

**THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA SITES:
A SHIFT IN PRIVACY NORMS RESULTING
IN THE EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE OF
ADOLESCENTS AND TEENS IN DATING
RELATIONSHIPS**

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INTRODUCTION..... 592
I.SHIFTS IN SOCIAL NORMS OF PRIVACY 593
II.HOW INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA SITES HAVE AFFECTED
NOTIONS OF PRIVACY..... 595
III.HOW THE INTERNET CAN BE USED TO EXPLOIT AND ABUSE . 598
IV.EFFECTS ON ADOLESCENTS, TEENS, AND COLLEGE
STUDENTS 601
V.RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REVALUING PRIVACY 606
CONCLUSION 610

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“I will continue to abuse you . . . but I will abuse you with your life line to safety and support.”¹

“Imagine a place where trespassers leave no footprints, where goods can be stolen an infinite number of times and yet remain in the possession of their original owners[.]”²

INTRODUCTION

As society becomes more dependent on technology, our notion of privacy has shifted in a way that has begun to readily accept the accessibility of personal information. It has become a daily necessity for us to use technology in an “increasing number of important transactions . . . [including,] [b]anking, travel plans, and legal activity[.]”³ making it very difficult to exist without interaction with it, while also making us more susceptible to digital abuse.

The U.S. Census Bureau’s Report on Computer and Internet Use in America, released in July 2012, estimates that fifty-four percent of Americans who access the Internet do so from their homes.⁴ On average, these Internet users spend approximately thirty-two hours per month online.⁵ Internet and computer accessibility has brought with it many benefits, such as availability of worldwide news, banking, shopping, online degrees, telecommunication, etc.⁶ Social media has also played an important role in this expansion of information sharing, with “62% of adults worldwide now us[ing] social media sites.”⁷ What

¹ Joanne Belknap et al., *The Roles of Phones and Computers in Threatening and Abusing Women Victims of Male Intimate Partner Abuse*, 19 DUKE J. GENDER L. & POL’Y 373, 400 (2012) (describing the message abusers send when using the victim’s phone or computer as a weapon).

² John P. Barlow, *Coming into the Country*, 34 COMM. OF THE ACM, Mar. 1991, at 19.

³ Andrew King-Ries, *Teens, Technology, and Cyberstalking: The Domestic Violence Wave of the Future?*, 20 TEX. J. WOMEN & L. 131, 139 (2011).

⁴ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, COMPUTER AND INTERNET USE IN THE UNITED STATES: 2010-TABLE 4: REPORTED COMPUTER AND INTERNET ACCESS, BY SELECTED INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS: 2010, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/computer/publications/2010.html>.

⁵ Cara Pring, *99 New Social Media Stats for 2012*, THE SOCIAL SKINNY (May 10, 2012), <http://thesocialskinny.com/99-new-social-media-stats-for-2012/>.

⁶ See Bob Bessette, *10 Life-Changing Benefits of the Internet Age*, WORKAWESOME.COM (July 21, 2010), <http://workawesome.com/communication/10-life-changing-benefits-of-the-internet-age/>.

⁷ Pring, *supra* note 5.

are the costs associated with the conveniences provided by this access to information?

Society's desire to have "information at our fingertips" has created a potentially dangerous view of what information should be readily accessible and which should remain private, as "the Internet removes barriers of both time and distance from its users because almost anyone, anywhere, and at any time, can access [it]."⁸ This change in our general perception of what should remain concealed has created a significant devaluation of privacy, which has affected all generations. The use of the Internet and social media sites are no longer activities for younger generations, as the age group thirty-five to forty-four is the second most "social" age group.⁹ Because of this, we must re-examine the importance we place on control over our personal information, not only for the benefit of younger generations, but also for society as a whole.

This article will examine the shift in social norms of privacy that has developed due to our growing dependence on the Internet and social media sites. It will also look at the consequences of information exchange and accessibility across different generations, as well as how abusers are using this devaluation of privacy to exploit their victims.

I. SHIFTS IN SOCIAL NORMS OF PRIVACY

Privacy is defined as the "freedom from unauthorized intrusion."¹⁰ The importance of privacy extends to every facet of our lives, as it gives us the power to determine what information we allow people to have access to; this becomes especially important when dealing with personal information. Privacy is one of the most important aspects of our social order,¹¹ as "there is a close connection between our ability to control who has access to . . . information about us, and our ability to create and

⁸ Laura Silverstein, *The Double Edged Sword: An Examination of the Global Positioning System, Enhanced 911, and the Internet and Their Relationships to the Lives of Domestic Violence Victims and Their Abusers*, 13 BUFF. WOMEN'S L.J. 97, 115 (2004/2005).

⁹ *Report: Social Network Demographics in 2012*, PINGDOM (Aug. 21, 2012), <http://royal.pingdom.com/2012/08/21/report-social-network-demographics-in-2012/>.

¹⁰ *Privacy*, MERRIAM-WEBSTER.COM, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/privacy> (last visited Mar. 6, 2014).

