A Grounded Theory of the Psychology of Privacy Management

by

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation describes the findings from a qualitative research study aimed at increasing our understanding of the psychology of privacy management. Specifically, I sought to explore people’s beliefs, perceptions, and process for managing privacy in the contexts that they inhabit. I conducted 32 one-on-one interviews with participants ranging in age from 18 to 85 years old. Using grounded theory methodology, I developed a substantive theory of privacy that outlines the way people manage their privacy in our current environment. This grounded theory takes into account people’s individual approach to privacy, the elements they consider when deciding whether or not to reveal aspects of themselves, and the behaviors they engage in to maintain their privacy or protect the privacy of others. Approach to privacy consists of beliefs about privacy, personality characteristics such as openness and self-confidence, and values, which include doing unto others, honesty, and choice (or control). In many cases this approach has never been explicitly considered, but it interacts with who one is speaking with, the topic of discussion, the context, and the perceived risks and benefits, in affecting the privacy decision. Trust is a key factor in deciding whether or not to reveal part of oneself to someone, but certain roles and relationships seem to bypass the privacy decision-making process. A risk-benefit analysis does occur, but it is one of several components
that impact privacy decisions and is hampered by the emotional nature of the information that is considered. Some contexts, such as technologically mediated situations, heighten awareness of privacy issues, while others involve information or situations that are seen to override privacy rights. Ultimately, these considerations interact and lead to particular behaviors for maintaining or regaining a desired level of privacy.
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The literature on privacy is typically said to begin with Warren and Brandeis (1890), who wrote about the increasing opportunities for privacy invasion in a modernized society and the importance of a right to privacy. Since that time, changes to society and to technology abound and discussions on issues of privacy have become more and more common. Today, the news is filled with stories of the way in which our privacy has been or could be violated. News articles appear regularly describing ways of better protecting one’s privacy, but just as regularly, one sees articles about privacy concerns. These are not only privacy violations, such as Facebook’s Beacon, which broadcast people’s activity on websites other than Facebook to their network of friends on Facebook (Perez, 2007), but also problems that have been encountered as a result of people’s own disclosures. For example, in the United States, witnesses have been ordered to share unsent emails and letters with the courts (Keenan, 2005) and in Canada, defendants and plaintiffs have been required to reveal their social network site profiles and one-on-one conversations as evidence in court (Dhawan, 2009). New technology leads to new problems, or new versions of old problems, as in the recent case of a man whose Facebook activity revealed that the newlywed was already married to another woman (Rabiner, 2012).

Surely the risks to our privacy and consequences of disclosure are ever greater, and yet over the past 40 years academics have repeatedly bemoaned the lack of scientific interest in the topic. In 1975, Altman, one of the pioneers of the study of privacy, described the subject matter as one that has been neglected by social and behavioral scientists. This time frame was arguably one of the most fruitful for privacy research, and
yet 20 years later, Newell (1995) had the same concerns. A further twenty years have almost passed, and while the topic has received considerable attention, the literature is fragmented. Lawyers and technology experts have been active in exploring issues related to privacy, but psychologists have been largely absent from these discussions. For these reasons, I undertook a study to better understand people’s beliefs about privacy, their perceptions of what types of situations are private and which are not, and how they manage privacy as a process in the various environments they encounter. My purpose in conducting this research was to better understand the concept and to develop a theory grounded in current data that would help psychologists, lawmakers, technical experts, laypeople and other interested parties to better understand the psychology of privacy in the North American context.

**Defining Privacy**

In 1977 Margulis described privacy research as being at the second of three stages of development, whereby the first stage argues for the importance of privacy as an area of interest, the second attempts to define it, and the third develops comprehensive and testable theories. Margulis believed that privacy research was in the second stage because Altman (1975) and Westin (1967), among others (see also Derlega & Chaiken, 1977; Pedersen, 1979; Schwartz, 1968), were generating interest in the topic and clarifying definitions, but they had not yet agreed on a core definition of privacy. As such, Margulis viewed the state of privacy research as theoretically immature. When Newell returned to the topic of privacy in 1995, she found that the field had not advanced substantially and that Margulis’s statement remained true as it pertained to psychological theories of
privacy. Despite pockets of interest in the topic over the last 40 years, theorists have not agreed on a common definition of privacy and no unified theory of privacy exists.

