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Young people online and the social value of privacy

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to develop a conceptual framework to contextualize young people's lived experiences of privacy and invasion online. Social negotiations in the construction of privacy boundaries are theorized to be dependent on individual preferences, abilities and context-dependent social meanings.

Design/methodology/approach – Empirical findings of three related Ottawa-based studies dealing with young people's online privacy are used to examine the benefits of online publicity, what online privacy means to young people and the social importance of privacy. Earlier philosophical discussions of privacy and identity, as well as current scholarship, are drawn on to suggest that privacy is an inherently social practice that enables social actors to navigate the boundary between self/other and between being closed/open to social interaction.

Findings – Four understandings of privacy's value are developed in concordance with recent privacy literature and our own empirical data: privacy as contextual, relational, performative and dialectical.

Social implications – A more holistic approach is necessary to understand young people's privacy negotiations. Adopting such an approach can help re-establish an ability to address the ways in which privacy boundaries are negotiated and to challenge surveillance schemes and their social consequences.

Originality/value – Findings imply that privacy policy should focus on creating conditions that support negotiations that are transparent and equitable. Additionally, policy-makers must begin to critically evaluate the ways in which surveillance interferes with the developmental need of young people to build relationships of trust with each other and also with adults.

Keywords Privacy, Disclosure, Youth, Internet, Social networking, Surveillance, Communication

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

A number of years ago, a colleague of ours heard that there had been an incident at a party that her teenaged daughter had attended. When she asked her daughter about it, the daughter refused to discuss it, no matter how our colleague pressed. In frustration, she told her daughter that it did not matter if she told her or not – she could just go online and read exactly what happened on her daughter's blog. Her daughter was furious and told her that reading her blog would be a huge invasion of her privacy. When our colleague responded, "But it's on the Internet", the daughter told her that was irrelevant and made it clear that she'd never trust her mother again if she read what she had posted.

The story illustrates the different perspectives often held by adults and young people about the privacy – or lack of privacy – associated with online communication. Popular sentiment posits that young people do not care about their privacy because they post



“everything” on social networking sites, blogs and video sharing sites for all the world to see (Johnson, 2010, p. 971). And, yet, empirical studies continue to report that young people value their privacy and seek to shield their online lives from scrutiny (Barnes, 2006, p. 1; boyd and Marwick, 2011, p. 1; Davis and James, 2012, p. 4; Livingstone, 2005a, p. 41, 2005b, p. 7; Livingstone and Bober, 2003, p. 3; Steeves, 2005, p. 29).

Regulators have, for the most part, responded to adult concerns with a combination of legislation and educational initiatives designed to provide young people with the tools they need to successfully navigate the privacy pitfalls of the online world. The 2008 Resolution of the International Data Protection and Privacy Commissioners is a good exemplar of the approach. The Commissioners point to the fact that many young people have embedded online communications into their social interactions, but argue that they “lack the experience, technical knowledge and tools to mitigate” the privacy risks they find online. They call for “an education-based approach, combined with data protection legislation” to raise awareness “of the privacy risks inherent in [young people’s] online activities and the smart choices available for controlling their personal information” (Privacy Commissioner of Canada, 2008, p. 11).

Data protection legislation focuses on a set of fair information practices that govern the collection, use and disclosure of personal information (Bennett and Raab, 2006). The gold standard of the data protection approach is consent. In the online context, there is an assumption that if organizations collecting information post a policy setting out what they are collecting, how it will be used and the conditions in which it will be disclosed to others, young people (and their parents) can make informed decisions about whether or not to disclose the information on the site (Steeves, 2006, p. 177). Privacy will then be protected because a child who wants privacy will choose not to disclose his or her information.

Educational programs typically reinforce this approach to privacy as informational control. For example, the European Union’s *Ins@fe* initiative, the *myprivacy.mychoice.mylife* (2013) campaign created by the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (2008) and the US government’s *Kids.gov* (2013) site all itemize the dangers associated with disclosing personal information online and encourage young people to limit what they say about themselves in online spaces. These sites advise young people that disclosing information opens them up predation and bullying; they link privacy – again defined as the non-disclosure of personal information – directly to safety.