¹¹ Charles Fried, *Privacy*, 77 YALE L.J. 475, 493 (1968).

maintain different sorts of social relationships with different people.”¹² This control allows us an ability to construct intimate relationships with those whom we decide to allow access to certain personal information.¹³

[I]nformation privacy is necessary to create social relationships that go beyond the basic respect due all human beings. Something in addition to basic human respect must exist between two individuals to transform their relationship into one of trust, friendship, or love. That additional something is intimacy, which is partly created by the release of secrets—the selective disclosure of personal information. Without information privacy, we would be less able to disclose on a case-by-case basis the nonpublic facets of our personality.¹⁴

Information privacy is important not only in our construction of intimate relationships, but also in our interactions with the general public, and the world.

Aside from a personal sense of control over information being accessed by others, another “value of privacy is that it protects against improper use of personal information.”¹⁵ When the ability to control who has access to certain information about your life and behaviors is impaired, you can become increasingly “susceptible to a whole range of ungenerous practices.”¹⁶ Although the importance of privacy over personal information seems obvious, dependence on technology has created a shift from a society which valued the need for personal privacy from friends, family, strangers, and the government, to one which embraces the ability to output one’s own, and to find others’, personal information. As technology, and our dependence on it, continues to grow, “it expands the means for privacy intrusions, thereby limiting the personal secrets and confidences that can be concealed.”¹⁷ Furthermore, “[n]ew technological tools diminish the ability of individuals to maintain a protected zone against

¹² James Rachels, *Why Privacy is Important*, PHILOSOPHY & PUBLIC AFFAIRS (1975), available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2265077?seq=4>.

¹³ Jerry Kang, *Information Privacy in Cyberspace Transactions*, 50 STAN. L. REV. 1193, 1212–13 (1998).

¹⁴ *Id.* at 1213 (alteration added).

¹⁵ *Id.* at 1214.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 1215 (such as spying, identity theft, and “social and political” vulnerabilities by way of prejudices towards certain personal information like sexual orientation or religion).

¹⁷ See William A. Herbert, *No Direction Home: Will the Law Keep Pace with Human Tracking Technology to Protect Individual Privacy and Stop Geoslavery?*, 2 I/S: J.L. & POL’Y INFO. SOC’Y 409, 409 (2006).

physical, sensational, informational, and cyber intrusions.”¹⁸

II. HOW INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA SITES HAVE AFFECTED NOTIONS OF PRIVACY

The importance of privacy and control over one’s personal information has become a harder task with the increasing amount of time and dependence placed on Internet interactions; “social networking is [the] most popular online activity, with 22% of time online spent on channels like Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest.”¹⁹ Social networking sites such as, Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, and Craigslist are “virtual communities where people with mutual interests meet online to share information and build relationships.”²⁰

The ability to instantly connect and share with people around the world has begun to break down the walls of privacy control that our society had upheld for generations; “[i]t may be that social norms just haven’t completely developed yet, but we end up revealing so much more than we likely would have without the Internet, and we reveal it to a much wider range of people.”²¹ Most users of social networking sites utilize some sort of privacy setting to control who sees their personal information, but what many people forget is that once you put the information on the Internet, others may be able to find it, regardless of the controls that the owner has put in place. This shift in privacy norms has not only impacted the way in which individuals conduct themselves online, but it has also changed the way social media sites set up their privacy controls.

In 2010, Facebook changed its default privacy setting to public, as opposed to the previous default setting of private,²² forcing users to be even more aware of the information they are releasing to the world. When Facebook’s founder, Mark Zuckerberg, was

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ Pring, *supra* note 5 (alteration added).

²⁰ *Social Networking Sites: A Bonanza for Stalkers?*, STALKING RESOURCE CENTER, THE SOURCE VOL. 7, NO. 1 (2008), available at <http://www.victimsofcrime.org/docs/src/social-networking-sites---a-bonanza-for-stalkers.pdf?sfvrsn=2>.

²¹ Cristen Conger, *Is the Internet Destroying Privacy?*, DISCOVERY NEWS (Mar. 22, 2011, 10:23 AM), <http://news.discovery.com/tech/is-the-internet-destroying-privacy.html>.

²² Irina Raicu, *Are Attitudes About Privacy Changing?*, MARKKULA CENTER FOR APPLIED ETHICS, SANTA CLARA U., <http://www.scu.edu/ethics-center/privacy/attitudes/> (last visited Mar. 8, 2014).

asked about this change in the default setting he explained:

When I got started in my dorm room at Harvard, the question a lot of people asked was ‘why would I want to put any information on the Internet at all? Why would I want to have a website?’ And then in the last 5 or 6 years, blogging has taken off in a huge way and all these different services that have people sharing all this information. People have really gotten comfortable not only sharing more information and different kinds, but more openly and with more people. That social norm is just something that has evolved over time. We [Facebook] view it as our role in the system to constantly be innovating and be updating what our system is to reflect what the current social norms are.²³

Other social networking sites, such as Twitter, have followed Facebook’s lead and changed their default setting to public for new users; for Twitter, “[p]ublic Tweets (the default setting) are visible to anyone, whether or not they have a Twitter account.”²⁴

