Virtual Communities and the Social Dimension of Privacy

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WHILE THE ISSUE OF PRIVACY and the internet has been a popular topic among academics across the disciplines for quite some time, this study explores the unique privacy concerns of virtual community participants. Employing a broad understanding of privacy, this study points to the need to focus on the expressive and social role of privacy in regard to virtual community participants. Furthermore, this study suggests that virtual communities offer members a unique opportunity to work on their self-identity via the degree of self-expression and social interaction that is available in these groups. This finding helps to explain why users consciously bring the "private" to the public realm, despite the inherent privacy risks they face in doing so. To investigate how virtual community participants perceive privacy and how this understanding helps explain their participation in a forum where privacy is presumably jeopardized, the article describes an interview-based study of virtual community participants.

SI LA QUESTION DE LA VIE PRIVÉE et de l'internet est un sujet à la mode chez les universitaires de toutes les disciplines depuis un bon moment, cette étude explore les préoccupations uniques des participantes et des participants à la communauté virtuelle en matière de la vie privée. Partant d'une interprétation très large de la vie privée, l'étude souligne le besoin de prêter une attention plus grande au rôle expressif et social de la vie privée pour ces participantes et participants. De plus, l'étude suggère que les communautés virtuelles offrent à leurs membres des occasions uniques de développer leur propre identité par le degré de liberté d'expression et d'interaction sociale que prévoient ces groupes. Les conclusions de cette étude aident à saisir pourquoi les utilisatrices et les utilisateurs rendent volontairement publics des volets de leur vie privée malgré les menaces à leur vie privée auxquels ils s'exposent de la sorte. L'article décrit une étude de la participation à la communauté virtuelle entreprise à l'aide d'entrevues afin de se renseigner sur la perception de la vie privée qu'ont les participantes et les participants à la communauté virtuelle et sur la façon dont leur vision en la matière aide à expliquer leur participation à un forum où la vie privée risque d'être en péril.

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1. INTRODUCTION

WHILE INTERNET USE CONTINUES to climb at an unprecedented pace for a vast array of purposes, one of the biggest concerns facing users, academics, and government officials alike is the inherent privacy risks. In a society where recording personal information has become the norm rather than the exception, participating in a space where any and all actions can be tracked without the user's awareness, let alone permission, threatens the very principles of freedom and openness of the internet. How to protect personal privacy while participating on the internet is a major concern for both users and computer-mediated communication scholars.[1]

    While privacy concerns appear to be an issue for many internet users, one user group in particular appears to face a number of unique privacy challenges: virtual community participants. Participation in virtual communities poses new opportunities for privacy violations to occur, as individuals discuss personal matters and provide opinions openly in a format that can be easily accessed by anyone with an internet connection and that is, furthermore, archived indefinitely. Future employers, insurance companies, police investigators or even a future spouse can locate decontextualized, and possibly damaging, statements. The storage or decontextualization that can occur with this kind of discussion represents a serious threat to privacy for virtual community members.

    And yet, in the face of these risks, this specific user group appears to have chosen to forego some of their privacy in return for participation in online

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1. Recent studies continue to indicate that privacy is a major concern for an overwhelming majority of internet users. For the latest privacy surveys, see Privacy Exchange, <http://www.privacyexchange.org/survey/index.html> and Roger Clarke, "Surveys of Privacy Attitudes," <http://www.anu.edu.au/people/Roger.Clarke/DV/Surveys.html#Can>.

forums. Why are these users willing to do this? What is it about participation in virtual communities that seems to trump the threat of privacy violations? Are users putting themselves at risk by participating? Are they concerned? Should they be concerned? One further wonders, more generally, how virtual community participants perceive privacy? What is the importance of privacy for the existence of virtual communities? And how much privacy can users really expect in these forums? Questions such as these have yet to be addressed. In fact, very little attention has been paid to the unique privacy issues around virtual communities in the computer-mediated communication literature at all. It is within this context that this study makes an initial attempt to understand how virtual community participants perceive privacy and whether such an understanding helps to explain their participation in a forum where privacy is jeopardized.

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<p style="text-align:center">2. DEFINING PRIVACY</p>

DEFINING PRIVACY IS NOT an easy task. A great deal of the important work on privacy continues simply to try to define the elusive concept.[2] Not surprisingly, there are very different conceptions about privacy across the literature.[3] For instance, Warren and Brandeis, who wrote the foundational legal work on privacy, define it as "the right to be let alone."[4] Westin defines 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."[5] Van Hove argues that privacy means two things: (1) that "a person has the right to a private sphere" and (2) that a person has "the right to control the flow of information about his private life."[6] Clarke defines privacy more generally as "the interest that individuals have in sustaining a 'personal space', free from interference by other people and organizations."[7] Van Der Haag defines privacy as "the exclusive access of a person to a realm of his own. The right to privacy entitles an individual to exclude others from (a) watching, (b) utilizing, (c) invading his private [personal] realm."[8] This sample illustrates how definitions

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2.   Richard A. Epstein, "Deconstructing Privacy: And Putting It Back Together Again" (2000) 17:2 Social Philosophy and Policy 1; Richard G. Frey, "Privacy, Control, and Talk of Rights" (2000) 17:2 Social Philosophy & Policy 45; Alexander Rosenberg, "Privacy as a Matter of Taste and Right" (2000) 17:2 Social Philosophy & Policy 68; Lloyd L. Weinreb, "The Right to Privacy" (2000) 17:2 Social Philosophy & Policy 25.

3.   The literature on privacy is vast. Legal, historical, sociological and policy-centered approaches are all available. I center my discussion on the function of privacy and therefore focus on the philosophical debate.

4.   Samuel D. Warren & Louis Brandeis, "The Right to Privacy" (1890) 4:5 Harvard Law Review 193, <http://www.louisville.edu/library/law/brandeis/privacy.html> at p. 193 [Warren & Brandeis, "Right to Privacy"].

5.   Alan F. Westin, *Privacy and Freedom* (New York: Atheneum Press, 1967) at p. 7.

6.   Erik Van Hove, "The Legislation on Privacy Protection and Social Research" (1995) 12:2 Computers in Human Services 53.

7.   Roger Clarke, "Internet Privacy Concerns Confirm the Case for Intervention" (1999) 42:2 Communications of the ACM 60, <http://www.anu.edu.au/people/Roger.Clarke/DV/CACM99.html> [Clarke, "Internet Privacy"].

8.   Van Der Haag, "On Privacy" (1971) cited in Lucas D. Introna, "Privacy and the Computer: Why We Need Privacy in the Information Society" (1997) 28:3 Metaphilosophy 259 at p. 262 [Introna, "Privacy and the Computer"].

often differ greatly in the fundamental way that they approach privacy, with some referring to physical aspects of privacy, others to personal information, and still others to issues of autonomy. Privacy encompasses a variety of different issues and is important for a number of reasons. As such, a unitary definition that adequately incorporates all the subtle differences that privacy evokes has so far proven impossible.

Privacy is a multi-layered issue and scholars have been struggling to define the concept for the last fifty years. There have been calls to move past the attempt to pinpoint an exact definition of privacy.[9] Obtaining a precise definition of the term inadvertently excludes some dimension of privacy. In this way, it can be said that it is more productive to grapple with privacy in all its varied complexity. I too believe this is a more fruitful direction for the discussion of privacy. Thinking of privacy in this way does not negate the necessity of using some sort of framework to proceed. To date, the most comprehensive and useful framework for the purposes of this study is Judith DeCew's cluster concept of privacy.

2.1. A Broad Conception of Privacy

In her 1997 book, *In Pursuit of Privacy: Law, Ethics and the Rise of Technology*, Judith DeCew argues that in order to adequately address all of the implications privacy entails, we must defend "privacy as a broad and multifaceted cluster concept."[10] Thinking about privacy as an inclusive concept means accepting that it is important in a number of ways, including "our ability to control information about ourselves, our ability to govern access to ourselves, and our ability to make self-expressive autonomous decisions free from intrusion or control by others."[11] As such, rather than attempting to create a solitary definition with a one-size-fits-all goal, DeCew encourages us to think of privacy as a "complex of three related clusters of claims concerning information about oneself, physical access to oneself, and decision making and activity that provide one with the independence needed to carve out one's self-identity through self-expression and interpersonal relationships."[12] In this way, DeCew's cluster includes three aspects of privacy: (1) informational privacy; (2) accessibility privacy; and (3) expressive privacy. By incorporating three different aspects of privacy into one cluster concept, DeCew ensures that the varied elements that have traditionally been incorporated into the discussion and definitions around privacy are included.

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9. Judith Wagner DeCew, *In Pursuit of Privacy: Law, Ethics & the Rise of Technology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997) [DeCew, *In Pursuit of Privacy*]; Ferdinand David Schoeman, *Privacy and Social Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Introna, "Privacy and the Computer," *ibid.*

10. DeCew, *In Pursuit of Privacy, ibid.* at p. 61.

11. *Ibid.* at p. 62.

12. *Ibid.* at p. 78.

