

Unlike Us Reader

**SOCIAL MEDIA
MONOPOLIES
AND THEIR
ALTERNATIVES**

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Social Media Monopolies and Their Alternatives

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THE FAN DANCE:
HOW PRIVACY THRIVES
IN AN AGE OF HYPER-PUBLICITY

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NATHAN JURGENSON
AND PJ REY

PRIVACY	PUBLICITY	SOCIAL
MORE	MEDIA	INFORMATION
NEW	STAGE	PUBLIC
MOST	OTHER	FRONT
BACK	FAN	DANCE

The history of our digitally-connected present is already being written: writers, within and outside of the academy, have constructed a modern mythology about how social media and other digital technologies are eroding our once-valued privacy and creating a new cultural movement of mass publicity in its stead. We believe, however, that this narrative of digital mass exhibitionism is a fiction that rests on an incorrect assumption that privacy and publicity are zero-sum. While the common, simple, story is that publicity comes at the expense of privacy, we provide a counter-narrative that demonstrates a dialectical relationship, where privacy and publicity are deeply intertwined, mutually reinforcing, and perhaps both increasing as digital information grows more ubiquitous. And, we believe that this interplay between the revelation and concealment is, at least partially, responsible for the seductive quality of social media.

We do not challenge the notion that our lives are becoming more public.¹ In her research on young people using social media, danah boyd observed this trend saying, 'the experiences that teens are facing in the publics that they encounter appear more similar to the celebrity idea of public life than to the ones their parents face'.² Empirical data supports the claim that information sharing via social media is widespread. In 2012, 48% of American adults used social networking sites daily (up from 27% just three years earlier).³ Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg predicts that social media will not only continue to gain users but that these users will grow more active so that 'next year, people will share twice as much information as they share this year, and next year, they will be sharing twice as much as they did the year before'.⁴ In this sense, individuals may have more opportunities to be visible than ever before.

The increasing publicity found in the lives of social media has led innumerable commentators to bemoan a perceived loss of the possibility of having privacy again – often

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1. See also, Nathan Jurgenson, 'Rethinking Privacy and Publicity on Social Media: Part I', *The Cyborgology Blog*, 30 June 2011, <http://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2011/06/30/rethinking-privacy-and-publicity-on-social-media-part-i/>.
 2. danah boyd, 'Why Youth <3 Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life', *MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning – Youth, Identity, and Digital Media Volume* (2007): 119–142.
 3. 'Trend Data (Adult)', Pew Internet and American Life Project, Accessed 27 October 2012, <http://www.pewinternet.org/Static-Pages/Trend-Data-%28Adults%29/Online-Activities-Daily.aspx>.
 4. Saul Hansell, 'Zuckerberg's Law of Information Sharing', *The New York Times*, 6 November 2008, <http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/06/zuckerbergs-law-of-information-sharing/?gwh=0092D1D22D3F8C5BEF616585D8A33F35>.

invoking fear of Orwell's Big Brother and other such hyperbole. The technology sections of various news publications are filled with headlines like 'The End of Privacy', 'How Privacy Vanishes Online', 'Disruptions: Seeking Privacy in a Networked Age', or 'Your Life Torn Open: Sharing is a Trap'.⁵ In such a media environment, one might be excused for believing privacy was a thing of the past.

The growing moral panic over the belief that the publicity afforded by all our new digital platforms and devices signals the death of privacy as we know it rests on a simple, but seldom acknowledged, assumption about the nature of the relationship between privacy and publicity: that two concepts are polar opposites and must come at the expense of one another. Most academics and commentators seem to implicitly believe that privacy and publicity are zero-sum.

We propose an alternative theory: instead of the assumed trade-off, in many cases, new social, digital technologies are associated with an increase in both privacy and publicity.