This response to changes in societal expectations of privacy is a perfect representation of the dangerous situation that has been created by our increased desire to share information. Not only is it necessary for social media users to monitor their personal information, but it is now necessary for them to set up privacy controls immediately upon creating a profile.²⁵ Social media sites have created a false sense of control over personal information by allowing users to change their privacy settings; there are limits to the ability to regulate who accesses their information. Specifically, although you may limit access to people you are “friends” with, there is no way for you to limit who these people share the information with or what they do with that information. It is projected that “4.8 million people have used Facebook to say where they planned to go on a certain day (a potential tip-off for burglars) and that 4.7 million ‘liked’ a Facebook page about health conditions or treatments (details an insurer might use against you).”²⁶

Facebook and other social media sites use this access to personality traits or personal preferences in order to tailor their service to the user’s interests. Facebook’s advertising guidelines

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *About Public and Private Tweets*, TWITTER, <http://support.twitter.com/articles/14016-about-public-and-protected-tweets> (last visited Nov. 26, 2012).

²⁵ *See id.*

²⁶ *Facebook & Your Privacy: Who Sees the Data You Share on the Biggest Social Network?*, CONSUMER REPORTS (June 2012), <http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/magazine/2012/06/facebook-your-privacy/index.htm>.

state, “the best ads are those that are tailored to individuals based on how they and their friends interact and affiliate with the brands, artists, and businesses they care about.”²⁷ Although this is an effective advertising technique, adding convenience and availability to information that may be of interest to you and your friends, the simple click of a button creates a potential for someone to gain key information that you may have previously kept private. Every time you “like” a group, comment on a picture or statement, or post an advertisement, you are revealing information about yourself. From the moment your account is created, these sites ask you to supply information “about [your] marital status, sexual orientation, hometown, school, religion, education, interests . . . children, or income. Although most of these questions are optional, users may automatically answer them” in order to meet other people with similar characteristics and interests.²⁸ Once this information is entered, without the immediate changing of privacy settings, it can be made “public” and others may be able to gain direct access to it.²⁹

As discussed earlier, the ability to keep certain aspects of our lives private enables our power to form healthy relationships and to construct intimacy.³⁰ Furthermore, “Facebook [and other social media sites] brings us too close to people too quickly. Dating is as much about maintaining healthy and safe boundaries as it is about intimacy.”³¹ Therefore, revealing personal information through these social media sites—whether it be intentional or unintentional—can create issues with personal privacy control and the formation of relationships.³² “[I]t’s not dissimilar to dating someone who works in your office; *you can’t control the exposure you’ll have*, and that can be a recipe for disaster.”³³ As we continue to embrace access to personal information it is important to examine the consequences of the devaluation of privacy control.

²⁷ *Facebook Advertising Guidelines*, FACEBOOK, http://www.facebook.com/ad_guidelines.php (last revised Feb. 10, 2014).

²⁸ THE SOURCE, *supra* note 20, at 2.

²⁹ *See id.*

³⁰ Kang, *supra* note 13, at 1212.

³¹ King-Ries, *supra* note 3, at 159.

³² Kang, *supra* note 13, at 1212.

³³ King-Ries, *supra* note 3, at 159 (emphasis added).

III. HOW THE INTERNET CAN BE USED TO EXPLOIT AND ABUSE

Because privacy plays such a significant role in our daily interactions with the public, as well as our intimate relationships, it is increasingly more important to consider the ways in which privacy can be exploited.

The accessibility to personal information that is created by the Internet and social media sites creates a potentially dangerous situation for all users. Social media websites allow anyone to post information, making it hard not only to control the information you may disclose, but also that which others disclose about you. This becomes increasingly risky when others have access to your personal information and passwords, making it relatively easy for them to post information as a third-party, or it may even allow them the ability to pose as you in order to post information. Even with the use of privacy settings, “[e]ven percent of households using Facebook said they had trouble last year, ranging from someone using their log-in without permission to being harassed or threatened. That projects to 7 million households—30 percent more than last year.”³⁴ The potential for “ungenerous”³⁵ use of personal information can become even more dangerous for those who are already victims of abuse. The safety issues posed by the internet use are: “[T]he openness of communication, the risk of false information being spread, and online stalking.”³⁶

Although the Internet “creates a whole world of aiding domestic violence victims” by giving them access to resources, “its use simultaneously opens the door to many dangers as well.”³⁷ Domestic violence and abuse are tools used to exert power and control over another person.³⁸ Although exploitation of privacy is a problem that affects many Americans,

[d]omestic violence victims have high needs for privacy, as they are already the target of an abuser, and often need to keep data from them. . . . This aggressor is able to take advantage of the general lack of protection for personal information in our society. Furthermore, this aggressor is familiar with many of the intimate details of the victim’s life. An abuser can violate privacy by

³⁴ CONSUMER REPORTS, *supra* note 26.

³⁵ Kang, *supra* note 13, at 1215. See Silverstein, *supra* note 8, at 117.

³⁶ Silverstein, *supra* note 8, at 117.

³⁷ *Id.* at 116–17.