In her 1995 article, Newell suggests that privacy has been defined in a number of different ways that represent different conceptualizations of the topic. Some similarities between them do exist but the definitions generally fall into one of three core categories: privacy as a quality of a person, a quality of the environment, or an interaction between person and environment. These core categories are further partitioned to include privacy as an attitude, privacy as a quality of a place (i.e., a place that affords privacy), privacy as a form of refuge, privacy as a goal, privacy as a behavior, and privacy as a process, among other definitions. In the context of psychological research, Altman (1975) and Westin (1967) developed highly influential psychological theories of privacy, with each designed to explain very particular behaviors. For instance, Altman (1975) defines privacy as the control and enabling of access to one’s self, a definition that characterizes privacy as a process that focuses on the physical and psychological aspects of privacy and the consequences of lacking that privacy. His theory also examines differences in attainable privacy based on differences in one’s position in the social hierarchy. This line of research explores displays of territoriality, use of space, physical barriers, and other ways of using the environment to obtain and protect privacy.

Westin (1967) has a very different perspective of privacy, and conceptualizes it as access to information. Westin argues that privacy enables people to control who may have access to certain information about them. While Altman and Westin’s theories fall into different major categories, according to Newell’s classification of privacy theories (focus on the environment and on the person, respectively), there is also considerable
overlap between their theories. Westin and Altman both emphasize the importance of control in their definitions of privacy, but they each do so in their own way. Altman views privacy as control over interaction – that is, controlling with whom one interacts – whereas Westin considers privacy as a form of control over information. Newell argues that privacy as control represents yet another form of privacy, implying that both Altman and Westin’s theories incorporate multiple uses of the term. Although Newell classifies researchers and their privacy definitions based on their degree of focus on person or on environment, to date most definitions of privacy incorporate more than one of Newell’s subcategories, which include goals, behaviors, place, and other conceptualizations of the term.

Because there have been so many different approaches to studying privacy, I believe that it is important to bring these approaches together so that the concept can be explored as a whole. As a result, a good starting point for our reconsideration of privacy as a psychological concept is to provide a working definition. The purpose of a working definition in grounded theory methodology is to provide theoretical sensitivity to a wide range of concepts and to give insight and direction, without closing the researcher to other interpretations of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Given that the categories and definitions that Newell provides are not mutually exclusive, perhaps it would be more useful to conceptualize them as different elements of privacy, rather than as different definitions of privacy.

I previously proposed that privacy be defined in terms of: “The desired level of exposure (be it personal or informational) to others” (Christofides, 2009). This definition is purposefully general and serves as the common denominator between various
conceptions of privacy. It incorporates the idea that privacy is about selective interaction or information sharing with others and that individuals have an ideal level of privacy (I should note that I do not mean to imply that this desired level of privacy is constant, but that it may vary based on the situation and the interaction). It also leaves open the possibility that people may choose to define privacy in a number of different ways.

One of the goals of this project is to find a way of incorporating the different elements of privacy into a substantive theory that is grounded in the range of experiences that people have in relation to privacy. For this reason, I have not made reference to any particular context in my definition and have not limited the research to any particular topic. Privacy research has generally been rooted in a specific context; however, I believe that considering privacy in only a limited context, as when one considers privacy online but not in person, or privacy of information but not of interactions, oversimplifies what is otherwise a very complex idea. As a result, I chose not to focus this research on the experience of privacy within a technological context, though I do believe this is a critical environment in terms of privacy experiences. I believe that there is an important place in privacy discussions for an examination of the concept of privacy as a whole. That said, this research is rooted within the time and place within which it was conducted. As a result, it explores privacy within the current political and cultural environment in North America.