The Facebook Fan Dance

She manipulated the undulating feathers in a slow, controlled, flowing line so that one fan swept to the side, the other took its place to cover her from her bare shoulders to her knees... Mesmerized patrons strained to catch a glimpse...⁶

Obviously, I did the fan dance naked, but the whole idea was that you had to keep yourself covered. The appeal was the illusion of being able to maybe see something.⁷

I rationalized... who's gonna know what's behind these fans anyway?⁸

The fan dance (and the tradition of burlesque dancing more broadly) is defined by a cyclical interplay between reveal and conceal. For this reason, it serves as an excellent metaphor for understanding how privacy and publicity function in general.⁹ To develop this fan

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5. 'The End of Privacy?', *The New York Times*, 14 July 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/15/opinion/sunday/the-end-of-privacy.html>; Steven Lohr, 'How Privacy Vanishes Online', *The New York Times*, 16 March 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/17/technology/17privacy.html?gwh=7F7171A571EFAC9BADB349DB73396060>; Nick Bilton, 'Disruptions: Seeking Privacy in a Networked Age', *The New York Times*, 14 October 2012, <http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/14/seeking-privacy-in-a-networked-age/>; Andrew Keen, 'Your Life Torn Open, Essay 1: Sharing Is a Trap', *Wired*, 3 February 2011, <http://www.wired.co.uk/magazine/archive/2011/03/features/sharing-is-a-trap?page=all>.
 6. Cheryl Ganz describing Sally Rand, Cheryl R. Ganz, *The 1933 Chicago World's Fair: A Century of Progress*, Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2012.
 7. June Wilkinson interviewed in Tom Weaver, *I Was a Monster Movie Maker: Conversations with 22 SF and Horror Filmmakers*, Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2001.
 8. Sally Rand, 'The Recollections and Thoughts of Sally Rand', interview by Studs Terkel, 1971, <http://www.studsterkel.org/htimes.php>.
 9. Marc Smith, 'A Link to Social Media Network Visualization: Picturing Online Relations and Roles', *iSchool Colloquium Series*, University of Maryland, College Park, 15 September 2009; Nathan Jurgenson, 'Rethinking Privacy and Publicity on Social Media: Part I'; Nathan Jurgenson and PJ Rey, 'Comment of Sarah Ford's Reconceptualization of Privacy and Publicity', *Information, Communication and Society* 15 (2012): 287–293.

dance metaphor, we look back to the way Jean Baudrillard uses the concepts ‘obscenity’ and ‘seduction’.¹⁰ For Baudrillard, ‘obscenity’ is the drive to reveal all and expose things in full, whereas ‘seduction’ is the process of strategically withholding, creating magical and enchanted interest (what he calls the ‘scene’ opposed to the ‘obscene’).

In Baudrillard’s vocabulary, the fan-dance is a seductive scene (as opposed to obscene) because each motion of the fan simultaneously reveals and conceals aspects of the body. The dancer’s movement hints at the concealed ‘bits’ without ever being fully revealed. The fan is an instrument for making things visible and invisible, known and unknown. As the dance progresses, we come to realize only more concretely that which remains hidden: the full view of the dancer’s body in its unconcealed obscenity. It is precisely in this interplay of known and unknown that the dance becomes so enchanting.

Privacy and publicity function in much the same way in everyday life, including social media. Privacy and publicity are co-implicated, or what some academics might call ‘dialectical’. That is to say privacy is defined through publicity and not against it. The most astute privacy activists have understood this all along, including an early generation of hacktivists:

Privacy is necessary for an open society in the electronic age. Privacy is not secrecy. A private matter is something one doesn’t want the whole world to know, but a secret matter is something one doesn’t want anybody to know. Privacy is the power to selectively reveal oneself to the world.¹¹

Both publicity and privacy are part of any act of disclosure; one is the capacity to project while the other is the capacity to protect. Each relies on the other. As the cypherpunks recognized in their advocacy of cryptography, we sometimes will share more if we also have more privacy. Thus, it is no less a mistake to believe privacy and publicity are independent than it is to believe them opposites. The two are engaged in a complicated and often mutually reinforcing dance.

The Front and Back Stage

The acknowledgement of revealing and concealing as mutually reinforcing and co-dependent is also found in perhaps one of the most cited theorists with respect to social media. Sociologist Erving Goffman developed many conceptual metaphors to help understand social processes and continues to be popular among those studying new digital technologies even though he wrote long before the rise of social media. Perhaps most popular is his ‘dramaturgical’ framework of self-presentation that describes human interaction as an endless series of performances.¹² In what Goffman called the ‘front stage’ is the aspect of the performance that is visible to observers. The various roles that individuals act out on the front stage tend to be prescribed by society; as Goffman puts it, ‘fronts tend to be selected, not created’.¹³ In other words, individuals

10. Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1990 (1983).