³⁸ *Definition*, DOMESTICVIOLENCE.ORG, <http://www.domesticviolence.org/definition/> (last visited Feb. 27, 2014).

sharing these details, or by using them to gain more information on a victim.³⁹

Access to a victim's personal information can allow the abuser to "wreak havoc on a victim's life: they can impersonate the victim in conversations" with "the victim's friends, family, and colleagues or post false updates."⁴⁰ Because of this, "[o]ne of the more terrifying tactics used . . . is to make the victim feel that she has no privacy, security, or safety, and that the stalker [or abuser in general] knows and sees everything[.] with technology, it is not difficult for stalkers to appear omniscient."⁴¹ These practices can also be used as tools to isolate the victims from their family and friends.⁴² By impersonating them, the abuser may be able to lead the victim's family and friends to believe that they wish to be left alone, severing the victim's ties with the outside world.⁴³ Email is one of the tools used by batterers in an attempt to gain control over their victims, as an email often contains purchase confirmations, billing information, and a broad range of communications.⁴⁴

While stalkers and abusers may use the sending of emails and flooding of the victim's inbox as a mode of harassment, they may also use email in a way that can be hard for a victim to detect and trace.⁴⁵ In 2009, the U.S. Department of Justice published a report of "Stalking Victimization in the United States" stating that 82.5 percent of the over three million victims surveyed reported having experienced stalking through email and 33.6 percent through computer spyware.⁴⁶ Spyware is "software that performs certain behaviors, generally without appropriately obtaining your consent first, such as: advertising, collecting personal information, [or] changing the configuration of your

³⁹ *Domestic Violence and Privacy*, EPIC.ORG, <http://epic.org/privacy/dv/> (last visited Feb. 27, 2012).

⁴⁰ Cynthia Fraser et al., *The New Age of Stalking: Technological Implications for Stalking*, 61 JUV. & FAM. CT. J. 39, no. 4, 47 (2010).

⁴¹ *Id.* at 44.

⁴² See *id.*; *Cyberstalking*, CADV HARBOR HOUSE, <http://elkoharborhouse.com/stalking/cyberstalking/> (last visited March 1, 2014).

⁴³ See *Tactics of Abusive Men*, CRISIS CONNECTION, http://www.crisisconnectioninc.org/domesticviolence/tactics_of_abusive_men.htm (last visited Jan. 21, 2013).

⁴⁴ See Silverstein, *supra* note 8, at 118.

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ KATRINA BAUM ET AL., BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS, STALKING VICTIMIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES 5 (Jan. 2009), <http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/docs/stalking-victimization.pdf>.

computer.”⁴⁷ This software can be very hard to detect and is designed to be hard to remove.⁴⁸ It “can be installed remotely or by physically accessing the victim’s computer[,]” and once on the computer, the installer has access to search history, which may allow them to gain access to the victim’s email or other online accounts.⁴⁹ In 2003, a Pennsylvania man was able to invade his ex-girlfriend’s email account, “which he then used to . . . delete files and email messages, and change her passwords so she could not access her other account.”⁵⁰ Although email provides the ability for easier communication, “because ‘email tends to be a medium of short messages and quick answers,’ many of its users do not pay close attention to what information they reveal while typing.”⁵¹ Access to the victim’s email and search history can also pose a physical threat, giving the batterer information about whether the victim may be intending to leave, where they are going, and what type of help they may be seeking.⁵²

The normative impact of privacy devaluation and information accessibility posed by social media sites is also a major problem that must be addressed, as “56% of social media users have admitted to using [these] channels to spy on their partners.”⁵³ As explained earlier, social media sites often ask you to supply information about different aspects of your life including personal interests and the current geographical area you are living in, allowing others to get a glimpse into your life without even having to leave their home.⁵⁴ The posting of information such as, “[l]ast names, school names, favorite hangouts, phone numbers, and addresses make it easy for stalkers to locate victims.”⁵⁵ Similarly, the posting of “[p]hotos with identifiers (like school

⁴⁷ *What is Spyware?*, MICROSOFT SAFETY & SECURITY CENTER, <http://www.microsoft.com/security/pc-security/spyware-what-is.aspx> (last visited Nov. 18, 2012).

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ Cindy Southworth et al., *A High-Tech Twist on Abuse: Technology, Intimate Partner Stalking, and Advocacy*, NAT’L NETWORK TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE 7 (2005).

⁵⁰ Silverstein, *supra* note 8, at 118–19.

⁵¹ *Id.* at 118.

⁵² Ann L. Kranz & Karen Nakamura, *Helpful or Harmful? How Innovative Communication Technology Affects Survivors of Intimate Violence*, MINCAVA (May 8, 2002), http://www.mincava.umn.edu/documents/5survivortech/5survivor_tech.html.

⁵³ Pring, *supra* note 5.

⁵⁴ See THE SOURCE, *supra* note 20.

