spirituality could become more prevalent is an unwelcome specter because embedded in classical social theory is a deep disquiet about the perils of modernization. Many contemporary social theorist display an inherited anxiety about the dark forces of individualism, industrialization, private ownership, mobility, and urban crowding seeing in them evidence that the present age is indeed the culmination of a bleak, but much anticipated social prophecy. Generally speaking, the root of the problem can be traced to an entrenched and pervasive sociological claim that individualism will undermine the basis of social solidarity and moral order.

Yet, I do not agree that autonomy and the strong internal gaze typified by SDNRs must come at the expense of strong social ties. There is certainly no compelling evidence in my research to suggest this is the case. It may be true in some cases that individuals lose their way and become alienated from the grander

social order, but it does not follow from here that SDNR morality is synonymous with anomie simply because it is not conventional. On the contrary, it is an antidote to it. Solid spirituality is a tenable moral framework that offers existential meaning and social connection to those who adopt it. Furthermore, because expressive postmaterialist values create discernable—and therefore communicable—patterns of moral logic, it is effective in shaping new generations of moral agents. Contrary to the critics view, therefore, solid spirituality provides a path for overcoming the dislocations inherent in utilitarian individualism, although it does so in unconventional, and as yet, poorly understood ways.

This might surprise those critics who see only formlessness and entropy in solid spirituality (e.g., scholars aligned with the ether view of spirituality). It is certainly true that solid spirituality is theoretically underdeveloped, but this does not make it intrinsically ambiguous. Its ostensible ambiguity has much more to do with scholarly paradigm blindness than its inherent traits. With the proper perspective, solid spirituality appears quite clearly as a religious form that arises at the junction where the Western monist tradition and post war social change meet. Based on the analysis in chapter two, survey research could quite easily measure the prevalence of solid and liquid spirituality in this country. The reasons these studies have not yet been done are perhaps an interesting commentary on the lingering hegemonic privilege of Christianity in Canada.

Chapter 8

Future Directions

The analysis offered in this thesis is not presented as the only or the best way to configure the SDNR socio-moral matrix. It is built—somewhat tenuously I admit—on the work of a handful of sociologists of religion whose research provided just enough infrastructure to proceed in what is otherwise grossly undertheorized terrain. This is amply demonstrated in the second chapter, which clearly shows the difficulty studies such as this one must confront in even trying to identify the group under discussion. Much more research is needed for solid and liquid spirituality to be constructs with value in applied contexts.

Future research could profitably build on the strengths of this research project, while avoiding some of its limitations and pitfalls. Most generally, this research has advanced 1) a descriptive typology to distinguish between the many types of religious behavior currently addressed with the term spirituality in the sociology of religion, and 2) a basic approach to studying the relationship between the social, political and religious/spiritual changes captured by the “spiritual but not religious” self-identifier.

Regarding the definition of spirituality, it is no exaggeration to say it has taken me years to come to terms with the confusing array of terms used. When I began my research I was often puzzled by the different ways sociologists of religion spoke about spirituality. Sometimes they invoked New Age, or solid

spirituality, other times they were overtly hostile to it. The term ‘spiritual but not religious’ was a very frustrating, and I struggled with the fact religious people used the term to describe themselves.

I have never liked the term New Age and am profoundly uncomfortable with the stereotypes associated with the label, a sentiment reinforced by many of the SDNRs I spoke with. Most do not use the term to describe themselves. Still, research projects need titles and terminology (not to mention credibility), and I needed some way to locate my study—and even myself—within the discourse. In the beginning, all I knew for certain was that I was not going to rely on the term New Age to explore the issues at hand. The category just seemed too small and reductionist. So what were my options? As I quickly discovered, the term spirituality was also moribund. It was so enormous it was almost meaningless. Between the popular press and marketing campaigns, it is rapidly becoming a fuzzy, objectively ineffectual way for speaking precisely about a religious disposition that is—I argue—very common in our culture. For precision I like the term ‘religiously unaffiliated spirituality,’ but overall I found it too heavy handed when describing my thesis topic either to potential informants or others non-academics who were interested in my research. Despite its limitations, the term ‘spiritual but not religious’ is still most useful way to communicate the thrust of my research to people in a way they can easily relate to.

Still, I was very relieved when I saw how Zinnbauer et al.’s venn diagrams could be used to distinguish between SBNRs and SDNRs. The fact that New Agers typically describe spirituality as distinct from religion was a critical insight

that offered me a way to think about SDNRs apart from SBNRs. Because it was essential that I control for institutional religious effects on social capital, the theoretical integrity of this research depended on my ability to conceptually separate these two cohorts, and I am satisfied that I have done this in this thesis. As I mentioned, although descriptions of the difference between religion and spirituality are ubiquitous, academics do not yet clearly distinguish between solid and liquid spirituality. For this reason, I regard my solution to defining spirituality as a highlight of this project, one that could be built on especially where survey research is concerned. While I do not think that my metaphor is particularly beautiful (solid spirituality is not a catchy phrase) it is eminently useful. My enthusiasm is based on the fact it enabled me to frame New Age, but go well beyond it without dipping into the domain of more conventional religious spirituality. So while it is probably true that less than one percent of Canadians describe themselves as New Age, I am convinced that survey research would find a much higher figure for SDNRs, if my methods for isolating them were followed. The classification scheme offered could change the way spirituality is studied if it were implemented. As it stands the study of spirituality needs to move out of the domain of NRMs and into more mainstream religious studies. For this to happen, though, clear categories are needed.