11. Hughes, Eric. ‘A Cypherpunk’s Manifesto’, 1993, accessible at <http://www.activism.net/cypherpunk/manifesto.html>.

12. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, New York: Doubleday, 1959.

13. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, p. 22.

must adopt certain scripts appropriate to the institutions that they operate within. The scripts are prescriptive, describing how one ought to perform in certain situations.

Thus, front stage performances often present idealized versions of the self, which requires a great deal of work and preparation beyond what is visible in the performance itself. One example Goffman gives of this invisible identity work is the 'calculated spontaneity' that characterizes interviews and other public exchanges of information:

To give a radio talk that will sound genuinely informal, spontaneous, and relaxed, the speaker may have to design his script with painstaking care, testing one phrase after another, in order to follow the content, language, rhythm, and pace of everyday talk.¹⁴

This invisible work involved in creating the observable performances given by an individual is said to occur in the back stage. It is the private work necessary to create a public persona. In this way, Goffman acknowledges the dialectical relationship between privacy and publicity: each new performance entails new back stage preparation; new public experiences come with new private experiences. Goffman, in the conclusion of his book, even explicitly acknowledges that the front stage and back stage, the visible and invisible, are dialectically linked (a fact overlooked by most commentators who cite him today):

Underlying all social interaction there seems to be a fundamental dialectic. When one individual enters the presence of others, he will want to discover the facts of the situation. Were he to possess this information, he could know, and make allowances for, what will come to happen and he could give the others present as much of their due as is consistent with his enlightened self-interest. To uncover fully the factual nature of the situation, it would be necessary for the individual to know all the relevant social data about the others. It would also be necessary for the individual to know the actual outcome or end product of the activity of the others during the interaction, as well as their innermost feelings concerning him. Full information of this order is rarely available; in its absence, the individual tends to employ substitutes – cues, tests, hints, expressive gestures, status symbols, etc. – as predictive devices. In short, since the reality that the individual is concerned with is unperceivable at the moment, appearances must be relied upon in its stead. And, paradoxically, the more the individual is concerned with the reality that is not available to perception, the more must he concentrate his attention on appearances.¹⁵

Just as with the fan dance, the visible enchants the viewer, which reinforces interest in the invisible. In short, Goffman's front stage does not steal from the back stage, rather they are co-dependent.

This interpretation is at odds with observers who claim that our lives have become all front stage. Even if the spotlight is potentially always on us, the back stage is a necessary part of the ongoing performance. Statements like 'electronic media have

14. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, p. 32.

15. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, p. 249.

facilitated the development of a “middle region” between the front stage and back-stage’ are problematic in that they fundamentally misunderstand what the back stage is.¹⁶ Such commentators tend to describe the back stage as the ‘real’ essence or self behind the individual and the front stage as an inauthentic or incomplete representation of the individual that is necessary to cope with the world. From this perspective, the front stage is nothing more than a partially exposed (and sometimes distorted) back stage – it is just the tip of the iceberg. However, Goffman clearly believes that the self resides in the performance and that the performance requires both front and back stage: there is no self beyond what is performed for the front stage, and there is no front stage without a back stage.

If anything, Goffman gives priority to the front stage, as he indicates by saying: ‘[a] mask represents [...] the role we are striving to live up to – this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be’.¹⁷ This is not to say that individuals do not, sometimes, put on cynical, self-aware performances aimed at deceiving an audience. Goffman observes that, through careful control of appearances, ‘the performer is able to forgo his cake and eat it too’.¹⁸ However, even when the individual is performing a deception, it is not the secret that constitutes the back stage; rather the back stage consists of all the work done to prepare a performance that conceals the secret. Concealment itself is a visible performance. Goffman gives the (notably dated, if illustrative) example of

middle-class housewives [who] may leave *The Saturday Evening Post* on their living room end table but keep a copy of *True Romance* (“It’s something the cleaning woman must have left around”) concealed in their bedroom.¹⁹

A close (re-)reading of Goffman makes clear that the front stage and back stage were never a dichotomy but are themselves simply two moments in the fan dance: the conceal implicated in the reveal, and revelation made possible only through further concealment. While we agree with most commentators that Goffman is useful in understanding privacy and publicity, we insist that Goffman must be interpreted in a manner consistent with his own dialectical conclusions. Taken in this way, Goffman’s dramaturgical model closely aligns with our own. We think his work remains infinitely useful for analyzing social media, the topic at the heart of many contemporary debates about privacy and publicity.