2.1.1. Informational Privacy

Informational privacy centers on the notion of control over one's information. The reference to protection or control over information is one of the most common evocations when people are discussing issues of privacy, and has become even more relevant as a result of electronic information gathering and storage. Informational privacy considers the arguments that much information about oneself "need not be available for public perusal."[13] Yet, not all kinds of information receive attention when discussing informational privacy. Information about one's medical history, financial situation, or lifestyle choices are often thought to be information of a more personal nature than other types of information. Therefore, it is this kind of information that needs to be protected more rigorously. For instance, a human resources department generally holds Social Insurance Numbers for legitimate reasons so that people get paid and to take care of tax-related issues. However, just because a human resources department holds this information does not give it the right to share that information without permission or knowledge. Moreover, the human resource department lacks the right to use that number to investigate credit history and recent financial transactions. Thus, the privacy threats in informational terms cluster around how the information might be used or appropriated to pressure or embarrass an individual, to damage an individual's credibility or economic status, and so on.[14] In other words, it is the potential to harm a person with the possession of that individual's private information that is the perceived threat with informational privacy—a man could be blackmailed with the information that he is cheating on a spouse; another person could be refused employment because of information that she has AIDS; and another person could be refused admission into a university because of his previous involvement with the gay rights movement. In these cases, the information that is gained or used is not usually regarded as pertinent to the *original* circumstances *for its collection,* so relevance is also a crucial issue when talking about informational privacy. Overall, the importance of informational privacy is in its ability to shield individuals from intrusions, as well as from threats of intrusions. It also affords individuals control in deciding who should have access to the information and for what purposes.[15]

2.1.2. Accessibility Privacy

The second aspect of the cluster concept of privacy—accessibility privacy—deals more explicitly with ideas of physical privacy "focus[ing] not merely on information or knowledge but more centrally on observations and physical proximity."[16] In this way, accessibility privacy tends to protect against traditional privacy violations such as a house being wiretapped, or a family consistently

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13. *Ibid.* at p. 75.
14. *Ibid.* at p. 75.
15. *Ibid.* at p. 75.
16. *Ibid.* at p. 76.

being watched via a neighbour's telescope, or a "peeping Tom" creeping around a house. All of these examples point to "limited accessibility"[17]—the importance of accessibility privacy so people can dictate who has access to them, and to what degree. Implicit in the discussion of accessibility privacy is also the degree to which someone is aware of the accessibility violation, on the basis that being wiretapped without one's knowledge intuitively feels like a privacy violation. In all, "protection of accessibility privacy allows individuals to control decisions about who has physical access to their persons through sense perception, observation, or bodily contact and to limit access that would be unwelcome to reasonable individuals in the circumstances due to the distraction, inhibition, fear, and vulnerability it can cause."[18] Accessibility privacy, while perhaps the most narrow understanding in the cluster, is nonetheless a crucial aspect.

2.1.3. Expressive Privacy

Expressive privacy protects people from the overreaching social control of others that would inhibit self-expression and freedom of association. Expressive privacy is about one's ability to freely choose, act, self-express and socially interact. It is tied to emotional vulnerability, autonomy, and social roles. Ultimately, expressive privacy can be said to protect people from the pressures to conform to socially accepted viewpoints or practices. In this way, expressive privacy limits external social control, thus enhancing the internal control over expression and the ability to build social relations.

Expressive privacy is particularly integral to protecting individual autonomy.[19] For instance, if a person is aware that she is being consistently observed and has no privacy in a domain where she would normally have "wide discretion concerning how to behave,"[20] she will presumably structure her actions not just according to her own will or intention, but will also try to keep them in line with what she envisions her observers would like to, or expect to, see. In this way, issues of expressive privacy and autonomy are also inherently intertwined with the social pressure that results from social judgments and norms. Thus, in a transparent society where all are visible to everyone, we would be completely subject to public scrutiny and would likely conform to societal norms for fear of being ostracized. This would have serious repercussions for

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17. Ruth Gavison, "Privacy and the Limits of Law" in Ferdinand David Schoeman, ed., *Philosophical Dimensions of Privacy: An Anthology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 346–403.

18. DeCew, *In Pursuit of Privacy, supra* note 9 at pp. 76–77.

19. Stanley I. Benn, "Privacy, Freedom, and Respect for Persons" in Ferdinand David Schoeman, ed., *Philosophical Dimensions of Privacy: An Anthology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 223–244; William L. Prosser, "Privacy" (1960) 48:3 California Law Review 338, reprinted in Ferdinand David Schoeman, ed., *Philosophical Dimensions of Privacy: An Anthology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 104–155 [Prosser, "Privacy" cited to Schoemann, *Anthology*]; Jeffrey H. Reiman, "Privacy, Intimacy, and Personhood" (1978) 6:1 Philosophy and Public Affairs 26, reprinted in Ferdinand David Schoeman, ed., *Philosophical Dimensions of Privacy: An Anthology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 300–316 [Reiman, "Privacy, Intimacy, and Personhood" cited to Schoemann, *Anthology*].

20. Schoeman, *Privacy and Social Freedom, supra* note 9 at p. 15.

autonomy. In one way, we would no longer be able to play with, and test social norms backstage, a crucial act to forming our individual self-identities.[21] Secondly, under such constant social scrutiny we would be practically forced to conform to societal norms. Thus, society could quickly become an undifferentiated mass where everyone says and does the same things in order to be deemed socially acceptable. In this situation, there would no longer be any room for individual thoughts, feelings, or emotions—our self-expression would be seriously limited. And even if such individual thoughts could continue to occur undetected, the actions that would normally correspond would likely cease to exist due to fear of social judgment.

Expressive privacy also plays a crucial role in developing social roles and relationships.[22] In particular, expressive privacy works to protect and maintain intimacy. Because intimacy is based on the self-disclosure of information, if we were unable to choose or control what information we give out or the degree to which we allow other people to know us, intimate relationships would cease to exist, and essentially everyone would know everything about everyone. This would inhibit intimate relationships because intimacy is premised on the fact that individuals know particularly personal, or otherwise unknown, information about each other. Without privacy, my relationship with my long-time best friend would be no different from my relationship with my employer, as both could know exactly the same amount and degree of information about me. In all, without expressive privacy, social relations couldn't be as varied, and social interaction in general would be seriously threatened.

Finally, expressive privacy also enables work on self-identity to proceed. Expressive privacy regulates and allows social interaction to occur. And because the self can only be developed via social interaction with others, expressive privacy and the reflexive formation of self-identity are closely connected.[23] Thus, issues around self-identity in late modernity are worthy of consideration.

According to Giddens, self-identity in late modernity is highly reflexive so that sustaining a coherent yet continuously revised biographical narrative is key. In this way, the focal questions for people living in modernity are what to do, how to act, what to be. The chronic revision of social and material relations in light of new information makes modernity's reflexivity different. While the enlightenment thinkers were trying to make way for securely founded knowledge, modernity undermines this, in part, because "science depends ... on

21.   Ervin Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings* (New York: The Free Press, 1963); Ervin Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1969).

22.   Charles Fried, "Privacy" (1968) 77: 3 Yale Law Journal 475, reprinted in Ferdinand David Schoeman, ed., *Philosophical Dimensions of Privacy: An Anthology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 203–223; [Fried, "Privacy" cited to Schoeman, *Anthology*]; Robert S. Gerstein, "Intimacy and Privacy" (1978) 89:1 Ethics 76, reprinted in Ferdinand David Schoeman, ed., *Philosophical Dimensions of Privacy: An Anthology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 265–272 [Gerstein, "Intimacy and Privacy" cited to Schoeman, *Anthology*]; Reiman, "Privacy, Intimacy, and Personhood," *supra* note 19.

23.   Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1994).

the methodological principle of doubt."[24] With such doubt in place, knowledge is always open to revision and reflexivity becomes crucial. And because of the reflexivity of modernity, one's self-identity is able to change at any given moment in life.

Giddens also argues that individuals in modernity follow an autobiographical way of thinking in that they try to develop a coherent sense of self. While many other authors have claimed that individuality is the key to modernity, Giddens doesn't think this is unique to modernity. Instead, there are a number of issues that are new to modernity and self-identity from pre-modern times. First, the self is a reflexive project for which the individual is responsible. In this way, we are what we make of ourselves. Self-identity is routinely created and sustained in everyday activities, via the routines of practical consciousness, so that it is continuously revised. Self-identity is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her biography. A person with a stable self-identity has a feeling of biographical continuity so that she can grasp and communicate it. In this respect, a person's identity is really about the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. Moreover, a person's biography can not be wholly fictive and must continuously integrate events into the ongoing story of the self. In essence, "In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become and of where we are going."[25] This reflexivity of the self is thus continuous and all-pervasive and the narrative of the self is made explicit in an attempt to sustain an integrated sense of self.

As Giddens makes clear, "in the reflexive project of the self, the narrative of self-identity is inherently fragile."[26] Making a coherent and continuous narrative amidst a constantly changing life experience is a continuous burden for the individual in modernity. One's self identity "must be continually reordered against the backdrop of shifting experiences of day to day life and the fragmenting tendencies of modern institutions."[27] Overall, Giddens concludes that the difficulty in sustaining a coherent narrative is because of modernity's dynamism and reflexivity. In this way, the relationship between self and society can be understood as follows, "The self establishes a trajectory which can only become coherent through the reflexive use of the broader social environment. The impetus towards control, geared to reflexivity, thrusts the self into the outer world in ways which have no clear parallel in previous times."[28] In this way, the abstract systems of high modernity allow the self more mastery over the social relations and contexts incorporated into self-identity.