These messages imply that the online environment is a scary and unsafe one for children, but this flies in the face of empirical findings that suggest that networked communication is embraced by young people because it helps them meet their developmental needs for attachment and individuation (Abbott-Chapman and Robertson, 2001, p. 485; Irving, 2001, p. 224; Ito *et al.*, 2008, p. 9; Livingstone, 2008, p. 393; Regan and Steeves, 2010, p. 151; Steeves, 2005, p. 6; Shade, 2008, p. 65). It also contradicts the growing evidence that many young people have a real resiliency when it comes to dealing with predation, bullying and offensive content and that on the whole online media are a positive part of their lives (Staksrud and Livingstone, 2009, p. 364; Steeves, 2012, p. 4). More importantly, for our purposes, it fails to resonate with young people’s lived experiences and the kinds of privacy problems they are concerned about.

In this paper, we suggest that the gap between legislative and educational initiatives to protect young people’s online privacy and their lived experience of privacy and invasion is grounded in a too-narrow conceptualization of privacy as informational

control. Instead, we suggest that privacy is an inherently social practice that enables social actors to navigate the boundary between self/other and between being closed/open to social interaction. We posit that the social negotiations that occur in fixing this privacy boundary in a particular context depend on individual preferences and abilities as well as the social meaning of the context. Online privacy is, therefore, complicated by the ways in which online contexts often overlap and performances flow easily from one context or relationship to another.

We use the empirical findings of three related projects conducted by researchers associated with the University of Ottawa's Centre for Law, Technology and Society as a starting point for our discussions. The projects include the The View From Here: User-Centered Perspectives on the Privacy Expectations of Digital Citizens (OPC), MediaSmart's Young Canadians in a Wired World study (YCWW) and the eGirls Project (EG)[1]. We begin by examining what young people told us in these projects about the benefits of online publicity and then examine their own accounts of what online privacy means to them.

Our goal is to develop a conceptual framework that better explains young people's lived experiences of privacy and invasion. In doing so, we draw on earlier philosophical discussions of privacy as a socially situated set of practices that are deeply linked to identity and relationship. We also draw on current scholarship that has steadily moved away from thinking about privacy as only of importance to the individual and instead posits that privacy is important to sociality as well.

The paper proceeds in three parts:

- (1) a very brief review of the recent philosophical and normative thinking about the social value of privacy, ending with an explication of why we focus on the concept of social negotiations surrounding privacy boundaries;
- (2) an examination of young people's accounts of privacy and publicity, with a focus on the social factors that constrain, or that must be taken into account, in negotiating privacy; and
- (3) an analysis of the value that a social negotiation perspective brings to our understanding of the social importance of privacy.

1. Thinking about privacy

Legislative thinking about privacy was profoundly shaped by Westin's (1967, p. 7) seminal work *Privacy and Freedom*. Although Westin was among the first to articulate a conception of privacy as "the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others", he rooted his thinking in a rich sociological tradition. Accordingly, Westin himself situated privacy within a set of dialectical social practices that regulated both withdrawal (through solitude, anonymity and solitude) and social interaction (Steeves, 2006, p. 184).

Although legislative attempts to protect privacy focused on Westin's definition of privacy as informational control, other thinkers of the day continued to explore the social value of privacy. Altman (1975, p. 6) defined privacy as "an interpersonal boundary process by which a person or a group regulates interaction with others [...] involving selective control over a self-boundary". Gerstein (1970, p. 87) suggested that privacy is closely linked to intimacy and the ability to enter into meaningful

relationships with others. Reiman (1976, p. 39) argued that privacy is “a social ritual by means of which an individual’s moral title to his existence is conferred”, and, as such, is “a precondition of personhood”.

Schoeman (1984, p. 4) summarizes this earlier line of thinking in the literature:

[...] the notion of privacy constitutes a central social concept which inflects our way of experiencing the social world, and which affects social life in profound and subtle ways. As a social category, privacy has both normative and descriptive functions which interact with one another. The concept of privacy regulates institutions, practices, activities, and social and individual life generally. It controls what people feel they have legitimate access to and in this way fosters both possibilities and limitations [...].

In the decades since Schoeman published his anthology of privacy theory in 1984, there has been a steady move away from thinking about privacy as only of importance to the individual – and instead an agreement that privacy is important to society as well. Both of us have been strong supporters of that latter view (Regan, 1995, p. 212; Regan, 2002, p. 382; Steeves, 2009), as have several other philosophers, sociologists, political scientists and legal scholars (Cohen, 2000, p. 1373; Nissenbaum, 2010, p. 66; Solove, 2008, p. 89).