⁵⁵ *Id.*

names or locations) also increase[s] a victim's vulnerability."⁵⁶

However, spying and harassment are not the only issues faced by victims of privacy exploitation; the ability of others to post information about you can have a devastating effect. In 2010, a Wyoming man used the personal information of his ex-girlfriend to pose as her in posting an advertisement on Craigslist.⁵⁷ The posting read, "[n]eed a real aggressive man with no concern for women," and was accompanied by the picture of the victim.⁵⁸ A week after posting the advertisement, the ex-boyfriend received an email containing an acceptance of this offer,⁵⁹ and proceeded to provide the man with "the victim's name, address, and [] information on how to get into her home."⁶⁰ The man who responded to the ad carried out the acts that he thought the woman agreed to, going into her home, and proceeding to rape her; "[n]either . . . was aware that the entire event was orchestrated by her ex-boyfriend until after she was raped. Both men were charged with multiple felonies."⁶¹

The importance of privacy and control over one's personal information extends to all Americans, making it imperative that our society re-evaluates its perception of what amount of privacy is necessary in an age of information exchange.

IV.EFFECTS ON ADOLESCENTS, TEENS, AND COLLEGE STUDENTS

As we examine the consequences of society's devaluation of privacy, it is vital that we recognize that privacy is not only important to the construction of adult intimate relationships, but is also crucial to the formation of healthy relationships for adolescents; "[a]lthough most adolescent relationships last for only a few weeks or months, these early relationships play a pivotal role in the lives of adolescents and are important to developing the capacity for long-term, committed relationships in adulthood."⁶² Regardless of their length and level of seriousness,

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ DeeDee Correll, *Craigslist Implicated in Rape Case; A Wyoming Man is Accused of Using the Website to Engineer an Ex-Girlfriend's Assault*, L.A. TIMES, Jan. 11, 2010, at A9.

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ Fraser, *supra* note 40, at 48.

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² SARAH SORENSON, ADOLESCENT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS (2007), http://www.actforyouth.net/resources/rf/rf_romantic_0707.pdf.

adolescent relationships are beginning earlier on in life with “[a]pproximately 72 percent of 8th and 9th graders report ‘dating.’”⁶³ Furthermore, one of the most popular ways that adolescents and teenagers communicate with friends and intimate partners is through online means.⁶⁴

A 2012 survey estimated that “95% of all teens ages 12–17 are now online” and eighty-one percent of online teens are users of social media sites.⁶⁵ The combination of adolescent dating and Internet use has become problematic, as the Internet and social media sites have allowed for a false sense of control. This desire for control is fostered by the general lack of independence they have at home.

As adults, by and large, we think of the home as a very private space . . . for young people it’s not a private space. They have no control over who comes in and out of their room, or who comes in and out of their house. As a result, the online world feels more private because it feels like it offers more control.⁶⁶

The Internet and social media sites allow users constant and continuous access to communication.⁶⁷ The widespread use of the Internet by young people, “has reduced or changed their expectations of privacy in their intimate relationships, normalizing a ‘boundarylessness’ which may make them more accepting of—and more at risk from—abusive behaviors by their intimate partners.”⁶⁸

The increased susceptibility for young people to engage in unhealthy relationships “is compounded by the fact that their incorporation of technology into their intimate relationships is largely unsupervised by their parents.”⁶⁹ Unfortunately, it seems as though many parents not only underestimate their children’s dating frequency, but are also largely unaware of the levels of abuse that are present among adolescents and teenagers.⁷⁰

⁶³ *Teen Dating Violence*, NAT’L CONF. OF STATE LEGISLATURES, <http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/teen-dating-violence.aspx> (last updated Jan. 2014).

⁶⁴ King-Ries, *supra* note 3, at 151.

⁶⁵ *Teens Fact Sheet*, PEW RESEARCH (May 21, 2012), <http://pewinternet.org/Commentary/2012/April/Pew-Internet-Teens.aspx>.

⁶⁶ Bobbie Johnson, *Privacy No Longer a Social Norm, Says Facebook Founder*, THE GUARDIAN (Jan. 10, 2010), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2010/jan/11/facebook-privacy>.

⁶⁷ See Silverstein, *supra* note 8, at 115.

⁶⁸ King-Ries, *supra* note 3, at 132.

⁶⁹ *Id.* at 156.

⁷⁰ See TRU, TWEEN AND TEEN DATING VIOLENCE AND ABUSE STUDY 6, 18 (2008), <http://www.loveisrespect.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/tru-tween-teen->

Moreover, even when parents, and other authority figures, are made aware of the situation, they “tend to minimize the seriousness of violence within adolescent relationships and to minimize the seriousness of stalking.”⁷¹ It is important that parents and adults alike begin to understand the serious effects that society’s cheapening of privacy control has, and is continuing to have, on adolescents and teenagers’ ability to perceive unhealthy relationship patterns.⁷²

The rate of abuse within adolescent relationships is much higher than most would expect; “one in four tweens [ages 11-14] (24%) say dating violence—physically hurting relationship partners—is a serious problem for people their age. Additionally, more than a third (37%) agree that verbal abuse is a serious problem for people their age.”⁷³ In 2008, TRU, “the global leader in youth research and insights, focusing on tweens, teens and twenty-somethings[,]”⁷⁴ released a study focusing on tween and teen dating violence and abuse.⁷⁵ The study concluded that “abuse via tech-devices and networking sites is far more prevalent than [people] realize.”⁷⁶ The study also found that “significantly more tweens (than parents [and adults] realize) also know friends who[,] [h]ave been verbally abused via . . . networking site[s] . . . [and] have been made to feel afraid not to respond to an electronic communication.”⁷⁷