Giddens' insights into the role of self-identity and society in late modernity are particularly useful for the purposes of this study because they help us to think about the ways that virtual community participants negotiate the

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24.   *Ibid.* at p. 21.
25.   *Ibid.* at p. 54.
26.   *Ibid.* at p. 185.
27.   *Ibid.* at p. 186.
28.   *Ibid.* at p. 148.

boundary between public and private, and hence, the society and the self. Additionally, because expressive privacy directly helps to protect the creation of self-identity, how this plays out via virtual communities has important ramifications for the goals and objectives of this study.

Overall, expressive privacy plays a fundamental role in our lives. It enables us to choose and dictate the way that we will live, it promotes the creation of our self-identity, and it allows us to enjoy a wide variety of social relationships and roles, including intimate relationships. Sometimes called the "outward-looking dimension of privacy," [29] expressive privacy is the key aspect of privacy for the purposes of this article because it highlights the important *social* dimension of privacy. Expressive privacy sets the stage for social interaction to occur and additionally enables the creation of one's identity by preventing other people's social overreaching throughout this interaction.

Interestingly, the social dimension of privacy is often neglected. When discussing privacy, many scholars focus on individual aspects of the concept.[30] Here, privacy is seen as protecting the autonomy of the individual, the desired intimacy level for each individual, and the individual's right to choose and act in various social roles. However, there is always an implicit reference to "the other" when discussing privacy. Autonomy is inherently about autonomy from others, intimacy is about intimate relations between oneself and others, and the social roles one chooses to enact are for other people. Furthermore, the degree of accessibility to others and the amount of information one wants others to have are all connected to privacy. In this way, privacy is essentially a social concept—at its very core, privacy has to do with our relations with others. Privacy is about facilitating associations *with* people, not about creating independence *from* people.[31] Acknowledging the social dimension of privacy is crucial to understanding how virtual community participants perceive and negotiate privacy.

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3. PRIVACY AND THE INTERNET

PRIVACY HAS BEEN INTIMATELY TIED to technology since its theoretical conception.[32] As a result, it is no surprise that increased interest in privacy has come about with the onset of the internet.[33] Popular and scholarly sources on the topic are abundant and a number of specific concerns about internet use and privacy can be delineated and categorized from the literature.

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29. DeCew, *In Pursuit of Privacy, supra* note 9 at p. 77.

30. Schoeman, *Privacy and Social Freedom, supra* note 9, is one of the first scholars to make the social dimension of privacy his focal point by examining privacy's relation to social encounters. As Schoeman argues, because privacy works to protect us from social overreaching, its very basis is located in interaction via our social relations.

31. *Ibid.* at p. 8.

32. DeCew, *In Pursuit of Privacy, supra* note 9; Jeff Weintraub, "The Theory and Politics of the Public/Private Distinction" in Jeff Weintraub & Krishan Kumar, eds., *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 1–42 [Weintraub, "Public/Private Distinction"].

33. Many authors argue that the pervasiveness of technological advancements have helped to instigate the renewed interest in privacy. See, for example, Randall P. Bezanson, "The Right to Privacy Revisited: Privacy, News, and Social Change, 1890–1990" (1992) 80:5 California Law Review 1133–1175; DeCew, *In Pursuit*

Firstly, concerns about the collection of personal information are frequent. The collection of personal information via the internet is now incredibly fast and easy. Traditionally, if personal information was required by institutions, it had to be recorded by hand—a long and arduous process. However, collection can now be easily performed via transactions with online sites, through web survey forms, or through applications like spiders or cookies. Because the collection of information is now done electronically versus manually, it is easier than ever before for institutions to gather information in a central place. But internet users and scholars alike are concerned not just that the collection of personal information is on the rise, but that the collection of that information is often invisible, automatic, and remote. Users are often unaware that their personal information is being collected at all. In essence, the new technologies that are being created to collect such information "probe more deeply, widely and softly than traditional methods, transcending barriers (whether walls, distance, darkness, skin or time) that historically protected personal information." [34]

A second oft-cited concern in terms of privacy and the internet is the storage and archiving of the personal information that is collected. Previously, when handwritten records were collected, a lot of physical storage space was needed to hold all the records, and a great amount of intensive labour was needed to keep the files up to date. Today, however, the information that is collected on users, with or without their knowledge, can be easily stored on databases with minimal space requirements. Furthermore, and perhaps most threatening, is the fact that information can now be archived indefinitely. Whereas, traditionally, keeping long-term records on individuals required a great deal of space, information that was collected ten years ago for a web-based contest can now be easily archived on a small server.

A third issue with internet privacy is that the collation and dissemination of personal information is now much easier on the internet. Traditionally, information that was recorded was disparate and incomplete. For example, an individual provided his height and vision test score to the licence and vehicle registry department, medical information to the doctor's office, and zoning information to city works. Each of these organizations held some disparate and unconnected pieces of information about that individual. With the electronic capture and storage of data that is now possible, those once disparate records can now be easily assembled from various databases to make up a complete, often overwhelming, profile of a person as a whole. In this way, information that

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of Privacy, *supra* note 9; David H. Flaherty, *Protecting Privacy in Surveillance Societies: The Federal Republic of Germany, Sweden, France, Canada and the United States* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Simson Garfinkel, *Database Nation: The Death of Privacy in the 21st Century* (Sebastopol: O'Reilly & Associates, 2000); Fred H. Cate, *Privacy in the Information Age* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997); Introna, "Privacy and the Computer," *supra* note 9; David Lyon, *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of the Surveillance Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) [Lyon, *Electronic Eye*]; Priscilla M. Regan, *Legislating Privacy: Technology, Social Values and Public Policy* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

34.   Gary T. Marx, "Privacy and Technology," 25 March 2003, <http://web.mit.edu/gtmarx/www/privantt.html> at para. 3.

was collected about an individual from one website can be sold to third parties that have other, very different, information about an individual on their databases to collate the information and create a composite of this person. Thus, information can now be assembled and traded easily. This can be done both by organizations like those described above, but also by individual persons who increasingly have the ability to process and disseminate massive amounts of personal information, both about themselves and about others. In this way, information on a person's credit history, his favourite car, and his driver's record could be put together to make a much fuller picture of the individual.[35]

Finally, the decontextualization of personal information that is now possible via the internet is another serious issue in the threat to privacy. Information that is collected, archived and possibly traded is used in another context from that for which it was intended. With the decontextualization of information, an individual's control over the presentation of self is suddenly out of her hands. Thus, the main problem is the potential to be misdefined and judged out of context:

> When intimate personal information circulates among a small group of people who know you well, its significance can be weighed against other aspects of your personality and character. […] But when your browsing habits—or e-mail messages—are exposed to strangers, you may be reduced, in their eyes, to nothing more than the most salacious book you once read or the most vulgar joke you once told. [36]

The decontextualization that is possible as a result of the collection, storage and trade of personal information, helped in part by the internet, means that a single part of who people are can come to represent the whole. Decontextualization threatens to skew the whole picture so that, "as intimate information about our lives is increasingly recorded, archived and not easily deleted, there is a growing danger that a part of our identities will come to be mistaken for who we are."[37]

In all, issues of collection, storage, collation and decontextualization are common topics covered in the privacy and internet literature which indicate that the internet poses some serious threats to privacy. Data is increasingly collected

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35. The collation and trade of personal information points to the way information has become a commodity. The "information as commodity" aspect of privacy risks has been examined in depth by a number of scholars. See Daniel Bell, *The Coming of the Postindustrial Society* (London: Peregrine, 1974); Simon G. Davies, "Re-Engineering the Right to Privacy: How Privacy Has Been Transformed from a Right to a Commodity" in Philip E. Agre & Marc Rotenberg, eds., *Technology and Privacy: The New Landscape* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997) 143–166; Oscar H. Gandy, Jr, "The Real Digital Divide: Citizens versus Consumers" in Leah A. Lievrouw & Sonia Livingstone, *Handbook of New Media* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2002) 448–460; Oscar H. Gandy, Jr, "Coming to Terms with the Panoptic Sort" in David Lyon & Elia Zuriek, eds., *Computers, Surveillance and Privacy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 132–155; Garfinkel, *Database Nation, supra* note 33; Lyon, *Electronic Eye, supra* note 33; David Lyon, *The Information Society: Issues and Illusions* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988) [Lyon, *The Information Society*]; Mark Poster, "Databases as Discourse, or, Electronic Interpellations" in David Lyon & Elia Zuriek, eds., *Computers, Surveillance and Privacy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 175–192.

36. Jeffry Rosen, "The Eroded Self" *The New York Times* (20 April 2000) 46, <http://people.brandeis.edu/~teuber/rosen1.html>.

37. *Ibid.*

and personalized; storage technology means it remains available; database technology makes it discoverable; and telecommunications enables its rapid reticulation.[38] What kind of privacy are these scholars talking about? After examining the different dimensions of privacy, we know that privacy can be broadly thought of as a cluster concept encompassing informational privacy, accessibility privacy, and expressive privacy. When scholars focus on collection, archiving, collation, and decontextualization issues, they are mainly referring to the *informational* dimension of privacy. Collection, archiving, collation, and decontextualization are all about information—the collection of personal information often unbeknownst to users, the storage of information for an indefinite period of time, and the collation or trade of information that can ultimately lead to the decontextualization of that information. Overall, when discussing these issues, a majority of scholars seem to be ultimately concerned with the lack of control over one's information as a result of the privacy-threatening applications on the internet. Thus, when many scholars discuss issues of privacy and the internet, they are in fact only talking about one dimension of DeCew's cluster concept of privacy—informational privacy. It is this understanding of privacy that provokes claims of violation because of the implicit belief that a great deal of information about oneself need not be legitimately available to anyone, particularly without one's permission. Thus, the increasing attention paid to internet privacy relates to the mounting capabilities and practices of formalized organizations and how they affect one's ability to control one's own information.