The focus on the social value of privacy serves to minimize the importance of individual preferences about privacy. Once privacy’s social value is recognized, its importance does not rise or fall on individual attitudes or behavior. Instead, as Nissenbaum (2010, p. 66) rightly points out, “privacy is worth taking seriously because it is among the rights, duties or values of any morally legitimate social and political system”. She further elaborates:

Individual preferences and interests are not irrelevant to privacy, but instead of being defining sources of its importance they would be secondary considerations, the primary considerations being those moral and political values that privacy is presumed to support (2010, p. 73).

2. Young people’s accounts

2.1 *The value of online publicity*

In spite of the fact young people disclose personal information in online environments, empirical studies continue to report that young people value online privacy and use a variety of strategies to shield their online lives from others (Barnes, 2006, p. 1; Livingstone and Bober, 2003, p. 3; Media Awareness Network, 2005, p. 42; Timm and Duven, 2008, p. 91). However, when we asked our participants directly whether or not social networking sites are private, they overwhelmingly agreed that the sites are public and that other people will be able to see the information posted there (OPC, EG). In fact, the public nature of the Internet was seen as axiomatic.

Privacy controls were recognized as an imperfect barrier to the flow of information because, even when controls are set to high to restrict access to the site itself, information is leaky and often finds its way to others. For example, some participants told us that even though they had used privacy settings to limit what their parents could see, their parents recruited other family members to police their social networking profiles and report back on their online activities (YCWW, EG). Other kinds of technical controls, such as blocking software, were also seen as unable to restrict access – children as young as 11 years of age readily shared techniques to get around school filters and otherwise “fool the system” to break out of protective restrictions (YCWW).

However, the simple fact that a young person decides to post his or her conversations, likes or photos online on public sites does not mean that there is no privacy expectation attached to his or her online activities. Indeed, for many of the young people we spoke to, access to social networking sites on the part of family members was equated with “spying” in spite of the fact the information is technically accessible (YCWW, EG). The bottom line was that just because something is posted online does not mean that everyone should look at it, even though they can. This resonates with Rossler’s notion of decisional privacy. She argues that the claim of children who tell their parents not to meddle in their choice of friends, for example, is a means of ensuring freedom to act without being constrained by fears of punishment, ridicule or interference (Rossler, 2005, p. 81). From this perspective, privacy is not dependent upon secrecy but upon parents acting with “a well-meaning and caring form of what is nonetheless still restraint towards their children” to make “a self-determined life possible” (p. 85).

Young people’s understanding of privacy is, therefore, not juxtaposed against publicity. In fact, they are attracted to online communication precisely because it enables them to enjoy publicity. Participants spoke about the pleasures of self-exposure, from diarizing on anonymous blogging sites with no intended audience, to deepening ties to real-world friends through social networking, to posting videos on YouTube with the hope of attracting a large number of viewers (OPC, YCWW, EG). However, in each of these situations, they relied on a complex set of norms to govern who should and should not look and how the viewer should respond to what they see. When these norms are violated, they report a general sense of discomfort and unease.

For example, levels of viewing are linked to the degree of relationship between the person and the viewer. Close friends can peruse a profile in depth because of the intimacy they share (innocent “stalking”), but someone outside the person’s circle who pays too much attention is “desperate” or a “loser” (annoying “stalking” or “creeping”). Strangers, especially older male strangers, are “creeps” who should be ignored and blocked as much as possible (malevolent “creeping”) even on sites where the aim is to attract and interact with a large audience. Parents should trust their children and respect their privacy by not watching them online. Paradoxically, young people who do enjoy a relationship based on trust with their parents can “friend” their parents because they know their parents will exercise benign neglect, but parents who use surveillance to watch everything should be kept in the dark through technical controls and “hiding in plain sight” tactics (YCWW).

The model of privacy as informational control suggests that young people who wish to enjoy online privacy should not disclose personal information in online spaces. This implies that privacy is set against publicity in a zero game; if you want to enjoy privacy, do not disclose information. However, this fails to account for the ways in which young people (seek to) negotiate both privacy *and* publicity in online spaces through their interactions with others.

We have argued elsewhere that the definition of privacy as informational control is problematic precisely because it locates privacy in the hands of the individual in conflict with the collective (Regan, 1995) and suggests that perfect privacy can be obtained through social withdrawal (Steeves, 2009). In keeping with that critique, young people’s experiences indicate that privacy and publicity are co-created through social interactions; both privacy and publicity coexist in a dynamic negotiation of boundary setting that seeks to manage a multiplicity of revelations and a multiplicity of audiences.