As addressed in Part II, it is important that all Internet and social media site users set up privacy controls for their information. It seems as though teens have embraced this warning, as it is estimated that some:

55% of online teens have profiles . . . [and most of them restrict access to their profile in some way.] [Of those with] profiles, 66% . . . say . . . their profile is not visible to all internet users. Among those whose profile can be accessed by anyone online, 46% say they give at least . . . [some] false information Teens post fake information to protect themselves, [and] also to be playful or silly.⁷⁸

study-feb-081.pdf.

⁷¹ King-Ries, *supra* note 3, at 134.

⁷² *Id.* at 154–55.

⁷³ TRU, *supra* note 70, at 11.

⁷⁴ *About TRU*, TRU, http://www.tru-insight.com/about.cfm?page_id=41 (last visited Feb. 22, 2014).

⁷⁵ *See generally* TRU, *supra* note 70.

⁷⁶ *Id.* at 19.

⁷⁷ *Id.*

⁷⁸ Amanda Lenhart & Mary Madden, *Teens, Privacy and Online Social*

Although teens may be more likely to place privacy limitations on online viewing, what happens when those exploiting or abusing access to their information are the people they have allowed, or been forced to allow, viewing access? The rate of abusive behavior amongst adolescents and teens is exacerbated by the increasing number of young people who are active on the Internet and social media sites, as it allows “access to information about where their partner is, whom the person is with, and what the person is doing.”⁷⁹ The TRU study estimated that, of the over 1,600 tweens/teens who were surveyed, “more than one in three teens report that their partners wanted to know where they were (36%) and who they were with (37%) all the time.”⁸⁰

Aside from continuous connectivity, the Internet and social networking sites also allow for unrestricted posting of information, creating opportunities for invasions of privacy outside the victim’s realm of control. As a result, many teens have also had to deal with the online sharing of private and embarrassing pictures and videos shared of them, as well as the posting and spreading of negative information and rumors about them.⁸¹ Similarly, teens have also stated “their partners had impersonated them on email, text messages, chat rooms, and social networking sites[.]”⁸² with two in five teens admitting that they “know friends who have been called names, put down, or insulted via . . . IM, social networking sites (like MySpace and Facebook), etc.”⁸³ This demonstrates the serious reality that tweens and teens are becoming increasingly more involved in unhealthy intimate relationships, which share many similar characteristics to abusive adult relationships.

The study also discovered the existence of behaviors that are characteristic of domestic violence; within these age groups, around thirty percent of ages fourteen to eighteen said that their partner had tried to prevent time with family and friends, or had asked the victim only to spend time with them.⁸⁴ This attempt to exert power and control over the person, while also isolating them from family and friends, is a serious issue that should not only be

Networks, PEW RESEARCH (Apr. 18, 2007), <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2007/Teens-Privacy-and-Online-Social-Networks.aspx>.

⁷⁹ King-Ries, *supra* note 3, at 157.

⁸⁰ TRU, *supra* note 70, at 3, 13.

⁸¹ *Id.* at 19; King-Ries, *supra* note 3, at 153.

⁸² King-Ries, *supra* note 3, at 153.

⁸³ TRU, *supra* note 70, at 11.

⁸⁴ *Id.* at 14.

taken seriously by adults, but also by the tweens and teens experiencing it. Although many tweens/teens recognize that these behavioral issues exist amongst people their age, the normative impact of society's dependency on the Internet—and information accessibility—has left them still unaware of the severity of online abuse and harassment within their intimate relationships. The “[c]onstant connectivity can blur the notions of individual boundaries and can create a sense of entitlement or the perceived expectation that each party is privileged to information about the other party's location, activities, and acquaintances, resulting in a loss of boundaries in the relationship.”⁸⁵

The “normalizing [of] unhealthy relationship patterns” is being carried on into adulthood,⁸⁶ providing increased danger for those finding their first sense of freedom and control, as they leave the rule of their parents and become enthralled in college life. As explained earlier, parents are often unaware of their children's relationships and dating behavior, so what does this mean once these teens leave the nest and venture off into a new community without parental supervision? In 2011, Knowledge Networks, Inc., polled between 400–500 college students to get a better understanding of the extent of dating violence and abuse within campus communities.⁸⁷ This study found “[n]early 1 in 3 . . . college women . . . ha[d] been in an abusive dating relationship,” and “[m]ore than half . . . of [the] college students who report[ed] experiencing dating violence and abuse said it occurred in college.”⁸⁸ College is a crucial time in the lives of teens, as they experience independence and have the opportunity to discover or reinvent themselves.⁸⁹ This self-discovery is paramount in creating a foundation for behaviors they will carry out into the workforce and adult society. However, the high levels of dating abuse that society tends to minimize in adolescent relationships are not decreasing with age. Moreover, the 2011 study found that the problem may in fact be getting worse as time goes on, with

⁸⁵ King-Ries, *supra* note 3, at 157.