**Psychological Perspectives on Privacy**

While privacy research has been conducted in a number of important fields, I have stated that I am interested in studying the psychology of privacy, so I will focus here on the research that has been done within psychology, or research from other disciplines
that has been applied to psychological issues. Many other fields have taken an interest in privacy research, including scholars from legal, communications, sociology, and computer science backgrounds. In many cases, these disciplines draw on a common body of early research, and I consider this literature here, though I do not provide a comprehensive review of the current literature within these related disciplines. This review of the literature will serve to provide the scholarly context for privacy research. From the perspective of grounded theory development, the primary purpose is to sensitize the researcher to the issues that have been explored and may be important to consider during data collection and analysis. My experience with this literature spans several years as I became interested in privacy early in my doctoral studies. However, since my goal is to develop a theory that is grounded in current data, I treat this literature review as a way of orienting myself and the reader to the topic, rather than as an established framework in which to fit my new data.

**Theories of Privacy**

Theories of privacy have typically focused either on interpersonal boundaries or the information aspects of privacy. These two streams of research have followed two different trajectories and have generally been applied to different sets of issues. Research into the interpersonal boundary aspects of privacy typically explores the benefits of disclosure, finding that disclosure has not only psychological benefits but also health benefits (for example, Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999), the risks of not achieving sufficient privacy (Webb, 1978), or the management of privacy in relationships (e.g. Petronio, Reeder, Hecht, & Mon’t Ros-Mendoza, 1996). Information control privacy research has generally explored privacy in the consumer context (see Culnan & Bies, 2003) and in
relation to the problems of technology and privacy (for example, Acquisti & Gross, 2006). From the information control perspective, privacy has often been interpreted as an ethical and a moral issue (Margulis, 2003b).

**Privacy as boundary regulation.** Privacy as the regulation of interpersonal boundaries is an approach that was first explored by Altman in 1975 in his Privacy Regulation Theory. Altman’s theory of privacy helps to elucidate how environmental and interpersonal circumstances motivate and in turn are affected by privacy-related behavior. Altman describes privacy as a dialectic process, whereby people seek an ideal balance between being open and closed to interactions with others at any given time. Dialectic in this case refers to the tension between the desire to be open with other people and the desire to be closed or private. Altman and colleagues’ (1981) perspective on dialectic processes is that they involve three core components: opposing factors (such as the desire to be open and closed) that make up part of a unified system, and that are dynamic (meaning that the balance of opposing factors shifts over time).

Altman focuses specifically on the mechanisms within the environment that enable people to attain their preferred level of privacy. Privacy mechanisms include verbal and paraverbal behavior (communication using body language or other signals), personal space, territory (ownership or possession of objects or places), and cultural mechanisms such as norms and customs. Similarly, Goffman (1963) describes the way expressions and words can be used to signal openness or a desire for privacy. Because these privacy mechanisms represent different ways of being private, one can achieve the desired level of privacy in one way (for example, verbally by not speaking), but not in another (for example, when one’s personal space is invaded). Altman views privacy as an
overall balance and as a result, he describes compensatory mechanisms by which people can restore their current desired level of privacy when one type of privacy is lower than they would like. In this way, the balancing process involves choosing from one’s arsenal of privacy mechanisms to find a more desirable overall level of privacy. For example, in one of Altman’s examples, an exotic dancer is able to compensate for a lack of physical privacy (in the sense that aspects of her body that would normally be considered private are observable) by hiding any emotion in her facial expressions.