Disclosure is a given because it is central to social participation. However, privacy is attained through an agreed set of norms that determine who can look and interact with a particular presentation of the self. From this perspective, Altman (1975) privacy emerges as the boundary between closedness and openness, the boundary itself is malleable rather than fixed and it is embodied in social practices.

2.2 *The value of online privacy*

There is a plethora of evidence to suggest that social networking sites help young people develop competence, enjoy autonomy and satisfy their psychological need for relatedness (Livingstone, 2008, p. 393; Shade, 2008, p. 65), all helping them mature into adults. Self-exposure in this context provides an opportunity to develop both a sense of identity and trust in and with others, and is used to strengthen friendships and other relationships (Walther *et al.*, 2009, p. 230; Valkenburg and Peter, 2009, p. 2; Valkenburg and Jochen, 2007, p. 267).

In keeping with other research, our participants consciously embraced online communication as a forum for self-presentation and identity play. They told us that the visibility enabled by online platforms made their own presentations visible to them, and the feedback provided by friends helped them gauge the value and authenticity of the performance. However, a lack of privacy, particularly from parents, educators and employers, interferes with this process and makes it difficult for them to obtain the benefits of online publicity. Privacy, therefore, becomes more important in online contexts precisely because the platform is visible to others.

For example, YCWW participants lamented the ways in which many parents and school officials place them under constant surveillance, and argued that there are simply some things adults do not need to know about their lives. This resonates with Reiman's (1976) claim that privacy is tied to claiming ownership over one's own life and one's status as a moral actor. Interestingly, constant monitoring also made it more difficult for them to ask for help when they needed it, precisely because it made it difficult for them to trust the adults they relied upon for advice. It also reconstructed the meaning of their social interactions and left them susceptible to ungrounded accusations of bullying or inappropriate behavior even though they were not violating the social norms accepted by their peers. As such, adult attempts to protect young people's privacy through strict control over disclosure paradoxically made it more difficult for them to use online interaction to deepen their social relationships and explore their identities precisely because they were unable to negotiate the level of privacy required to do so.

eGirl participants indicated that a lack of privacy placed a particularly heavy burden on girls and young women, who carefully negotiate the social consequences of performing a variety of identities as daughter, friend, girlfriend, student and young professional in the same online space. Privacy, as a mechanism for adjusting the boundary between self and others, is essential to the drawing of lines between the various roles they play. Once again, an inability to maintain the lines between roles led to unease and conflict. Many of our participants indicated that they had a love-hate relationship with social networking, and often felt that online exposure made them vulnerable to the judgments of others because they were unable to adjust their performances as their various audiences collided.

Young people's accounts, therefore, resonate strongly with earlier conceptions of privacy as central to a sense of self and the ability to enter into meaningful social

relationships. In the next section, we more fully connect the experiences of young people online with the theoretical literature on privacy.

3. Theorizing the value of privacy in context of young people online

As we examine the experiences and reactions of young people online, we are reminded that privacy does, indeed, appear important to them – and that it does so for a number of reasons. We also observe that privacy’s importance derives not from a simple source, nor does it satisfy one clearly articulated and isolated value, but that privacy’s value is more complex and multifaceted. In this section, we develop an argument providing a rationale for privacy’s meaning and value for young people online, relating that rationale to contemporary theories of privacy as well as and, hopefully, expanding and illuminating them further. Based on our empirical findings and our theoretical analyses, we focus our attention here on the concept of *social negotiations* as being a fundamental component in the various understandings of the social value of privacy and as an activity in which individuals engage as they construct the meaning of privacy in their social lives. We believe that the concept of social negotiations ties together previously separate rationales for the value of privacy and, thus, helps to identify not necessarily a common value but instead a common activity that further underscores the social nature of privacy.

We identify four understandings of privacy’s value, all of which appear in recent privacy literature and which we identify in the empirical findings of our three projects.

3.1 Contextual

Helen Nissenbaum’s development of the framework of contextual integrity has been a major contribution to current thinking about information privacy. According to Nissenbaum, different social contexts are governed by different social norms that govern the flow of information within and out of that context. Protecting privacy entails ensuring appropriate flows of information between and among contexts. Key to Nissenbaum’s (2010, p. 129) framework is the construct of “context-relative informational norms”, which express “entrenched expectations” regarding flows of information. This framework is enormously helpful in understanding flows of information in “entrenched” or relatively well established contexts[2], such as employment or health care, but Nissenbaum (2010, p. 136) sees the framework as being most valuable for evaluating practices in newer contexts (such as online social networking) or in areas where contexts overlap or collapse or where one context is “nested” in another context (grade school nested in education context).