⁸⁶ *Id.* at 154–55.

⁸⁷ KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS (prepared for Liz Claiborne, Inc.), COLLEGE DATING VIOLENCE AND ABUSE POLL 17–18 (2011), http://www.loveisrespect.org/pdf/College_Dating_And_Abuse_Final_Study.pdf.

⁸⁸ *Id.* at 11 (alteration in original).

⁸⁹ *Finding Your Self Identity in College*, CAMPUSPEAK, <http://www.campuspeak.com/news/finding-your-self-identity-in-college> (last visited Feb. 28, 2014).

the amount of juniors and seniors who experience dating abuse in college more than doubling the amount of freshmen and sophomores therein.⁹⁰

Just as with adolescents and teenagers in high school, a vast majority of college students are using the Internet and social media sites for communication.⁹¹ Aside from granting people access to their profiles, one in three college women admitted to giving out their passwords to their partners, allowing them direct access to personal information.⁹² This willingness to give up privacy control has created an increased vulnerability to abuse, with thirty-two percent of women reporting to know a friend who has been victimized via technology.⁹³ This digital abuse includes using the victim's password—without permission—to check up on their private conversations, delete friends on social networking sites, and to alter their online profiles.⁹⁴ We, as a society, have failed to re-establish the characteristics and image of a healthy relationship within an increasingly electronic world. Because of this, “only half of all tweens (51%) claim to know the warning signs of a bad/hurtful tween-dating relationship[,]”⁹⁵ and seventy percent of college students said they were unaware, at the time, that they were in an abusive relationship.⁹⁶

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REVALUING PRIVACY

Although it may be unfeasible to regain the amount of privacy that was available to generations before the Internet, it is not too late to change the way we view privacy as a whole, and the image that is imparted to all people, especially adolescents and teens. Continued education about the importance of placing a high value on privacy of personal information, and the ways in which we can prevent abuse and exploitation of this information, is necessary to help people be proactive in protecting themselves.

By making people aware of the prevalence of this issue, it will encourage them to reconsider what information they make

⁹⁰ KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS, *supra* note 87, at 17.

⁹¹ *College Students Connect on Social Networking Sites for Coursework*, BARNES & NOBLE (Dec. 7, 2011), <http://www.bncollege.com/news/college-students-connect-on-social-networking-sites-for-coursework/>.

⁹² KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS, *supra* note 87, at 12.

⁹³ *Id.* at 18.

⁹⁴ *Id.* at 19.

⁹⁵ TRU, *supra* note 70, at 11.

⁹⁶ KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS, *supra* note 87, at 22.

accessible and who they grant access to. MTV's "Thin Line" Campaign attempts to bring the issues faced by adolescents and teenagers to light,⁹⁷ as it was created to promote an "understanding that there's a 'thin line' between what may begin as a harmless joke and something that could end up having a serious impact on you or someone else."⁹⁸ Similarly, "www.loveisrespect.org, a partnership between the National Dating Abuse Helpline and leading teen dating violence prevention organization, Break the Cycle, is launching an initiative to target college students with new, relevant resources to address the issue of dating abuse."⁹⁹ However, it seems unlikely that teenagers and tweens will seek out this information if they are unaware of the warning signs of such abuse. Therefore, it is vital that educational programs are established within school systems, to bring this subject to the forefront. This will not only open the lines of communication between children, parents, and schools, but it will help to foster a clearer understanding of what types of digital behavior "cross the line," and how such behavior should be punished. This will also help the school system to set up parameters for disciplining electronic abuse that is brought to its attention. Similarly, schools should educate counselors about the prevalence of intimate partner abuse among young people. It is important that we take a stand against abuse and privacy exploitation, regardless of the forum used.

In order for us to affect change, it is crucial that parents and other adults take part in the education process. Not only will this help to create a united stand against these behaviors, but it will also help to give everyone a better understanding of the warning signs of digital abuse. It is important that adults and children are aware of the ways in which others can use the Internet and social media sites to gain access to their personal information. For this reason, the program should include education on the use of spyware, and how information individuals post online can be accessed and used to exploit their privacy, as well as ways in which individuals can protect themselves and their personal

⁹⁷ See generally *Get The Facts*, A THIN LINE, <http://www.athinline.org/facts> (last visited Mar. 5, 2014).

⁹⁸ King-Ries, *supra* note 3, at 163.