However, this interpersonal boundary approach to privacy has difficulty explaining some aspects of online behavior. Both verbal and paraverbal behaviors exist online and may well be used to regulate privacy in semi-public spaces, such as social network sites. On these sites, people can use verbal privacy mechanisms such as cryptic language, or a form of code that is understood only by their desired conversation partner. In addition, people may use physical gestures or posture to create privacy when having private conversations in public spaces. An example of this behavior is when someone speaks on their mobile phone in a public area, but turns their body away from potential observers. Altman’s theory suggests that these actions would give the speaker a greater sense of privacy. Interestingly, while these behaviors may increase feelings of privacy, they do so without protecting the information that is being shared. When speaking on the phone, physical gestures may be intended to communicate to others that it is their responsibility to refrain from listening. However, this technique is unlikely to be effective when others cannot sufficiently distance themselves from the conversation. In using cryptic language, speakers/writers may also believe that their privacy is protected, but it may not be difficult for an observer to piece together the meaning of a conversation,
especially in social network websites where other informational cues are available. In this way, some of the mechanisms that Altman describes may serve to increase perceptions of privacy without changing actual levels of privacy.

Privacy Regulation Theory was influenced by Altman and Taylor’s (1973) earlier research on the process of relationship formation. Their Social Penetration Theory posits that relationships follow a linear path where they begin with little exchange of only superficial information, and gradually become more intimate in terms of the depth and breadth of information that is exchanged. Applied to privacy, this theory helps to situate the process of disclosing, or choosing to relax privacy boundaries within the context of developing relationships. Petronio’s (2002) work on Communication Privacy Management can be seen as a continuation of this program of research in that it approaches privacy as a process for managing people’s interface between themselves and others. It also views privacy as a dialectic process whereby people balance the need for disclosure and information control and do so by regulating their privacy boundaries. Whereas Altman focuses on the individual mechanisms that someone might use to maintain their desired privacy boundaries, Petronio focuses more on relationships with others, and on the process of managing these boundaries when interacting with them.

According to Petronio (2002), people have privacy boundaries around themselves and their personal information. When the information is theirs alone, they set the terms of their boundaries and of how and when these boundaries can change. However, sharing information with someone else brings that person into the privacy boundary, with its associated set of rules. When information is shared, the privacy boundary changes such that the information becomes jointly owned. The confidante thus inherits a certain set of
responsibilities, along with the information that they have learned. There may be rules to
the way the information can be shared, how it can be discussed among those in the know,
what can be shared with people outside the boundaries, and who can do the sharing.
Social groups also have their own idiosyncratic privacy norms, which are quickly learned
by new members of the group.

**Privacy as information control.** Westin (1967), on the other hand, is also
concerned with informational privacy, which addresses one limitation that I noted in
Altman’s theory – that people may experience feelings of privacy without actually
protecting their private information. In this way, the contributions of Westin and Altman
are highly complementary. While Altman is interested in describing privacy mechanisms
and the environment, Westin examines the information exchange aspect of privacy. He
also identifies four types of privacy (solitude, intimacy, anonymity and reserve), which
differ in terms of who one is interacting with, and in terms of one’s level of openness. In
solitude, the person is alone and excludes others from their thoughts and personal space.
In intimacy, the person is open, but they are only open with a specific person or people.
In anonymity, the person is in a public space and in the presence of other people, but can
experience a sense of privacy because they do not know the people around them. With
the final type of privacy, reserve, the person may be in the company of friends but they
hold back certain information in order to maintain a desired level of privacy.

Pedersen (1979) later adds isolation as a type of privacy and separates intimacy
into two categories: intimacy with friends and intimacy with family. However, including
isolation as a type of privacy is a debated concept. In Pedersen’s view, isolation differs
from solitude in that it involves physically removing one’s self from potential interactions.
with others, rather than merely going somewhere quiet or closing the door. Perhaps the key distinction between solitude and isolation is in eliminating the potential for interaction, in the case of isolation, whereas in solitude the person is spending time alone but has the potential for interaction with others if desired. The distinctions between these terms is subtle, and Altman (1975) has argued that isolation is not a type of privacy at all. Instead, it is an involuntary condition that results from an imbalance in terms of the optimal level of connection with other people. As a result, it may not be something that is under a person’s control. This issue highlights the question of where control fits in discussions of privacy. As noted earlier, both Westin and Altman have treated control as a fundamental element of privacy, which may explain the exclusion of isolation from Westin’s types of privacy.