In these newer or less-entrenched contexts, Nissenbaum (2010, p. 159) posits that evaluating practices “in relation to entrenched context-relative informational norms, which in turn requires characterizing them in terms of actors (subjects, senders, receivers), types of information, and principles of transmission” will help determine the acceptability of flows of personal information. The activity that occurs here is thus fundamentally one of social negotiation – but the starting point for the negotiation are the entrenched norms that she sees as not decidedly conservative but as a way to guide thinking about newer contexts (2010, p. 169).

Using entrenched norms as a guideline to protect young people’s privacy online is complicated by at least two factors. First, there is a potential conflict between the norms accepted by the adults who guide and supervise young people and the norms that have

emerged in their own online interactions with peers. They are too young to feel constrained by, or to have been totally socialized into, the entrenched norms accepted by adults. Instead, these norms, assuming they are, indeed, recognized as such by young people, are what they are often reacting against or testing the boundaries of rather than unthinkingly accepting. In addition, the norms they have developed themselves are often discounted by adults who seek to invade their privacy to protect them from strangers and offensive online content. Second, the online context – and the online social networking context either nesting in or merely occurring within that context – is very much evolving as a social sphere and itself does not yet have a broader set of entrenched norms. Commercial, educational and political norms online are evolving, and are often in conflict with the social norms young people use to regulate online publicity and privacy. Moreover, this conflict illustrates that young people’s experiences reflect their relative lack of power in institutional contexts that exist outside of – and yet intersect with – the realm of family and friends. So important as context is as a construct for helping us to think about privacy norms and meanings, in the particular context in which we are interested, its usefulness is somewhat limited.

The construct of context and Nissenbaum’s framework of contextual integrity, however, reveal the importance of the activity of arriving at context-relative informational norms. And we believe that the core of this activity is the social negotiations reflected in the interviews, focus groups and surveys about young people online[3]. From the perspective of context and social negotiation, three features of the social importance of privacy to young people become apparent: first, the notion of boundaries, albeit imperfect, is still something that is talked about; second, expectations of “audiences” (self and others) are part of the equation; and third, accountability, again of self and others, and trust are components of the social importance of privacy.

3.2 Relational

The value of privacy to forming a range of human relationships has been long recognized. As [Fried \(1968, p. 477\)](#) noted, privacy “is necessarily related to ends and relations of the most fundamental sort: respect, love, friendship and trust”. And the notion of relationships is implicit in that of contexts, but we believe it needs to be disaggregated a bit further. To us, the key component of the notion of relational is “reciprocal”. It entails a two-way give-and-take. It’s mutual, both parties are in it together.

This notion of a reciprocal component to privacy provides the standard response to those who have claimed that in a small town, no one had any privacy – the counter being that there was privacy because you knew as much about your neighbor, as he or she did about you and you both knew each other as members of that small community. Any one piece of information about one person (subject) was both known in a particular context and was also a piece of information that the subject knew about others; the interactions of the subject with others were governed by a reciprocal set of obligations and responsibilities regarding the treatment of things known about them. The relationships provided a shared platform. Seemingly isolated individuals operating in individual spheres of privacy did not exist but were similarly placed and understood that.

Such an understanding of a shared nature is what we find young people searching for and creating – with some hits and some misses – in the online world. They understand that there is reciprocity. If they “friend” or “unfriend” someone, it will be noticed and

there will be consequences, although what the consequences may be and what is a socially acceptable response to them are still evolving in young people's online experiences. They also have an empathetic understanding of parents and family members who transgress their privacy boundaries; although they seek to avoid being watched, they call their family members to account and express a desire to be trusted and to be treated as moral actors in their own right (YCWW, EG).

What is not really understood are the hidden relationships, or more accurately the lack of reciprocity in the relationships or the one-sidedness of the relationships that young people have with school boards, marketers, potential employers or law enforcement agencies. In these cases, there is no reciprocity. And the notion of consenting to a privacy notice does not establish reciprocity. Instead, it conveys at best acquiescence to a requirement to comply with terms set by others. The consent is an acknowledgment that another claims and asserts the right to watch the consent-giver through a one-way gaze, not because the consent-giver is then able to know something of the other in a two-way relationship but because the consent-giver is required to do so and will not be given access to a benefit – education, employment and proof of innocence – unless he or she acquiesces.