⁹⁹ *Press Release: 2011 College Dating Violence and Abuse Poll*, BREAK THE CYCLE (Sept. 14, 2011), <http://www.breakthecycle.org/content/press-release-2011-college-dating-violence-and-abuse-poll>.

information. For parents, it has been noted that some of the warning signs that their child's privacy is being exploited or abused may include noticing that their child is spending a lot of time in the evening on the computer, or that their child closes out of computer programs when others are around in order to hide what he or she is doing, or it is discovering that their child is using email addresses that the parent was not previously aware of, or parents may notice that their child has become withdrawn.¹⁰⁰

However, the burden of restoring privacy and control over personal information should not fall completely on general members of society, but also on the companies who are enabling these modes of exploitation. Facebook and other social media sites should be required to bear some of the cost in educating the public about ways in which their sites, and the Internet as a whole, can be used to abuse personal information. Also, as explained in Part II, Facebook has changed its default privacy settings. Although this was done in an attempt to better meet the needs of users and advertisers, it is important to recognize that this exposes people to very real dangers. Although Facebook "maintain[s] added protections and security settings for teens (age 13-17) that ensure their timelines and posts don't show up in public search results"¹⁰¹ at a minimum, new users, especially those under the age of seventeen, should be prompted to the Facebook Safety Center for a discussion of measures that can be taken to ensure privacy.¹⁰²

Facebook and other social networking sites could protect their users if they implemented a system which requires new users to take an online safety course, whether requiring the reading of a safety protocol guide or going through an interactive program. Because of the massive amount of people who use these sites as their main tools for interaction, it seems unlikely that these requirements would have a substantial impact on one's decision to sign up, eliminating the sites' reason to say no to these new protocols.

Although it is important to educate children, parents, and

¹⁰⁰ *Cyberstalking & Internet Stalking*, SAFETY WEB, <http://www.safetyweb.com/cyberstalking> (last visited Mar. 5, 2014).

¹⁰¹ *Facebook: Parents 'Help Children Break Age Limits'*, BBC NEWS (Apr. 26, 2012), <http://www.bbc.com/news/education-17853498>.

¹⁰² *See, Playing it Safe*, FACEBOOK, <http://www.facebook.com/safety/groups/teens/> (last visited Mar. 5, 2014).

adults about digital exploitation, society must also work toward a better understanding of the severity of intimate partner abuse amongst adolescents and teens. If society continues to minimize the relationships of young people, as “[p]arents, teachers, and other authority figures may have a tendency to dismiss the seriousness of the teen’s experience, believing that it is merely a phase, melodrama, or ‘puppy love[,]” they will continue to withhold information.¹⁰³ For these reasons, it may also be helpful to educate parents and adults about the normative impact of adolescent relationships on adult relationship patterns.

Rhode Island laid the groundwork for such mandatory school curriculum, with its 2007 passage of the Lindsay Ann Burke Act, in memory of a twenty-three-year-old woman who was involved in an abusive relationship, and later murdered by her batterer.¹⁰⁴ When asked about the legislation, Patrick Lynch, Rhode Island’s Attorney General at the time, stated “[y]ou teach sex ed, you teach ‘don’t do drugs,’ you teach ‘don’t drink,’ you should also be teaching ‘don’t be a victim of domestic violence[.]”¹⁰⁵ The law requires:

1. Each school district to develop a dating violence policy to address incidents of dating violence that occur at school and inform parents of such policy
2. Each school district to provide dating violence training to administrators, teachers, nurses and mental health staff at the middle and high school levels
3. Each school district to teach an age-appropriate dating violence curriculum through health education classes every year in grades seven through twelve
4. Dating violence awareness trainings for parents are strongly recommended
5. Verification of compliance with the Rhode Island Department of Education on an annual basis through the annual school health report¹⁰⁶

Today, “[a]t least 19 states have laws that urge or require school boards to develop curriculum on teen dating violence. Many states have also adopted teen dating violence awareness

¹⁰³ King-Ries, *supra* note 3, at 163.

¹⁰⁴ Eric Tucker, *R.I. Schools Required to Teach about Dating Violence*, USA TODAY (Oct. 6, 2008, 7:00 PM), http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/2008-10-06-dating-violence_N.htm.

¹⁰⁵ *Id.*

¹⁰⁶ *Lindsay Ann Burke Act*, LINDSAY ANN BURKE MEMORIAL FUND, <http://labmf.org/teachers/lindsaysact> (last visited March 5, 2014).

weeks or months” while Missouri and Oklahoma currently have such legislation pending.¹⁰⁷ In order to change the way adolescents and teens view relationships, society must not only recognize the serious nature of teen dating patterns of abuse, but society must also compel lawmakers to pass legislation, like the Lindsay Ann Burke Act, to empower an understanding of the warning signs of abuse, and make resources available to victims.

CONCLUSION

The revaluation of privacy is essential to the creation of healthy relationships for future generations, as well as enforcing the availability of privacy, control, and safety for all Americans. By educating parents and children about necessary privacy boundaries, and by urging policy makers to require a curriculum that will ensure this education, we may help to offset the occurrences of intimate partner violence within these targeted age brackets; “[a]dolescence is a ‘window of opportunity’ for prevention, and policymakers can play a role in preventing teen dating violence.”¹⁰⁸ The most important thing that can be gained through an active discussion of digital abuse is a realization that privacy and control over personal information is a vital part of all human interaction, regardless of age, and should therefore be a top priority.

¹⁰⁷ *Teen Dating Violence*, NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES, <http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/health/teen-dating-violence.aspx> (last updated Jan. 2014).

¹⁰⁸ *Id.*