‘Whitewalling’ and ‘Social Steganography’

It is easy to find modern social media examples where privacy and publicity are mutually reinforcing rather than zero-sum. Consider ‘whitewalling’ and ‘social steganography’, two prominent cases described in detail by danah boyd. Whitewalling is a practice where social media users post information in a highly-public way and subsequently, sometimes daily, delete much or all the information, leaving a blank (Facebook) wall.²⁰ This leaves no public archive of users’ previous interactions. Social

16. Sarah Michele Ford, ‘Reconceptualizing the Public/Private Distinction in the Age of Information Technology’, *Information, Communication and Society* 14.4 (2011): 550-567.

17. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, p. 249.

18. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, p. 41.

19. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, p. 48.

20. danah boyd, ‘Networked Privacy’, Personal Democracy Forum, New York, NY, 6 June 2011.

steganography is a practice where users hide messages in plain sight.²¹ For example, a teen may post song lyrics that, to his or her parents, seem to hold little significance, but to peers carry an entirely different meaning. This might be a strategy to announce major distress publicly to one group (here, friends) without letting others in on that information (parents).

In both cases, users are being highly public (posting sometimes very intimate information for many to see) and highly private (deleting the content or hiding it behind multiple meanings). In both examples, high degrees of privacy *and* publicity are enacted together, especially in the latter example where both are performed simultaneously. The conventional zero-sum logic of privacy and publicity suggests a continuum between the two, and since these behaviors are both highly private and highly public, they are located in some midpoint on such a continuum.²² This placement would be similar to one who posts limited amounts of information on social media. However, clearly there is something qualitatively different about the whitewall-er and social stenographer's use of social media: they are more engaged than the casual user, they are more private *and* more public. To mistakenly view privacy and publicity as a dichotomy, or even a continuum, assumes a zero-sum tradeoff that cannot grasp the differences in how people often use social media.

Whitewalling and social steganography are fairly extreme attempts to simultaneously maximize privacy and publicity, but even more typical social media users engage in such strategies. For instance, the availability of privacy controls does not thwart sharing but actually encourages it. There is evidence demonstrating that those who share the most are also most sensitive to privacy settings.²³ If users feel that they are unable to share selectively, they are often more likely to keep information secret. As we would predict, social media users are very active in manipulating their privacy settings. For example, a nationally representative Pew survey indicates that in 2010, 65% of adult American social media users adjusted the privacy settings on their profiles.²⁴ A similar survey conducted in 2012 indicates that

81% of those who know ways to manage the capture of their data do this. Some 75% of this group uses the privacy settings of websites to control what's captured about them. And 65% change their browser settings to limit the information that is collected.²⁵

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21. danah boyd and Alice Marwick, 'Social Privacy in Networked Publics: Teens' Attitudes, Practices, and Strategies', Decade in Internet Time: Symposium on the Dynamics of the Internet and Society, Oxford University, 22 September 2011, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1925128.
 22. Ford, 'Reconceptualizing the Public/Private Distinction in the Age of Information Technology'.
 23. Kevin Lewis, Jason Kaufman and Nicholas Christakis, 'The Taste for Privacy: An Analysis of College Student Privacy Settings in an Online Social Network', *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 14.1 (2008): 79-100.
 24. Mary Madden and Aaron Smith, 'Reputation Management and Social Media', Pew Internet & American Life Project, 26 May 2010, <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Reputation-Management.aspx>.
 25. Kristen Purcell, Joanna Brenner and Lee Rainie, 'Search Engine Use 2012', Pew Internet & American Life Project, 9 March 2012, <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Search-Engine-Use-2012.aspx>.

If the cultural current was truly toward unfettered exhibitionism, then we would not expect this sort of concern over privacy to accompany new modes of sharing. However, this data indicates that the work of sharing or revealing information on the web is deeply tied to the work of privacy and selective concealment.