It is important to note, however, that the fact that the general discussion on internet privacy to date has mainly focused on informational privacy is not necessarily an incorrect direction. Rather, I am arguing that it is critical that we keep in mind that when scholars and citizens discuss privacy issues on the internet, they are mainly referring only to the informational privacy dimension. Thus, issues of accessibility and expressive privacy generally go unnoticed. This is an integral point for the purposes of this article.

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<p style="text-align:center">4. DEFINING VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES</p>

VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES AS A PARTICULAR INSTANCE of social interaction on the internet have received a great deal of attention and have been taken up with zeal by both users and scholars alike. Although what actually constitutes a virtual community is often debated, commonalities amongst the conceptions are evident. For instance, Rheingold defines virtual communities as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace."[39] According to Scime, a "'virtual

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38.   Clarke, "Internet Privacy," *supra* note 7 at p. 2.

39.   Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1993) at p. 5.

community' is a group of individuals who thanks to computer technology come to have shared values, care for each other, engage in real dialogue and have a moral voice."[40] Preece argues that a virtual community is "any virtual social space where people come together to get and give information or support, to learn or to find company."[41] While the fact that academics disagree over a definition may not be a surprise, virtual community members themselves have been shown to disagree over the term's meaning.[42] Moreover, virtual community's foundational term—community—is a slippery concept itself and has more than ninety-four definitions associated with it.[43] The definitions of virtual communities are as many as their popularity is vast. However, one common aspect can be found in the majority of those definitions—the sociability factor of the virtual community. Virtual communities are about "virtual togetherness," how users connect and communicate with their fellow humans. [44] They can cover a range of topics, from midwifery to home renovating; they take different shapes and forms, such as newsgroups, mailing lists, and online forums; and they can be synchronous or asynchronous.

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<p style="text-align:center">5. VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES AND PRIVACY</p>

THE TRADITIONAL CONCERNS ABOUT PRIVACY that are associated with the internet also appear to apply to virtual communities. Notably, there are also unique privacy concerns that virtual community participants face. For instance, issues such as the collection of information while using the forum is likely to be a concern that is shared by virtual community participants. However, the threat of information being collected from the forum itself through the revelation of information of a more personal nature seems to be a unique concern for virtual community participants. While only relatively innocuous information can be pulled from a user while browsing the internet, such as an IP address or even a name, much more sensitive or personal information could be lifted from discussion threads. On forums, participants often share meaningful and private information, in addition to superficial contributions. Thus, the type of "information" that could be collected, because it is more closely tied to one's self-identity and self-expression, poses a different kind of threat to virtual community users.

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40.   Roger Scime, "<Cyberville> and the Spirit of the Community: Howard Rheingold meets Amitai Etzioni" (1994), <gopher://gopher.well.sf.ca.us:70/00/Community/cyberville>, paraphrased in Mihaela Kelemen & Warren Smith, "Community and its 'Virtual' Promises: A Critique of Cyberlibertarian Rhetoric" (2001) 4:3 Information, Communication & Society 370 at p. 371 [Kelemen & Smith, "Virtual Promises"].

41.   Jenny Preece, "Sociability and Usability in Online Communities: Determining and Measuring Success" (2001) 20:5 Behaviour & Information Technology 347 at p. 348.

42.   Kelemen & Smith, "Virtual Promises," *supra* note 40.

43.   *Ibid.*; Maria Bakardjieva, "Virtual Togetherness: An Everyday-Life Perspective" (2003) 25:3 Media Culture & Society 291 [Bakardjieva, "Virtual Togetherness"].

44.   Bakardjieva, "Virtual Togetherness," *ibid.*

In addition, while the storage of information is a concern for all internet users, the archiving of virtual community discussions seems to pose a much bigger threat. While participation on virtual communities may seem transitory and fleeting, the fact that they are archived indefinitely in many cases could be a real problem for the privacy of participants. As humans, we tend to change and grow over time. In this way, my opinion on abortion, for instance, may be different now than it was fifteen years ago due to a personal experience or greater detailed knowledge. However, let's say that fifteen years ago I participated on a forum where I let my opinion on abortion be known. Then, later, when I apply for a volunteer position with a non-profit organization, the hiring committee comes across this opinion in a simple Google search. In this case, the storage of my opinions and personal experiences for such a long time poses a serious threat to my privacy and presents consequences that I presumably did not anticipate at the time of disclosure. The storage of information that was initially public presents a unique privacy risk for virtual community participants because they often assume that the forums are private. In other words, the small numbers of people that participate in these forums, in addition to their familiarity, often enables virtual community participants to forget about the actual public nature of the forum and to share private information there that they potentially would not share in a traditionally public space. It is the presumption that the forum is private that ensures that the storage of information can be a serious privacy risk for participants as private information is shared more easily.

Additionally, the collation of all of my contributions to a certain virtual community could easily paint a picture of me as a person. If this picture painted by my participation in an online forum was then used in a different context, further serious privacy risks are posed. For example, let's say I participated in an anorexic forum when I was younger as I believed I had an eating disorder and was fascinated by the other girls' lifestyles and discussion. Let's further propose that this was a difficult time in my life, where I was experiencing mild depression and generally wasn't happy with myself. Now, however, I am a well-adjusted and happy family lawyer who is up for partner. What would happen if my appointment committee drudged up my contributions to this virtual community and made the decision that my emotional well-being is questionable at best, because I was quite emotionally unstable ten years ago. There is an increased chance, they argue, that I will become so again and hence am not a "desirable" candidate. Or, consider a situation along the same lines where I might have posted very strong opinions about the US war in Iraq. If someone on the hiring committee finds my opinions online, and then also finds my views offensive, in contradiction to her own moral conception of the world, the fact that I disclosed this information could now have potentially serious effects on my career and life-plans.

While scenarios such as those listed above may seem unlikely because of the use of pseudonyms, we only have to look at the cases described by Rosen to realize how easy it is to connect a person to his pseudonym:

America Online, for example, got into trouble when it revealed that the screen name "boysrch" belonged to a sailor named Timothy McVeigh—a revelation that led the Navy to try to expel McVeigh for homosexuality. Similarly, Raytheon, a defense contractor, sued more than twenty employees in 1999 for posting pseudonymous messages criticizing the company on the Internet; two of the employees resigned in protest after Yahoo revealed their identities in response to a subpoena. (Indeed, Yahoo now has a subpoena group—a cluster of employees who are responsible for tracking down the identity of its subscribers in response to civil subpoenas.)[45]

The particular privacy issue of connecting one's pseudonym to one's person seems to pose a serious threat to virtual community participants where, under the guise of anonymity, users reveal particularly personal information. The explanation for the disclosure of such information has been, in part, because of the anonymity in a public space. In this way, the belief that because "no one knows me, there will be no repercussions" can be problematic if that user can easily be discovered. For example, say one virtual community participant consistently reveals information about her sexual preference and partner. But this is a sexual preference and partner that is unknown to her husband. If the pseudonym of an individual can be easily tracked, and this user revealed this information only because she thought she was anonymous, then serious repercussions could in fact occur if her husband, or anyone else, discovers this information.

Furthermore, cyberstalking also seems to pose a serious privacy risk to virtual community participants. For instance, perhaps one virtual community participant has unknowingly attracted the attention of another participant. The latter participant pays particular attention to his posts and is always sure to reply. She spends hours obsessing over every word he types, searching for evidence that they are more than just "online buddies." Throughout her infatuation with this participant, she has noted his references to the city in which he lives, and the paths he enjoys jogging on. One weekend, she takes it upon herself to visit "her boyfriend." She comes across him in the park, jogging with another woman (who incidentally is wearing his engagement ring) and tears into him in a jealous rage, screaming at him for "cheating on her." While I may be accused of having an overactive imagination, this scenario is possible when details such as a participant's favourite bar, eatery or even grocery store are innocently mentioned when describing an event from the day.

Finally, a privacy risk that appears to be unique to participants on virtual communities is the possibility that their offline acquaintances, friends, family, coworkers, etc., might see derogatory, or other, comments that the virtual community participants have written about them. Again, this can be tied to the anonymity that pseudonyms seem to secure, but online group participants often make reference to their issues or difficulties with people in their offline lives, using the forum as a place to complain or "rant." Yet, virtual community

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45.   Jeffrey Rosen, *The Unwanted Gaze: The Destruction of Privacy in America* (New York: Random House, 2000) at pp. 175–176.

members often seem oblivious to the possibility that the very same coworker they are describing as having a sneezing problem in the cubicle adjacent to them could also be a member on the same forum, reading the comments. Likewise, when participants ask for advice on whether or not to divorce a spouse because of this or that, there is always a chance that the spouse could see these comments. In this way, the personal disclosure that virtual community participants perform on a regular basis appears to pose very unique privacy threats. In all, the online privacy threats that virtual community participants face are similar, but unique, compared to general online users, and this needs to be explored.