These one-way relationships are purely instrumental relationships while two-way relationships are social relationships[4]. In other words, these one-way relationships do not involve a moment of social negotiation, where transparency and mutuality allow the subject to negotiate a comfortable boundary and/or hold the organization to account for invading that boundary. Current information privacy and data protection policies assume that information practices involve instrumental relationships – and hence do not protect, or take into account the possibility of, a social value of privacy. They fail to capture the continuing importance of privacy after one consents to collection and disclosure. They fail to reflect any reciprocal element after consent is secured or to embody the continual involvement of the data subject. Consent in this case is not consent to an ongoing relationship with an organization but consent to that organization taking and using information for its own purposes. [Nehf \(2003, p. 26\)](#) underscores the lack of the relational that exists in these types of interactions: “We do not know who has what information, how they got it, what purposes or motives these entities have, or what will be done with the information in the future”. However, the notional consent that is “given” when young people post information on social networking sites or school networks operates to legitimize everything that happens after the information is posted.

Covert surveillance is also a one-way non-reciprocal relationship involving, as [Allen \(2008, p. 1\)](#) reminds us, “stealth, trickery, and deception”. If we fast-forward from the 19th century techniques of false disguises, taking photos from behind bushes, shadowing in black cars to the 21st century techniques of “lurking” on social networking sites, then we immediately understand the sense of “creepiness” that we hear from young people online. Allen rightly, and relevantly to our discussion here, points out that:

[...] spying carries an ethical cloud. Spying is like cheating. It exploits confidence in the rules of the game. Spying inherently involves taking advantage of those who place their confidence in the social norms that shape a cooperative communal life (2008, p. 2).

Allen gives as an example to a morally feasible situation of consensual spying where a friend asks another friend to go through her apartment (or e-mail or online activities) to make sure she is not backsliding on something she has promised herself to do (drinking,

promiscuous dating, etc.). What is important to note here is that this spying is part of a two-way relationship; it's a reciprocal form of friendship that may not be immediately reciprocated with same-time spying of one on the other but the possibility of consensual spying by the other friend is inherent in the relationship. Moreover, spying in this context is textured by the trust and mutuality of care that is at the heart of the friendship, and the ongoing nature of the spying is open to further negotiation between the friends.

In the cases of both the one-way consent represented by fair information practices and lurking online, there is no chance for reciprocity or mutuality or social negotiation. And there is no chance for trust, which fundamentally entails future expectations in an ongoing two-way relationship. Almost all discussions of trust begin with (Hardin, 1998, p. 12) formula that "Trust is a three-part relation: A trusts B to do X". Blackburn (1998, p. 31) adds that trust also includes trusting B to act from a certain motivation and assuming a certain degree of rationality and shared understanding of reliance. Trust is, thus, a product of a social negotiation. It assumes that those with whom we deal have certain motives and responsibilities (roles) for acting in a certain way and that their actions will thus be somewhat predictable.

Trust also assumes that ongoing interactions will be transparent enough that the parties will both be held to account and hold the other to account in a mutual recognition of each other's status as subjects/not-objects. As Allen notes, relationships of mutual dependence, or social relationships involving reciprocity, as we define them, give rise to obligations of accountability – and that "accountability demands a performance" that is context-dependent including providing information, explanations and justifications (2008, p. 8). This entails social negotiations of what is expected, what is being exchanged, what the terms of reciprocity are. Again, the activity we find of utmost importance in establishing or arriving at privacy is social negotiation.

3.3 Performative

As has been argued theoretically and documented empirically, the online environment – particularly social networking sites and particularly for young people – provides an important space for self-expression, playing with presentations of self and trying on roles and behaviors. For such self-discovery to occur, it is essential that this space not be one of constant monitoring, of judgmentalism, or of retention of trial runs. Privacy theorists have long recognized autonomy and self-development as values that are protected by privacy. More recently Cohen (2000, p. 1377) has elaborated on this aspect of privacy and tied it to the social value of privacy. She advocates a "dynamic theory of individual autonomy" where the individual is valued "as an agent of self-determination and community-building" and where "productive expression and development [...] have room to flourish". More specifically, with reference to the performative aspect, she writes:

We do not experiment only with beliefs and associations, but also with every other conceivable type of taste and behavior that expresses and defines self. The opportunity to experiment with preferences is a vital part of the process of learning, and learning to choose, that every individual must undergo (2000, p. 1425).