Users' concerns for privacy have manifested in high-profile fights with social media platforms over various privacy violations that have become major public relations mishaps for the companies and continue to be fought in courts around the globe. These debates around privacy policies for various social media sites are not a fight for more privacy in order to share less. Rather, users are also seeking greater privacy so that they feel comfortable sharing *more* (i.e., so they can feel comfortable being more public with more parts of their lives). This is a fact that publicity advocate Jeff Jarvis recognizes when he notes 'privacy and publicity are not mutually exclusive; indeed, they depend upon each other'.²⁶

WikiLeaks

We intend our point that privacy and publicity are not always a trade-off but often mutually reinforcing to be a general one that applies to more than just social media profiles. WikiLeaks, for example, is an institution that embodies the privacy/publicity dialectic and also understands and leverages the fan dance approach in its strategic actions. For instance, when the organization receives a major leak, they never release the information all at once. Instead, WikiLeaks often lets the information dribble out slowly – that is to say, WikiLeaks keeps its information partially concealed – so that each time the leak fades from the headlines, attention is restored by the release of a new set of documents. Moreover, the attention is reinforced by media speculation about what unreleased documents WikiLeaks might have in its possession. These private unknowns serve to increase public visibility. In this way, WikiLeaks activists recognize that their goal of transparency is often best achieved through use of the mechanism of concealment.

The philosophy of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is deeply dialectical. His goal is to eliminate 'conspiracies' which he describes in network terms as 'connected graphs' or clusters of individuals that share information internally but deny it to those on the outside. He believes that this exclusive exchange of information works to the advantage of those within the conspiracy cluster and at the expense of those external to it. Conspiracies cease to exist when information cannot be surreptitiously transmitted between the individuals that comprise these exclusive information-networks. Many 'open government' and transparency advocates believe that powerful conspiracies can be shattered by imposing disclosure rules on the institutions that host conspiracies. Donald Tapscott describes transparency in a way that is typical of most such advocates:

I define transparency as the opportunity and obligation of institutions to provide pertinent information to stakeholders, like customers, employees, business partners, and shareholders – "pertinent" meaning it can help them if they have this information

26. Jeff Jarvis, *Public Parts: How Sharing in the Digital Age Improves the Way We Work and Live*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011.

[...] Evidence suggests open institutions will perform better [...] every company and government needs a transparency strategy.²⁷

Assange, on the other hand, observes that transparency is promoted, somewhat counter-intuitively, when institutions are provoked into draconian efforts to plug leaks, to tighten up and become more private and secretive. One of WikiLeaks main goals is to instigate such countermeasures under the assumption that the imposition of internal privacy measures slows the flow of information, causing the institution to function less efficiently and making it ineffective and vulnerable to subversion. Assange concludes that:

When we look at a conspiracy as an organic whole, we can see a system of interacting organs, a body with arteries and veins whose blood may be thickened and slowed till it falls, unable to sufficiently comprehend and control the forces in its environment.²⁸

Thus, WikiLeaks' strategy relies on more than just the public's reaction to leaked documents; it also expects that as governments and corporations react to stop the leaks, they will operate less efficiently, and, ultimately, become easier targets and less capable of projecting their power. When this happens, enemies of the conspiracy will have an easier time hacking the conspiracy and the cycle will repeat itself.

Given this sophisticated view of privacy/publicity, the media description of WikiLeaks as an 'anti-secrecy group' is a misnomer.²⁹ In fact, Assange even praises secrecy, saying 'secrecy is important for many things but shouldn't be used to cover up abuses'.³⁰ A better description of WikiLeaks might be 'anti-conspiracy', understanding that this agenda is served by sophisticated manipulation of both privacy and publicity.

Violentacrez

Another example of this logic played out when *Gawker* reporter Adrian Chen 'doxxed' a famous and controversial Reddit user who used the handle, Violentacrez.³¹ 'Doxxing' is internet slang for revealing personally-identifying information about someone who had previously existed online anonymously or pseudonymously under various nicknames, handles, avatars, and so on. Violentacrez moderated as many as 400 discussion boards – many on very controversial topics that pushed the limits of free speech and violated others' privacy. Some of the boards dealt with topics such as so-called 'creep shots' (photos taken, most often of women, without their consent and posted to the web for others to comment on), photos of dead children, child por-

27. Donald Tapscott and Clay Shirky, 'Where Everybody Knows Your Name: How to Succeed in the Post-Privacy Age', *The Atlantic*, 2 November 2012, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/11/where-everybody-knows-your-name-how-to-succeed-in-the-post-privacy-age/264468/>.