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<div align="center">6. THE STUDY</div>

IN ORDER TO INVESTIGATE how virtual community participants perceive privacy and how this understanding helps explain their participation in a forum where privacy is presumably jeopardized, I performed in-depth, semi-structured interviews with fifteen virtual community participants. The interview participants were selected from two different virtual communities—a women's running online forum and a newsgroup about songwriting. They were approached as interviewees based on their "committed" use, generally over one thousand posts on their respective forums, and their long-time membership (minimum two years). The interviews themselves were conducted either over the phone or via email and lasted anywhere from one to two hours.

The purpose of the study was not meant to be representative of the population but rather to focus intimately on perceptions of some virtual community members. The participant breakdown for the study is as follows:

- Fifteen participants participated in in-depth interviews, with four male participants from the newsgroup and eleven female participants from the online forum.
- Nine of those interviews were conducted over the telephone while the other six took place over email.
- In terms of their demographics, the interviewees varied according to their socio-economic situations, age, and experience with the internet and forums.
- The participants were from geographically varied areas with two participants physically residing in the United Kingdom and the remainder living in the United States and Canada.[46]

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46.   For a complete breakdown of the participants, see Appendix A below.

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7. THE FINDINGS

FROM THE INTERVIEWS, a number of things were made clear in terms of how virtual community participants understand privacy and how their understanding helps to explain their participation in virtual communities.

7.1. Users Are Aware of Privacy Risks

Firstly, it was clear that participants are very aware of the potential privacy risks when they use the internet in general and when they participate in the forums in particular. Participants displayed a vast awareness of the various kinds of privacy risks that they face and identified risks that fall under informational, accessibility, and expressive privacy dimensions. Users most often talked about informational privacy when discussing the internet in general and often referred to things like cookies, or the fact that users do not have a reasonable expectation of privacy online. In addition, some users pointed out that there were indeed accessibility privacy risks associated with participating in virtual communities. For instance, when questioned why one user would not put his personally identifiable information on the forum, the participant, Jack, responded, "Because I suppose they could figure out who you were some other way, but by putting it out there it's sort of like you're inviting contact from people that, you know anybody could stumble across it rather than just people you would choose to have contact with." Similar comments around concerns about unwanted contact from people came from some of the other participants.

Despite the mentions of informational and accessibility privacy risks, it was the expressive privacy risks that participants faced when using virtual communities that seemed to be the most pressing, and the most frequently cited kind of privacy risk participants noted. In this way, risks to participants' freedom to express, act, or associate seemed to be the most worrisome. An expressive privacy risk, for example, is that someone from their online world may stumble on participants' comments. This is because outside interference or social control on their self-expression becomes an issue. As one user, Barbara, explains, "I would say I'm more concerned about my privacy when I post a comment that I would not want members of my offline world to read. My concern is that a member of my offline world will access the forum and read my comments. My fear is that I will become too comfortable within the forum and I'll tell more information about myself than I should." There seem to be two important points made about privacy risks by this participant: firstly, the restriction of expression that results from the fear that someone from her offline world will see her comments; and secondly, that she will reveal too much about her person. Both of these risks are about expressive privacy via freedom of expression because the threat of someone from her offline world reading her comments limits her expression, and her emotional vulnerability is at risk by exposing herself too much.

In addition to the expressive privacy risks posed by offline parties, participants noted a number of risks internal to the forum that indicates that their major concern in terms of privacy risks in virtual communities is in regard to expressive privacy. As one respondent, Lori, noted:

> As soon as you post, you leave yourself wide open to somebody posting to you or questioning your beliefs or questioning your whatever ... you're just leaving yourself open to things you may not want to hear or maybe things you want to hear.... It's more like, every time you post you're telling somebody a little bit more about yourself. So I would say that's digging into your private person, getting to know you. I mean, you may not think you're exposing yourself but you are.

From this comment, we begin to see that participants are aware of the personal vulnerability that they can leave themselves open to when participating in a virtual community. Users are concerned about protecting their emotional vulnerability, and therefore because expressive privacy protects individuals' emotional vulnerability, it plays an important role in virtual communities. Participants' identities and their emotional vulnerability are at risk with each comment or disclosure they make to the group.

The threat of social judgment from within the group as a risk of participation on the forums was apparent with other respondents as well. As another respondent, Joleen, poignantly notes, the threats to participants in virtual communities can be both informational and expressive.

> I think there are two layers of, in a sense there are two layers of people who I'm aware of in terms of how it's not entirely private. And one is the sense of you know like future employer/other non-interested parties out there who might be interested in tracking down information about me, in terms of future employment or you know, work related or whatever. And so that's on my mind a little bit and the other side of it is the well, you know, I know some of these people in real life and being aware, you know, what will they think of me. And um, there's the fact that I've actually met in real life some of the people does affect how I, what I put, what I say or don't say. As much as I don't want it to.

In essence, this participant shows an awareness of both the potential informational and expressive privacy risks while participating in the forum. The first, informational privacy, is at risk from external parties who might be interested in connecting the information she shares to her person in a decontextualized manner. The second kind of privacy risk, and ultimately the one she later claims has more of an effect on her participation in the group, is about the social aspect of privacy, so that what other people think about her and how she acts and presents herself has serious repercussions for what she does. Thus, the social control exercised by the other members in the group can be a serious privacy risk. The expressive dimension of privacy protects against this kind of risk of the overreaching of social control of others. The fact that this participant notes that a privacy risk of this kind ultimately has more influence

over her participation than the informational risk she describes is telling of the importance that expressive privacy has for virtual community members.

Overall, two important points can be drawn from the users' descriptions of privacy risks on the internet and the forums. Firstly, the users are in fact aware of the various privacy risks inherent in the use of the internet, but more importantly for this study, virtual communities. This finding negates the argument that users provide "private" information in these forums because of their ignorance of the threats. The users I interviewed were very aware of the possible privacy risks they were assuming through participation in the forums and their participation continued despite the risks. The important point here is that despite previous research that indicates that the opposite is true, virtual community participants are not naive about the potential privacy risks associated with their use.

Secondly, it is important to note that the most frequently cited kind of risk, and the one that was described as having the most influence on virtual community members, was the threat to expressive privacy. Thus, it was the possibility of the restriction of expression and of the opportunity to work on self-identity and freedom to associate that was most often noted as significant privacy risks around virtual communities. From this finding, it appears that members are more concerned about their expressive privacy while participating in online groups than either their informational or accessibility privacy.

7.2. Users See the Internet and Forums as Public Spaces

Despite their awareness of the multitude of privacy risks that participation on the internet and in the forums can entail, the majority of participants said that they generally are not concerned about privacy in either regard. They explain their lack of concern, in part, on their belief that both the internet and virtual communities are public spaces. According to the participants, because the internet in general, and consequently the forums as well, is incredibly accessible, visible, and host to unfamiliar people, it is a public space.

The degree of accessibility is a major part of what makes a space public or private according to the participants interviewed. In this regard, the more accessible or visible a space is, the more it is considered to be public. Hence, public spaces, in the words of participant Martin "can be accessed by anybody, whoever they are." Inherent in this concept of the accessibility of public spaces is the idea of restricted access. The less restrictions that are found in a space, generally the more public it is. For example, one participant, AnneMarie, identified a public space as "somewhere anybody can go, there's no restrictions." Another participant, Hannah, said that a public space is "easily accessible to a large number of people. That is to say there are few barriers to entry." In all, the degree to which spaces are accessible to a broad group of people, without restrictions, was a major determinant to what makes a space public in the participants' minds.

A correlative element of accessibility, visibility, or the degree to which one can be seen or observed, was also frequently highlighted in the participants'

discussion of what makes a space public. The participants indicated that, in part, public spaces have a high degree of exposure or capacity for observation. For instance, one participant, Barbara, claimed that a public space is a "space that is exposed to a community." Another participant, Lloyd, focused on the likelihood of observation and claimed that in a public place "you're in a situation where there might be people taking pictures, there might be people observing you that you have no control over." In this way, a public space is not only accessible to anyone, but is also open to be seen by anyone.

The level of familiarity with those involved in a public space was also important to participants. As some of the participants highlighted, the presence of unfamiliar individuals, or strangers, is also a key determinant of a public space. When asked what makes a space public, one participant, Amy, responded, "I suppose people that I don't know being in it," while another, Lori, claimed that "anytime you're out with or among people, it's public." In both these cases, the presence of people, particularly strangers, also worked to ensure that the space could be considered public.

In all, the respondents indicated that they felt that the forums they participate in are public spaces. Moreover, an overwhelming majority said that not only do they believe the forums are public spaces, but that they are consciously aware of the publicness of the forums when participating, and that their uses reflect this awareness. This finding is interesting because previous research on virtual communities has implied that participants disclose information that is traditionally viewed as private because they "forget" or are "unaware" that the forums are in fact public spaces.[47] The fact that the participants I interviewed see the forum as public and are aware of this when participating seems to contradict previous research.

7.3. Users Are Not Concerned About Privacy

The respondents indicated that because they believe that the internet and forums are public spaces, they have no expectation of privacy when participating on them and thus are generally not concerned about it. As one participant, Lloyd, notes, he is not concerned about privacy on the internet "because I think it's well known that the internet is accessible to everybody." Similarly, another participant, Marsha, said, "it's not that important to me because I don't trust it in that way. I don't ever think of it as that so no.... I don't see myself as being private on the internet. The internet is so accessible I don't think, oh no one will ever see this. I know they will. I'm sure they will." This finding, that the majority of the users I interviewed were not concerned about their privacy on the internet or on the forums, was surprising. Recent studies continue to indicate that users are consistently concerned about their privacy

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47.   See (1996) 12:2 Information Society for this argument.

online.[48] However, the respondents I spoke with generally were not concerned about their privacy in this regard, mainly because they view the internet and the forums as public spaces, and hence, have no expectations of privacy.