Without the space privacy protects to engage in the "conscious construction of the self" (Cohen, 2000, p. 1424), individuals' beliefs and desires are more likely to track with the mainstream and expected. With this space, the role-playing that can occur allows identit(ies) to emerge – both public and private –and enables all individuals to try on

identities and measure how their social group responds. This is particularly important for young people who are very much in the process of forming identities and personalities, which we recognize will continue to evolve and, hence, this space retains importance for those of all ages.

The performative rationale for privacy again entails social negotiations as the activity through which one can try on, act out and get responses. A give and take with the audience, an audience one understands and has some basis for trusting, is key. From this perspective, the meaning(s) of the performance are not determined by the individual alone as he or she decides to release information. Because of this, the value of this performative space and the importance of privacy to this space do not provide a rationale for license and absolution. Indeed, the value of this space is not just for individual self-expression but also for creating a society of autonomous, interesting, smart, funny and inquisitive individuals: individuals who are social beings and who are accountable within and to the society of which they are a part.

What we see in the online world is that the platforms on which such performances are often now occurring have been colonized by instrumental messages tied to the commodification of young people's social interactions and identities, and this colonization impacts the kinds of people who are performed online. As [Kline et al. \(2003, p. 244\)](#) note, young people's online lives have "been subject to the enclosures of digital commodity forms offered by the interactive entertainment industry", and this has impoverished the kinds of identities available to them. Certainly our eGirls participants spoke extensively about the ways in which the mainstream media images reproduced on social networking sites constrain more authentic, liberating performances of girl.

The mechanism that enables this instrumental restructuring of the social world is invasion of privacy; seamless surveillance coopts and transforms the social meaning of online interactions for instrumental purposes and then reinserts these new meanings back into the social environment to privilege certain kinds of consumption and certain kinds of consumers ([Steeves, 2006, p. 183](#)). Our teenaged YCWW participants told us they spend considerable time online negotiating with celebrity culture, and our eGirls participants talked about the constraining impact of the highly mediatized sexualized girl so often reproduced in online spaces both through advertising and by some girls themselves. Because the privacy of the social world has been opened up to the marketplace, the cultural capital that attaches to media messages is amplified for these young people; whether they coopt or resist these messages, their direct integration into the online platform complicates young people's social behavior.

Resistance is key here. As [Marian Koren \(2001, p. 242\)](#) notes:

Every human being is in need of [...] a narrative that she can transform into her own story or life. This process helps her to balance the inner and outer world [...]. It is not too far-fetched to think of human life as a developing narrative. As a consequence, a child should be able to write, read and to tell her own story rather than have it told for them.

Privacy provides a space for a more authentic narrative, and privacy claims require us to be more thoughtful about the ways in which both corporate surveillance and corporate messages affect and constrain the kinds of narratives young people can tell about themselves.

3.4 Dialectical

Young people's experiences underline the ways in which simple categorizations of public and private have collapsed in online spaces. The notion of a boundary between public and private has blurred in fundamental ways so that such a notion is no longer applicable. Instead there is a dialectical tension between realms or spheres, with overlaps and gray areas, and separate linkages or paths between or among. We see spaces of semi-public/private or spaces that are context specific or spaces that are individually defined in certain ways – and all of these are continually undergoing transformations in part because of technology and, in part, because of changing social practices. Currently, negotiations of the definition, meaning, boundaries of these spaces are occurring – and young people online are at the forefront of some of these negotiations. Moreover, these negotiations are occurring in spaces that need to enjoy, to borrow phrasing from [Cohen \(2000, p. 1423\)](#) “the benefits of shadow as well as those of sunlight”.

Placing privacy within this ongoing dialectic of boundary-making, and re-making also helps us better understand the relationship between privacy, publicity and identity. Implicit within Nissenbaum's notion of contextual integrity is a recognition of a context of the self, which not only seeks to manage the contextual flow but also retains some information for non-disclosure to any others, or very selective disclosure, in what is referred to as a “private” space. That self is socially situated within a web of relationships with other social actors, and comes to know itself through the performance of roles and identities for and with those others. Young people's privacy concerns are accordingly intricately tied to the negotiation of boundaries not between public and private but between self and other, and between being open and closed to social interaction. Consent fails to capture the dialectical nature of this negotiation precisely because it operates as a one-time permission: young people can either be open to social interaction and, therefore, subject to one-sided surveillance or they can be closed and, therefore, unable to participate in the rich identity play and performativity of online spaces. Privacy as dialectic recognizes that young people can seek both privacy and publicity at the same time, and that the ways in which they do so are intricately linked to the emergence of identity.