28. Julian Assange, 'State and Terrorist Conspiracies', Cryptome.org, 10 November 2006, cryptome.org/0002/ja-conspiracies.pdf.

29. See for example, Shane Scott, 'WikiLeaks Archive — Julian Assange Issues Warning', *The New York Times*, 6 December 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/07/world/europe/07assange.html>.

30. Julian Assange, interview by Richard Stengel, *Time*, 30 November 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2034040,00.html>.

31. Reddit is a popular discussion forum website and 'Violentacrez' is pronounced 'violent acres'.

nography, and much else. When reporting on this, Chen learned Violentacrez's actual identity and revealed it in a high-profile story.³²

When Chen was asked why he 'doxxed' this individual (whose given name, we learned, is Michael Brutsch), Chen answered along the lines of Assange, stating that more important than protecting Brutsch's identity is protecting the privacy of others he was violating. Brutsch, as well as the Reddit website, facilitate widespread privacy violations, in part, by granting privacy and anonymity to its users. Chen, on the other hand, utilized publicity in order to protect privacy: making one person far more public can allow others to be more private, if they choose so.

Celebrity Culture

The privacy/publicity dialectic is also visible offline in, for example, celebrity culture. Celebrities keep tight control over images (outfits, bodies, sexual encounters, etc.) and other information (romances, children, divorces, etc.) not because they are trying to minimize publicity and maximize privacy. Rather, celebrities often control this information in order to release it in a manner that maximizes publicity. By creating artificial scarcity, celebrity culture manipulates a demand never satiated but enticed further by releasing enough information to remind us that they still exist while leaving us feeling like there is more to be known. The net effect of the slow reveal is to generate more buzz, more publicity than absolute transparency. In short, celebrities often use privacy as a tool to garner publicity.

The most extreme, if unintentional, example of this phenomenon is J.D. Salinger, author of *The Catcher in the Rye*, whose intense reclusiveness made him a sort of mythic figure and garnered him a cult-like following. Audie Cornish described Salinger's intense desire for privacy in an obituary titled 'Rest in Privacy':

In our celebrity-soaked culture where people dream of fame for the sake of fame alone, Salinger was the anti-celebrity. He walked away from autograph seekers. He had his fan mail burned. He took refuge from the "phonies" he wrote about [...] He lived on the other side of the world from Brangelina and Octomom. While celebrity wannabes aspire to barge onto center stage through the gates of the White House, Salinger wanted nothing more than to slip out the back door [...] I don't expect to hear anything like that from anyone in my generation today. We spill our private lives across the Internet in blogs, Twitter and Facebook. And we expect our favorite actors and writers to do the same.³³

Here, Cornish engages in a remarkable performative contradiction: she is celebrating how Salinger supposedly gave up publicity for privacy while at the same time writing a very public obituary to his privacy. In fact, in her piece, his privacy features more prominently than his writings. In doing so, she is demonstrating just how Salinger's privacy made him such a prominent public figure.

32. Adrian Chen, 'Unmasking Reddit's Violentacrez, The Biggest Troll on the Web', *Gawker*, 12 October 2012, <http://gawker.com/5950981/unmasking-reddits-violentacrez-the-biggest-troll-on-the-web>.

33. Audie Cornish, 'Rest In Privacy, J.D. Salinger', *Weekend Edition Saturday*, NPR, 30 January 2010, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=123140347>.

If celebrity culture is often about leveraging privacy in the name of publicity, a recent observation by danah boyd illustrates that this privacy/publicity dialectic can also be reversed, selectively leveraging publicity to further privacy:

When Angelina Jolie married Billy Bob Thornton, the press frenzy around her was intense. She willingly exposed many aspects of her life, fuelling the fire. At one point, a journalist asked Angelina about her decision to be so public and reject any privacy that she might possibly have. Angelina responded by telling the reporter that the best way to achieve privacy was to appear to be so public that no one bothered looking into areas that she wanted to protect.³⁴

Celebrities are, perhaps, those most involved in the game of publicity, so it is no surprise that they are often the ones who are most involved with measures to protect their own privacy. Celebrity culture proves to be a particularly dense dialectical nexus of privacy and publicity and therefore an ideal case study for how they interact.