Yet, the finding that participants are not concerned about their privacy at all in the forums or generally online not only contradicts most research done to date, it is rather difficult to fathom. In one way, participants explain their lack of concern as a result of their awareness of the publicness of the forums, in that they are accessible and visible to anyone with an interest to look. Furthermore, participants claim that this awareness of the publicness of the forums leads to certain practices of use such as the restriction of content, information, and the reliance on anonymity.

7.4. Users Employ Mechanisms to Protect Privacy

From the interviews, it became clear that part of the reason users claimed they weren't concerned about privacy was because they employ certain mechanisms to protect themselves from potential privacy risks. Thus, users are aware of the privacy risks on virtual communities and take steps to limit them. One such mechanism, the restriction of content, works to illustrate the importance of expressive privacy for virtual community participants.

7.4.1. Restriction of Content

A number of participants indicated that they often avoided joining in on certain topics, censored their opinions, or used certain language to ensure that their postings were suitable for a public audience. In this way, they employed the mechanism of restricting content to protect expressive privacy. Interestingly, participants applied, and relied, on this mechanism more than any other to protect their privacy, which seems to indicate that it is expressive privacy that they are most concerned with when participating in virtual communities.

Restricting content as a mechanism to protect expressive privacy in virtual communities was an extremely popular tool. As one participant, Marsha, explains, "I'm careful about what I say, the language I use, I personally try not to give into conflicts or anything like that because I think of it as a public space .... I guess what I mean is that I choose words carefully. I don't always put exactly what I'm thinking or in the way I'm thinking it." Here, we can see that the respondent intentionally restricts her content, and thus her self-expression on the forum. In other words, we can see how this user is consciously negotiating her participation on the forum in regard to privacy and social interaction. Thus the user is relying on a continuum of understanding of the public and private and shifts her participation accordingly. She is working out the degree of publicness or privateness that she wants her participation to follow and as a result, illustrates the delicate balance that virtual community participants experience. On one hand, participants are protecting the privacy that guards their

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48.   Anne Kandra & Andrew Brandt, "The Great American Privacy Makeover" *PC World* (8 October 2003), <http://www.pcworld.com/howto/article/0,aid,112468,00.asp>.

autonomous self, and on the other, they want to socially interact and hence, lessen their freedom of expression. In this way, participants' desire for social interaction is always in conflict with their need to protect their expressive privacy—interestingly, both are protected by expressive privacy. Expressive privacy appears to offer both sides of the coin of the self and society to virtual community members.

One user's response to whether she felt fully free to participate in the group was particularly interesting as she battled out whether the fact that she restricted her content meant that she really felt fully free or not. Amy stated, "I'm sure you expect me to say no, but in some ways I do because, I don't know, nooooo, I don't though. Because there's definitely things I won't say and won't talk about so I guess no, I guess the answer would be no." Thus, because she is aware that she censors her participation, this user is claiming that she's not fully free, however, her instinct was to claim she was. When I probed her on why she initially thought she did feel fully free, Amy said, "I mean when you're just talking about running and stuff that's that, what's the word I'm looking for, non-threatening I guess then it doesn't bother me as much to talk more about it but it's just when you get into other topics that I would say I feel more restricted." Here then, we can see that this participant intuitively feels free to participate on the forum because she censors, or restricts, her participation. Again, the restriction of content seems closely tied to the protection of participants' emotional vulnerability. The "non-threatening" topics that she feels comfortable participating in, such as strictly running-related topics, are naturally also those topics that are less threatening to one's emotional vulnerability. In other words, the more participation may threaten her self-identity, presumably by exposing her views and thus making her vulnerable to outside influence or judgment, the more she restricts her content. Again, we can see how this user is consciously and intentionally negotiating the boundary between public and private. This user is taking responsibility to ensure that her participation is in line with her desires as to how public or private she wants to be at that specific time—a process that is consistently shifting from day-to-day, but even from topic-to-topic, and thus moment-to-moment.

A number of participants mentioned employing the mechanism of restricting content to protect expressive privacy. As another user, Hannah, claimed, "I certainly don't share all aspects of my life, only the aspects that I choose to reveal. I don't include anything in a post that I would be embarrassed to be associated with." The issue of control over what participants choose to express further highlights the importance of expressive privacy for virtual community participants. The aspects of her life that Hannah presumably chooses not to reveal are those aspects that she feels are private. In other words, the aspects that are not shared are likely tied to her self-identity and person. Thus, she manages to negotiate a boundary between self and society that she feels comfortable with, and at the same time is able to interact socially in the forum. In this way, participants are able to define and maintain the desired level of publicness or privateness that they wish to achieve through the level of personal exposure that they allow.

This control over the degree that one's person is known through the kind and amount of information that one reveals is further evident when one participant, Hannah, noted, "online I can convey the message I want to convey; if I choose not to participate, I don't participate. Offline interaction is not as controllable." Overall, the mechanism of control of disclosure illustrates not only that the foremost privacy concern of participants in virtual communities is expressive privacy, but moreover illustrates how these participants are able to negotiate the delicate balance between privacy and expression through social interaction which is part and parcel of this dimension of privacy. By controlling their disclosure while participating in online groups, members are able to decide where to draw the boundary between themselves and others. Thus, managing their participation via that shifting public/private continuum is an important part of participants' experience with privacy on virtual communities.

Another interesting dimension of expressive privacy's role in virtual communities is clear from Hannah's statement. From the comment that "offline interaction is not as controllable," it can be suggested that not only is expressive privacy key to the existence of virtual communities, but that virtual communities in fact offer a greater opportunity for expressive privacy than any other medium at present. Participants are able to control their expressive privacy, and hence their interactions, to a greater degree in virtual communities. Virtual communities allow participants to express themselves in ways that would be difficult in face-to-face interactions[49] and to experience interaction with a more diverse group of people than traditionally possible. Participants are thus able to use such social interaction to work on their self-identities in new ways.

Furthermore, they have more control over their self-expression and freedom of association in virtual communities because they can simply ignore a post or discontinue using a forum altogether if they feel that their response may threaten their emotional vulnerability. In face-to-face interactions, this is not always so easy. In addition, virtual communities allow participants to choose with whom they want to interact, so that they have complete freedom of association. If someone posts a question to them, they can choose to ignore it or can respond without the social repercussions that often take place in face-to-face interactions. If I decided that I didn't want to interact with a coworker for instance, I would be considered rude at best, but more likely, would be fired for my inability to get along with others. Overall, the degree of freedom of association and expression that is offered by virtual communities appears to present a unique opportunity for expressive privacy. This may very well be the reason that participants are willing to accept the inherent privacy risks of participation in virtual communities. While participants are aware of the potential privacy risks, the unique opportunity for expressive privacy afforded to participants through virtual communities seems to ensure that they disregard the threat.

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49.   Allucquere Rosanne Stone, "Will the Real Body Please Stand Up? Boundary Stories about Virtual Cultures" in Michael Benedikt, ed., *Cyberspace: First Steps* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991) 81–118; Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

Participants also indicated that the threat of social judgment or pressure was a reason participants restricted their content. One user, Christine, in particular explains that what she reveals helps to promote the picture of herself that she would like to give to the public at large as well as to the forum participants:

> I think I'm a pretty open person anyway so I think that the way I talk and what I will post on that forum, it's things I would like the public to know or it's written in a way that I would like the public to perceive me. I think it has a huge effect on me that I think a lot of people are going to see it.... there's some topics that I won't post back to, there's some things I won't get involved in. You know, sometimes I do censor what I say.

In this way, the participant is illustrating the importance of an expressive dimension of privacy. She is concerned about what others think of her, the social judgement or control of others, and thus restricts her content accordingly. Through this statement the paradoxical relationship between expression and privacy that makes up expressive privacy is evident. On the one hand, the fact that a lot of people are going to read her posts limits Christine's expression. On the other hand, because she desires social interaction and feels a need to form meaningful relations with the same group, she is trying to balance what she expresses with what she believes are the group's expectations. Furthermore, she describes how she works on her self-identity in the group by consciously promoting particular representations of herself. By referring to how she posts things in order to make the group perceive her in a certain light, this participant is explicitly acknowledging her reflexive project of the self. When probed on what she used as a defining criterion for censoring her disclosure, Christine talked about social alienation from the group:

> I think it has to do with, you know, if I think I'm going to say something that's going to alienate me from the group or something that's going to be, something that's not going to make people like me. Like if there's a political topic, I'll usually ignore it, especially if my view doesn't coincide with everybody else's.

As we can see, being accepted by the group and continuing social relations are extremely important factors in determining where the person sets the boundary of self-expression—a further example of the importance of expressive privacy in virtual communities.

In a related manner, long-term participation can diminish participants' opportunities for expressive privacy. In this way, as one reveals more and more about oneself, the large degree of expressive privacy that was available at the early stages of participation on the forum is no longer possible. The balance seems to shift toward less expressive privacy with continued or long-term participation of virtual community members. As members get to know one another, the possibility for self-expression becomes limited. One participant, Joleen, notes this shift:

> I think at the beginning when I really did feel like it was anonymous, when I hadn't posted you know, identifying details, I think that I felt more free to participate. And in a sense it's sort of ironic because as I've revealed more personal details about myself, I feel less inclined to reveal personal details about myself because I know I'm identifiable.