Moreover, because privacy is dialectical, it cannot be given away once and for all. Instead, it is always in tension, always being negotiated. Even when young people consent to corporate monitoring, for example, they still push back by providing false information or hiding in plain sight ([Burkell et al., 2007, p. 13](#); [Media Awareness Network, 2005, p. 45](#); [Youn, 2005, p. 91](#)). Rather than establishing a line between private and public, consent becomes just one of the features of a social environment that enables interactions that can be resisted or challenged on an ongoing basis as boundaries continue to be set and reset. However, the experience of privacy within that environment is shaped by a number of factors, not least of which is the degree of power each party enjoys. Notions of privacy that focus on individual control assume the individual is able to fix a boundary by declining to disclose. However, young people's experiences remind us that the ability to negotiate the desired level of privacy is linked to social power, and that privacy policy must interrogate the social impact of invasive practices to create regulatory mechanisms that are fair.

4. Negotiating the social value of privacy

If we find evidence of all four understandings of the social value of privacy and if we find negotiation to be the common activity associated with each understanding, then we need to unpack what is going on in these negotiations – who are the players, is it an even playing field, what are the rules, what skills are required. We believe that this does not simply take us back to a clearer or more robust statement of fair information practices, but instead requires a more holistic approach to understanding such negotiations.

Ironically, this is what Westin suggested when he first advocated the use of fair information practices as a corrective to computer-enabled surveillance; fair information practices were only to be adopted after the surveillance in question was interrogated and found to be in the public interest Steeves, 2007. By collapsing the policy field to questions of individual control over the flow of information across a fixed boundary between public and private, we lost the language to address the ways in which the boundary itself is negotiated, and the arena to challenge surveillance schemes because of their social consequences. Moreover, the information practices of the corporations that collect our information online have become opaque, hidden behind privacy notices that do little to highlight the ways in which that information is used to reshape the online social environment to manipulate individual behavior (Johnson *et al.*, 2011, p. 974).

If, indeed, social negotiations are key, privacy policy needs to focus on creating conditions that support negotiations that are transparent and equitable. In the context of young people's online privacy, policy-makers must begin to critically evaluate the ways in which surveillance – by parents, schools and corporations – interferes with the developmental need of young people to develop relationships of trust with each other and with the adults who nurture and guide them. To do this, we must go beyond informational control and embrace a notion of privacy that captures its rich social meaning and practice. In this regard, Jeffrey Resiman's words in 1976 still resonate:

[...] there is indeed something unique protected by the right to privacy. And we are likely to miss it if we suppose that what is protected is just a subspecies of the things generally safeguarded by [...] personal rights. And if we miss it, there may come a time when we think we are merely limiting some personal or property right in favor of some greater good, when in fact we are really sacrificing something of much greater value (1976, p. 28).

Notes

1. For a full report of the methodology and findings of each of the three studies, see Burkell *et al.*, 2013, Steeves, 2012 and Steeves and Bailey, 2014, respectively.
2. Nissenbaum defines contexts as “structured social settings with characteristics that have evolved over time (sometimes long periods of time) and are subject to a host of causes and contingencies of purpose, place, culture, historical accident and more” (2010, p. 130). She further adds, “Contexts are structured social settings characterized by canonical activities, roles, relationships, power structures, norms (or rules), and internal values (goals, ends, purposes)” (2010, p. 132).
3. Nissenbaum rejects the position that social networking sites are a newly emerging social context for which there are no entrenched social norms (p. 223). She, instead, sees these sites “as a medium of interaction, transaction, information exchange, communication, and much more, serving and extending the transactional range of a diverse variety of social contexts” (p. 223). The context becomes the specific site in question – implying, for example, that

MySpace or Facebook may be considered different social contexts, as would the contexts of family and friends which exist simultaneously (and often overlap) on social networking sites. Nissenbaum fully acknowledges the complexity that social networking sites pose to any analysis of privacy and that further work in this area needs to be done.

4. Christofides's (2012) qualitative study of the psychology of privacy in adults identifies a distinct difference between concerns about control over functional information, on the one hand, and privacy attitudes and behaviors that occur within the context of social relationships, on the other. Functional information must be shared with organizations to obtain access to benefits like banking and shopping; however, individuals have little control over it and it is difficult to protect against the consequences of that information being released to malfasants. Social privacy, in contrast, was linked directly to essential questions about identity and trust.

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