The Streisand Effect

The 'Streisand effect' describes cases where the pursuit of privacy leads to unintended publicity. This name derives from an incident where the famous singer Barbara Streisand – believing that her privacy was violated by aerial photos taken of her house as part of a coastal erosion monitoring project – took legal action to have them removed from the internet.³⁵ Before the lawsuit, virtually no one had viewed the photo, but after news of the legal action broke, the photo began to rapidly circulate around the internet, thus making it far more public. Streisand eventually lost the case, though the pictures would have remained more public even had she won.

Techdirt founder Mike Masnick coined the phrase 'Streisand effect' when comparing the Streisand lawsuit to a similar legal action pursued by a Florida resort against *Urinal.net*, a joke site that curates images of urinals. *Urinal.net* publicized the fact that they had received a cease and desist order after posting a picture of one of the resort's urinals and the story was picked up by several news outlets and web-based discussion groups. Masnick elaborated on the logic of the Streisand effect while ranting against the *Urinal.net* case:

How long is it going to take before lawyers realize that the simple act of trying to repress something they don't like online is likely to make it so that something that most people would never, ever see (like a photo of a urinal in some random beach resort) is now seen by many more people? Let's call it the Streisand Effect.³⁶

The Streisand effect played out more recently when the Church of Scientology claimed violation of copyright over a YouTube-hosted interview of Tom Cruise that represented Scientology in an unflattering light. YouTube removed the video under

34. danah boyd, 'Dear Voyeur, meet Flâneur... Sincerely, Social Media', *Surveillance & Society* 8.4 (2011): 505-507.

35. Mike Masnick, 'Streisand Suing over Environmentalist's Aerial Shots of Her Home', *Techdirt*, 1 June 2003, <http://www.techdirt.com/articles/20030601/1910207.shtml>.

36. Mike Masnick, 'Since When Is It Illegal To Just Mention A Trademark Online?', *Techdirt*, 5 January 2005, <http://www.techdirt.com/articles/20050105/0132239.shtml>.

threat of litigation. However, the actions of the Church of Scientology provoked the ire of free speech and transparency activists (indeed, Gabriella Coleman notes that hacktivists have had a long-running antagonism with the Church of Scientology and its 'extremely proprietary' nature stemming from the days of Usenet³⁷). Many sites (most notably, *Gawker*³⁸) reposted the video in protest, and news reports drove enormous flows of web-traffic. The hacker group Anonymous led demonstrations in front of Scientology facilities and released a series of videos claiming that the Church of Scientology uses its institutional power to affect a form of censorship. Even more traffic was driven to the videos as the media reported on these protests. Again, an attempt to conceal information through litigation and other institutional mechanisms led to further revelation.³⁹

The Blank Spot on the Map

Like the Streisand effect, blank spots, blackouts, and redactions on maps and other documents are instances where privacy may generate unintended publicity. Blank spots are unknowns that produce new kinds of knowledge: namely, knowledge that something is missing. In this sense, the act of concealment is also an act of revelation. Borrowing the words of former defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld, blanks spots produce 'known unknowns'. Geographer Trevor Paglan describes how this dialectic between known and unknown operates within a blank spot:

Secrecy can only work as a Band-Aid, a way to cover something up. But just as a Band-Aid announces the fact that it conceals a wound, blank spots on maps and blacked-out documents announce the fact that there's something hidden. Secrets, in other words, often inevitably announce their own existence. For example, when the government takes satellite photos out of public archives, it practically broadcasts the locations of classified facilities. Blank spots on maps outline the things they seek to conceal. To truly keep something secret, then, those outlines also have to be made secret. And then those outlines, and so on.⁴⁰

Often the fact that something has been concealed generates more attention (in the form of suspicion) than the thing concealed ever would.