This is an incredibly interesting statement. For this participant it seems that when she first began using the forum, she experienced a great degree of expressive privacy. She felt "more free to participate" in terms of her self-expression. But interestingly, as time and her participation went on, this participant feels less free to express herself. This limitation on self-expression was further increased by physically meeting people from the forum. Because the other participants came to know her in a fuller sense, as a whole person, the control over what, and to whom, she can reveal herself became limited. Importantly, while participation in virtual communities can provide a unique opportunity for expressive privacy, with prolonged participation, the ability to freely express and associate becomes limited. However, while participants lose some of the freedom to express themselves with long-term participation, members develop meaningful relationships in return. Thus, participants seem to experience a trade-off in terms of self-expression for meaningful relationships.

As I have shown from the above examples, participants frequently restrict content to protect their privacy. This particular mechanism seems to protect the expressive privacy dimension more than any other and thus indicates the importance of expressive privacy to virtual community participants. In addition, expressive privacy seems to be a paradoxical phenomenon for participants—on the one hand, participants strive to protect their autonomous person, but on the other, they also strive to develop meaningful relationships, which act to lessen their self-expression. Thus, the delicate balance between privacy and expression is played out through participation in virtual communities. Furthermore, it appears that virtual communities provide a unique opportunity for expressive privacy because of the format and design of the medium which may explain why participants ignore the risks and participate. However, despite this unique experience, with continued participation, expressive privacy becomes limited again.

7.4.2. Anonymity and Restricted Information

Besides restricting content, participants noted two other mechanisms they employ to protect privacy. Firstly, some participants noted that they relied on their anonymity in the forums. As one user states, even when posting to topics considered to be more personal or private by traditional standards, the anonymity of the forum makes her participation more likely. As Susan noted, "I responded to a post about birth control recently which could be considered a private issue but because my name wasn't on there, I didn't have a problem responding to a personal issue because I was anonymous while I was doing it."

Another mechanism users apply to ensure that privacy is not an issue is the restriction of personal information. What participants felt comfortable

revealing on the forums obviously varied, but frequently cited as within the limits of what would be disclosed were general address information (city, country, etc.), age, birthday and job. By contrast, things like names, physical address, phone number, financial information and information about family/personal life were often cited as not okay to reveal. As one participant, Barbara, explains, "I trust that my identity is private. I have chosen to share my first name, the city I live in, and occasionally share one of my email addresses if I want to talk about more personal things with certain people. But I don't believe that any of this information would give anyone access to anything about me that's not already available to them." Restricting personally identifiable information is another mechanism users employ to lessen the likelihood of privacy risks, here implicating more of the traditional understanding of privacy, one where control of personal information can protect the individual person.

7.5. Users Participate to Seek Information and for Social Interaction

Thus far, I have discussed the relevant findings from my research in terms of how virtual community members understand privacy. I have argued that users are undoubtedly aware of the potential privacy risks inherent in using the forums. I have also argued that despite this awareness of the risks, users are generally not concerned about their privacy when participating in the forums. This is in part because of the mechanisms they employ to protect their privacy, but also because it is expressive privacy that seems to be the real privacy issue for virtual community participants. And because users are able to negotiate their participation in terms of the degree of publicness or privateness they wish to achieve, and hence feel in control of their self-expression and freedom of association, expressive privacy is sufficiently achieved. As a result, it is not a major concern for users because it is in place.

But I still have not adequately explained why it is that users are willing to risk their privacy in return for participation on virtual communities. If users are aware of the privacy risks and even take conscious actions in order to limit these so that they can participate, what is it about participating on the forums that outweighs the potential privacy risks? What is so appealing about participating on these forums that makes these users willing to take, and adjust to, the privacy risks?

7.5.1. Information Seeking

From the interviews, there appeared to be two major reasons why users participate in the forums. Firstly, what I term "information seeking" is a factor, particularly in the initial stages. A number of participants mentioned that one of the biggest reasons they use the forum is because of the helpful information and advice they receive, essentially, that they have learned a lot by participating in the forum. For example, one participant, Susan, found that "people also have a lot of good experience, particularly to running, on that forum and I like getting their opinions and find they have some good advice to offer." Especially for new

users, the information seeking role of the forum is important. One participant, Christine, explains, "Before [I participated] just because I needed advice on stuff, because I really did need running advice and I really don't have a lot of running contacts in the real world. Now it's just because they're a great group of women and I just feel like I have a lot in common with them. And you know, if I'm not on there daily with them, I miss them, I miss their opinions." As we can see, while information seeking appears to be an initial impetus for some in joining a forum, the reason to continue participating seems to have more to do with the social interaction, which I will turn to now.

7.5.2. Social Interaction

The second major, and more prevalent, reason that respondents gave for participating in the online forums was what I term "social interaction." By this I mean that the participants seemed to want to engage with other people and enjoy the interaction and companionship of others. The virtual community participants I interviewed stated that they participated in online groups for the simple joy of being with, and hearing from, a diverse group of people. Of course, as I have argued throughout this article, one of the most important functions of expressive privacy is its ability to allow deep and meaningful relationships to develop. Thus, the importance of expressive privacy to virtual communities is again made evident because participants claim that social interaction is a major factor in their continuing participation in virtual communities, despite the privacy risks. Furthermore, because the self is only developed through our interactions with others, and because the reflexive project of the self is a characteristic of late modernity, the opportunity to continuously work on the project of the self via the interaction on online groups is a major reason participants turn to virtual communities. With the increased opportunity to express themselves and socially interact freely in virtual communities, participants have a unique occasion to work on the narrative of the self.

For instance, the sense of community in the forum and the opportunity to form social relations were often stated by users as reasons to participate. For example, one forum user, Lloyd, stated:

> It's a community. When I went on this morning I saw Martin [x]'s name and he's a name I've noticed for a long time and goodness, I can't think of all the names right off the top of my head but I'll see the names and I'll recognize them.

Yet another participant, Martin, mentioned that the forum "is a good place to meet other musicians, and they seem to be more knowledgeable and of a better standard than the ones I meet in my home town." Likewise, another participant, Joleen, stated that not only is it a source of information, but the forum is "also a sense of community. I really have loved that I've been able to sort of meet new women who I would never know in real life who have lifestyles or come from

social circumstances that are you know, just so different from my own. I really like that." In this way, the sense of community offered via the forum is also a draw to participate. A sense of community, it seems, provides a space where participants feel more comfortable expressing themselves. Members participate when the community provides a safe place to express oneself via social interactions, and furthermore provides a safe place to work out one's identity. Expressive privacy is achieved through the protection of these goals.

In addition to the sense of community that was noted as a factor in their participation, Joleen in particular notes how the diversity of the group is an attractive feature. Such diversity further works to provide a unique opportunity for participants to work out the reflexive project of the self. Faced with different people, who hold different values, beliefs, lifestyles, etc., the opportunity to continuously factor in the shifting circumstances and adjust one's narrative of the self accordingly means that one's biography is repetitively challenged, and usually reinforced. Thus, the reflexive project is reasserted and the modern self can carry on.

The development of close relationships, protected by expressive privacy, was another reason users stated to explain their participation. One respondent, Marsha, in particular noted that "I've become very close friends with a couple of people. One of whom went from being on the [x] forum to now we correspond through snail mail and the telephone and though she lives across the country, we are very close friends. I don't say the same things to her online that I do if I write her a letter." Thus, the development of relationships via social interaction, both online and offline, was a major impetus for participation for many respondents. The development of deep and meaningful relationships in these forums points to the important role that expressive privacy plays here. Without expressive privacy regulating social interaction, and preventing the social overreaching of others, such relationships would be impossible and a major reason for the popularity of virtual communities would cease.

The positive, supportive environment in the forums was another oft-cited reason for participation. Similar to the sense of community reason cited above, the positive, supporting environment that promoted participation also sets the stage for freedom of expression to occur. When participants feel safe to express themselves openly and furthermore, and to test out or work on their self-identity in such a space, expressive privacy isn't far behind. For example, in answer to why she continues to participate in the forum, one participant, Marsha, claimed it is because of "a tremendous amount of support and from people that you don't even know. A tremendous amount of 'atta girl' and you know, 'go for it.'" Additionally, this participant discusses how the forum acts as a place to know you're not the only one experiencing something so that it's "a place to talk to somebody if you're feeling rather alone in what you do or that you're not doing it well.... Tremendous feeling of camaraderie and support and gee, there's somebody like me out there and you know, I'm not the only one and I'm not the oldest one in the world that this happened to and stuff like that." This idea of not feeling alone was echoed by another participant, Joleen, who

claimed, "It's very motivating to see what other people are doing and getting ideas and learning. I've learned a lot and you know, at the beginning that I wasn't the only one who chafed under my bra [laughs]." Thus, we can see that the forum plays an important role for some users so that they do not feel like they are alone in their experiences and ideas. Again, this seems to be a natural prerequisite for self-expression—the more participants feel comfortable, the more likely they are to express themselves openly. And by expressing themselves openly, meaningful relationships can form and their identities can be developed. In this way, the protection of expressive privacy is crucial to the success and continuation of virtual communities.