The second major aspect of this study is the question of how non-institutional, privatized religions such as solid spirituality can participate in civil society. The Putnam thesis is an important starting point, though future research will want to reconsider giving it such a central place in the analysis, since its

model of citizen engagement and mobilization is constructed almost exclusively in terms of traditional institutions. This is not to say that my findings are ironclad, or require no further research to be confirmed. As suggested at many points in chapter five, my questionnaire data was compromised because I did not pose the questions in ways that were conducive to straightforward comparisons. In this sense, it would very helpful to repeat the research to clear up these basic methodological oversights. This could be done quite easily, and if the sample size was large enough, could provide very clear and compelling data.

Yet the basic methodological problem remains, namely that the communitarian view of civil society frames the discourse in ways inconsistent with SDNR moral logic. The greatest area of research innovation, therefore, will not come from treading back and forth over communitarian territory, and making direct comparisons between SDNRs and the Very Committed. This is a useful exercise but it will never shed light on the reasons SDNRs behave as they do. The real work that needs to be done is to formulate new explanatory models such as I have attempted here, that explain what we do see, rather than what we do not. The previous chapter, for instance, acknowledges that SDNRs do not vote as much as the Very Committed, but instead of stopping there, it proceeds to ask what other types of political engagement they do engage in and provides some indication why.

Overall, researchers who take up the SDNR mantle will find enormous opportunity for interdisciplinary explorations that incorporate the theories and methods used in economics, sociology, psychology, political science and religious

studies. There is great potential for collaboration, and with so little research done, the field is enticingly open. I will give a few examples of the types of research endeavors that occur to me, though there are many more than could be listed.

One line of inquiry concerns the question of SDNR institutional (dis)engagement. The obvious fact SDNRs have no affiliation with—and in some cases affection for—religious institutions, which Putnam and the communitarians hold in high regard, makes it tempting to assume that SDNRs automatically disengage from all institutions. I have even hinted at this in my own exploration of the counterculturalist ethic, invoking the fear of “brainwashing” as one of the reasons SDNRs avoid institutions. In reality, I doubt the matter is this cut and dried. Future research that closely investigates the nuances of this matter would be most welcome. Rather than simply assuming that SDNRs reject institutions across the board, it would be helpful to clarify patterns of resistance and engagement. Clearly people cannot function well in our society without any institutional involvement, but it was beyond the scope of this research to investigate in any detail exactly what SDNRs think about medical, educational, social, political, and of course religious institutions. On what grounds do they opt for involvement? On what grounds do they retreat? This information will help to decipher the syntax of their associational lives and prepare the way for researchers to develop more sophisticated models of social capital, and even help organizations that could benefit from better understanding how to optimize the human capital potential of this group.

This speculation leads to another potentially valuable research project,

namely, the nature of SDNR volunteerism. Given the limits of my own data on this issue, a valuable study would be to determine more precisely the parameters of SDNR engagement in formal and informal volunteering. Is it really the case that SDNRs volunteer less than the average Canadian and the Very Committed? With the aging population, the SDNR penchant for healing work in combination with their preference for informal, one-on-one care hints that SDNRs could easily be recruited for such work, especially if training was provided, and the potential for person development emphasized.

Still, while this might be generally the case, it is certainly true that the SDNR cohort is not monolithic. Given my estimate that it might be as large as 5% to 8% of the Canadian population, it only makes sense that there will be considerable internal variation. Research needs to be done to tease out the various subcultures within the cohort. One way to approach this is along gender lines. While Heelas and Woodhead found that the holistic milieu was predominantly female, and women were also a majority presence in my own study, I simply cannot accept that SDNR is an exclusively female domain. I know it is attractive to women, but I also think that there are many SDNR men in the shadows who are turned off by stereotypical SDNR activities such as aromatherapy or Reiki. I suspect that many men are SDNR, but that they do not have the vocabulary to describe their spirituality, or the inclination to pursue its more usual (holistic/therapeutic) forms. I suspect that men's transcendent experiences often go unnoticed because men lack both an interpretive framework as well as communities of practice that can contextualize and legitimate their experiences.

Masculine postmaterialist spirituality, therefore, is another exciting frontier for future SDNR research. Its scope is potentially enormous and the topic is almost entirely untouched.

Ultimately, SDNR research will only progress if it has demonstrable value. Yet the real reason sociologists study NRMs at all is not to discern the minutiae of bizarre or marginal cults, but rather because, like canaries in a coal mine, their very existence points to impending social-structural changes as they manifest on the periphery of normative social life. It is not surprising, really, given the role of Christianity in the founding of the Canadian and American nations that NRMs are not a popular object of inquiry. Although I would not say SDNR is a fringe phenomenon, many critics and more conventional scholars are content to dismiss it as trivial and inconsequential, and keep focused on projects that reinforce more conventional aspects of socio-religious life. But this strategy will not work forever. If Inglehart is correct, social values will shift in the years ahead as new postmaterialist cohorts enter the mainstream of social and political life. Young people today see self-expression, freedom, autonomy, and conspicuous consumption as the new facts of life. Their lifestyle choices, including their spirituality, their politics, and their morality all reflect the reality of individualism which is now embedded deep in the very structures of social and economic activity. The process of generational replacement means, therefore, that postmaterialist values are poised to become a significant, if not authoritative, cultural discourse in the years ahead. I do not mean that fundamentalism, or even more moderate forms of religious belief will not persist, only that it will be

progressively more difficult to either ignore or polemically dismiss emergent trends in social and religious life such as solid spirituality. While it is worthwhile to study SDNR for its own sake, practically speaking, its greatest value rests with its ability to tell us something about where we might be headed as a culture, and prepare for these eventualities by assembling more comprehensive interpretive repertoires.

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