One now infamous example of a blank spot occurred when former Vice President Dick Cheney used the power of his position to have his personal residence blotted out on Google Maps (and other map services). As soon as this fact was discovered, articles like *Wired's* 'Why is Google Earth Hiding Dick Cheney's House?' drew nation-

37. Gabriella Coleman, 'Old and New Net Wars Over Free Speech and Secrecy or How to Understand the Lulz Battle Against the Church of Scientology', *Global Café Series*, The Institute for Public Knowledge, New York University, New York City, 31 March 2009.

38. Nick Douglas, 'Why Kids on the Internet Are Scientology's Most Powerful Enemy', *Gawker*, 21 January 2008, <http://gawker.com/347367/why-kids-on-the-internet-are-scientologys-most-powerful-enemy>.

39. Robert Vamosi, 'Anonymous Hackers Take on the Church of Scientology', *CNET*, 24 January 2008, http://news.cnet.com/8301-10789_3-9857666-57.html.

40. Trevor Paglan, *Blank Spots on the Map: The Dark Geography of the Pentagon's Secret World*, New York: EP Dutton, 2009, p. 17.

al attention to the house and its geographical location.⁴¹ In short, the fact the house was hidden made it (and its location) more public.

An even more prominent example is the conspicuous privacy that helped US intelligence officials identify the compound where Osama bin Laden was hiding. Though the White House counterterrorism chief described bin Laden as ‘hiding in plain sight’, it was, in part, the compound’s extreme privacy that highlighted it to intelligence officials.⁴² *The New York Times* reported:

The property was so secure, so large, that American officials guessed it was built to hide someone far more important than a mere courier [...] The property was valued at \$1 million, but it had neither a telephone nor an internet connection. Its residents were so concerned about security that they burned their trash rather [than] putting it on the street for collection the way their neighbors did.⁴³

US officials never had ‘eyes’ inside the compound, but made the decision to raid it primarily based on the extensive privacy surrounding it.

Finale: The Seduction of Social Media

In each case presented here privacy and publicity are mutually reinforcing. However, the common assumption for researchers, journalists, commentators, and nearly anyone discussing these issues is that privacy and publicity are a trade-off. Instead, privacy and publicity should be seen as joined in a kind of fan dance of reveal and conceal. Privacy can create conspicuousness and publicity can conceal.

The most obvious implication of our argument is to take with deep skepticism news reports, articles, books, and so on that proclaim the ‘death of privacy’. The evidence simply does not support claims that ‘the Web unmask everyone’ or that it is where ‘anonymity dies’ or that ‘The Web Means the End of Forgetting’.⁴⁴ Zygmunt Bauman was equally incorrect when he suggested in the *The Guardian* that we might be witnessing an ‘end of anonymity’.⁴⁵ These commentators are right that publicity is expanding, but we need to remember that, contrary to common assumption, the spread of publicity does not have to come at the expense, or death, of privacy. Examples abound of continued, and even expanded, privacy and anonymity, both on and offline – sometimes the cause, and sometimes as the result, of publicity.

41. Sharon Weinberger, ‘Why is Google Earth Hiding Dick Cheney’s House?’, *Wired*, 23 July 2008, <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2008/07/what-is-google/>.

42. Mark Cooper, Helene Mazzetti and Peter Baker, ‘Behind the Hunt for Bin Laden’ *The New York Times*, 2 May 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/03/world/asia/03intel.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

43. Mark Mazzetti and Helene Cooper, ‘Detective Work on Courier Led to Breakthrough on Bin Laden’, *The New York Times*, 2 May 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/02/world/asia/02reconstruct-capture-osama-bin-laden.html>.

44. Brian Stelter, ‘Upending Anonymity, These Days the Web Unmasks Everyone’, *The New York Times*, 20 June 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/21/us/21anonymity.html>; Jeffrey Rosen, ‘The Web Means the End of Forgetting’, *The New York Times*, 21 July 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/25/magazine/25privacy-t2.html>.

45. Zygmunt Bauman, ‘Is This the End of Anonymity?’, *The Guardian*, 28 June 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jun/28/end-anonymity-technology-internet>.

Indeed, this seductive partial-revelation may be part of the appeal of social media. Social media would be far less enchanting if it was either the complete, obscene, exposure of the self, or the full concealment of identity through universally anonymous profiles. Instead, social media, like other enactments of privacy and publicity, is more like a fan dance: a creative, seductive, and mutually-reinforcing interplay of reveal and conceal.

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