Another participant also felt that the openness of the group ensures that she can feel fully free to participate. Susan states:

> I feel like it's an easy group, I feel like people are pretty open when you post something. I think people are, truly do want to be helpful. And because I do think I have some experiences that other people could learn from, so by posting maybe I can you know help someone with a question they have.

Finally, another participant, Jennifer, stated that "the group is welcoming, trying to include new people and listening and helping those who need it. I especially enjoy when people respond to my posts, and make me feel welcome. I try to do the same for others." In all of the above responses, then, it appears as though basic trust and security is a large part of the success of these forums. Because participants feel welcome and free to express themselves, amidst a great deal of diversity, the forum is a safe space to share.

Thus, "social interaction" is another factor that encourages participation in addition to the information seeking that forum participants do. Participants responded that they use the forum to connect with people around a common interest; they like the sense of community the forum promotes; they have established important and meaningful relationships; and they feel the forum is a positive and supportive environment that often offers motivation and inspiration. Furthermore, the fact that the forum is full of a diverse group of people with varying backgrounds, experiences, and goals is another aspect of the sociability of the group. Additionally, the groups often provide an opportunity to help others and give participants a feeling of not being alone in whatever they may be experiencing. Overall, it is clear that the social interaction that virtual communities make possible is an important reason users continue to participate despite their awareness of privacy risks.

But it is not just social interaction that draws participants to these groups; for if it is only social interaction they are after, they could simply walk down the street and go into a coffee shop or a pub. There seems to be something about the fact that these communities take place in an online space that provides an additional attraction. From the interviews, it appears that it is because virtual communities provide a unique opportunity for expressive privacy, and furthermore allow participants to work out their reflexive project of the self in new ways, that makes these communities worth joining—and staying.

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8. CONCLUSION

A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT FINDINGS arose out of this study on virtual communities and privacy. Firstly, the virtual community participants I interviewed were very aware of the privacy risks they face when using both the internet and virtual communities. They were able to list a wide variety of the potential privacy risks, including risks around the informational, accessibility, and expressive dimensions of privacy. The finding that users are in fact aware of the privacy risks is in contrast to previous research, which has indicated that users are generally naive about privacy risks. Furthermore, from their discussion around privacy risks in virtual communities, it became apparent that the kind of risks users mentioned most frequently, and seemed the most concerned about, was the threat to expressive privacy versus informational or accessibility privacy. While users did make mention of the latter kinds of privacy concerns, the predominant risk that virtual community participants were concerned with was the threat to their expressive privacy. This is an interesting finding because traditional research on internet privacy tends to restrict its focus to informational privacy issues only. Thus, a broader conception of privacy, particularly in regard to virtual communities, needs to be employed by scholars when discussing online privacy issues.

Secondly, I found that the virtual community participants I interviewed see the internet and online forums as public spaces because they are largely accessible and visible to an unfamiliar audience. Furthermore, participants indicated that they are fully conscious of the publicness of the forum while participating. Again, this finding contradicts what previous research has promoted, that users "forget" or are "unaware" that their online communication is publicly available.

A third major finding from the study is that users are generally not concerned about their privacy while participating on either the internet or forums. Virtual community participants indicated that they are not concerned about privacy while using the forums because they see them as public spaces, and thus act in accordance with this belief. In this way, it becomes clear that users are not concerned with privacy because they trust the mechanisms they employ to protect their privacy.

As to the mechanisms that users employ to protect their privacy, the one participants discussed the most was their practice of restricting content. A number of noteworthy points can be deduced from the application of this mechanism. Firstly, the restriction of content protects participants' expressive privacy. Participants' emotional vulnerability is protected by determining to what degree participants express themselves and socially interact. Because the restriction of content appeared to be the mechanism that participants relied on the most to protect their privacy, it illustrates the importance of expressive privacy to participants. Secondly, the practice of restricting content demonstrates the delicate balance between expression and social interaction

that virtual community participants are constantly negotiating. By restricting what they share with the group, participants are able to control how much of themselves they expose or make vulnerable. Thus, by restricting content, participants are able to dictate the boundary between themselves and others, or between society and the self. Thirdly, from the restriction of content, and the control issue that is implicit in that restriction, the fact that virtual communities offer a greater opportunity for expressive privacy becomes clear. Because virtual communities offer participants more control over their expression and interaction than previously possible, participants are further able to work on the reflexive project of the self in new and important ways. This opportunity to work on the reflexive project of the self, a crucial practice in late modernity,[50] seems to provide an explanation as to why virtual community participants are willing to overlook the privacy risks in order to participate. In other words, it is the unprecedented chance to test the biography of the self against a constantly changing background that is an attractive feature of virtual communities. Through examining participants' comments about their practice of restricting content, the article also noted that expressive privacy tends to diminish for users with long-term use. Again, this conclusion points to the delicate balance that users must negotiate. As users reveal more about themselves, and thus make themselves more emotionally vulnerable, they are losing some of the freedom to express themselves. But it is only by losing some of this freedom that they are able to develop meaningful relationships, and thus further develop their identities.

Users employed other mechanisms to protect their privacy such as the use of anonymity and restricting information. By relying on anonymity as a mechanism, users showed how they protect their informational privacy, but further demonstrated how expressive privacy is essential to virtual communities. In other words, by relying on anonymity, the virtual community members felt freer to express themselves, and thus prevented the overreaching social control that expressive privacy protects against. The participants also noted that they restricted the disclosure of certain kinds of information to protect their privacy, here understood in terms of informational privacy.

Finally, from the interviews, it was clear that members participate in online forums for two main reasons. Firstly, individuals use online groups to obtain information, particularly when they begin using the forums. Secondly, participants are looking for social interaction. Forums are a kind of "public life" that participants seem drawn to. This finding is valuable because it shows that expressive privacy is important to the existence of virtual communities. Through the free expression that expressive privacy allows, deep relationships are able to develop. It appears as though the development of relationships is a major reason that virtual community participants use these groups. Furthermore, the reflexive project of the self is developed through interaction, or through these

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50.   Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity, supra* note 23 at p. 7.

online relationships. Thus, it is the ability to freely express oneself, socially interact, and develop meaningful relationships, as well as work on the biography of the self that ensures these participants disregard the known privacy risks of participating in virtual communities, which are also the components that expressive privacy protects. Thus, expressive privacy is a prerequisite for the existence of virtual communities.[51]

But what do these findings mean for law and lawyers? What are the broader implications of the above findings? It is clear that privacy, especially expressive privacy, is crucial to the existence of virtual communities, and that the existence of virtual communities is important in order for individuals to work on self-identity and to develop meaningful relationships. Policy makers need to ensure that the expressive privacy of online group participants is protected. I believe this study indicates that the privacy of virtual community participants needs to be legally protected, and that these users need appropriate avenues to rectify privacy violations.

How to do that is an entirely different question. Because expressive privacy protects one's autonomy, the ability to form various kinds of relationships, and to play out various social roles, it is a relatively difficult thing to protect. In actuality, expressive privacy really speaks to freedom of expression and association and may be protected in this way. Other scholars have suggested that copyright or intellectual property rights may be usefully employed to protect users' privacy online.[52] While it is not within the scope of this study to be able to adequately suggest a path for law makers to proceed in this manner, I would like to highlight certain specific areas that law makers might focus on to help virtual community participants protect their expressive privacy. For instance, it is important for participants' freedom of expression that individuals or formalized organizations are not permitted to appropriate statements from virtual communities. Thus, the decontextualization of posts, or even the use of such posts to discriminate against users, needs to be prohibited. Similarly, the collation or trade of such contributions to virtual communities must be forbidden. Additionally, it is incredibly important that users are made aware of an individual's or group's intention to do something with their posts. Thus, participants must be contacted and furthermore must give permission to use any part of a post. All of these violations, if permitted to occur unchecked, would likely have serious repercussions for users' self-expression and thus their ability to socially interact and develop meaningful relationships. While these communities may appear public, and the users I interviewed understood, and used, them in this manner, it does not negate the fact that the information they share is often intimately tied to their person. As a result, violations to their

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51. The sample size of this study obviously resists any attempt to make broadly generalizable claims around virtual community participants' perceptions on privacy and how this helps to explain their participation in forums where they appear to trade privacy for participation. However, it is an important initial attempt toward understanding these important issues—issues which have real relevance for the future of online group life.

52. Clarke, *Internet Privacy, supra* note 7.

expressive privacy are much more serious than the traditional informational privacy concerns that policy makers have been concerned with when discussing internet privacy. And it is imperative that this fundamental privacy be protected for virtual community participants.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Participant Name	Age	Address	Occupation	Experience with Technology (low, medium or high)
Amy	26	Connecticut	Research Assistant for a Private Lab	Medium
Barbara	26	Colorado	Director of Marketing	Medium
Christine	24	Massachusetts	Retail Clerk	High
Darren	62	Bedford, UK	Analyst/Programmer	High
Hannah	29	Minnesota	Engineer	High
Jack	46	California	Computer Consultant	High
Jennifer	25	Ohio	Architect	Medium
Joleen	33	New York	Human Rights Researcher	Medium
Lori	42	Washington	Accountant	Medium-low
Lloyd	48	Florida	Reporter/Song Writer	High
Marsha	59	California	Multi-media Production Specialist	Medium
Martin	29	England, UK	Student	Medium-high
Sally	25	Washington	PhD Student in Computer Science and Engineering	High
Susan	31	Tennessee	Marketing and Communications Director	High
Tanya	29	Ontario	Administration	High