According to Foddy and Finighan (1980) the purpose of privacy is related to the self and one’s ability to maintain a specific role identity. The more two people interact, the more they develop ideas and expectations about each other’s role and identity. The way a person is viewed is in a sense negotiated with the person with whom they are interacting, and must be negotiated with every new connection. In this way, privacy enables people to maintain an identity by controlling information that contradicts their expected role or desired identity. Thus, at least from Foddy and Finningham’s perspective, the purpose of privacy is to enable people to maintain specific identities and control information that might interfere with other people’s acceptance of their identity claim. The information that people share is important in helping them define their identity, and what is kept private similarly helps by keeping identity-contradictory information out of view. Further, privacy mechanisms help people to define their identity
with specific others in the sense that they can keep private information that might be counter to their identity with that person but reveal it to others for whom it would not seem inconsistent.

**Deciding Whether to Disclose**

Psychology research typically addresses privacy in terms of information disclosure. Several privacy theories assume that in deciding whether or not to disclose, people weight the relative risks and benefits. For example, Petronio’s (2002) theory posits that privacy rules are developed in part based on the risks of disclosing or of keeping something to one’s self. Westin (1967) approaches privacy in the context of social norms, and so people are seen to base their disclosure decisions in part on what is believed to be socially acceptable. In assessing the risks and benefits of disclosure or maintaining privacy, people consider a number of personal and interpersonal factors.

**Factors leading to disclosure.** When asked about their reasons for disclosing something private to another person, Derlega, Winstead, Mathews, and Braitman (2008) found that participants most often reported disclosing because of a close and trusting relationship. Other common reasons included seeking help and a duty to inform their confidante about a particular issue. Most common reasons for not disclosing were to protect the other person, concern about losing the other person’s respect, and their own privacy. These attributions show the importance of disclosure in close relationships and the way a lack of trust motivates people to maintain their privacy. Other research has shown disclosure to be an important factor in building trust in a relationship. For example, parents are more likely to trust children who spontaneously share details of their daily activities than those who do not (Kerr, Stattin, & Trost, 1999). Similarly, Henderson
and Gilding (2004) find that people who disclose more online are seen as more trustworthy to their conversation partners.

Omarzu (2000) provides a framework for understanding the self-disclosure decision process and demonstrates the complexity of this process. Any given environment may have a number of cues that either encourage or discourage disclosure, and different environments may make different goals more salient. For example, I have argued that because people are exposed to the disclosures of others on Facebook, the environment normalizes disclosure and encourages people to disclose (Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, 2009). Similarly, Petronio (2002) predicts that the tension between goals that might encourage disclosure, for example seeking validation, and the perceived risks of disclosure, for example embarrassment, affects people’s decision to disclose or to keep information private. Other goals include expression (expressing one’s self in order to cope with a situation or with certain emotions), self-clarification (clarifying one’s own ideas through the process of sharing them), relationship development (sharing to connect with another person), and social control (disclosing in order to influence someone else’s opinions or actions). Omarzu’s goals of approval, intimacy, relief, identity, and control are similar.

While Omarzu (2000) refers to goals of disclosure, if disclosure and privacy are seen as two needs that must be balanced, then privacy goals serve as the balancing factors. As such, disclosure goals can also be thought of as privacy goals, or functions of privacy, to use Pedersen (1997) terminology. Pedersen developed a list of potential functions of privacy based on a review of the literature on the purpose of privacy. He then used factor analysis to identify eight different functions, which include
contemplation, autonomy, rejuvenation, confiding, creativity, disapproved consumptions, recovery, catharsis, and concealment. Of these functions, confiding is presumably a goal that tips the balance towards disclosure, whereas the others would be expected to lead to privacy-enhancing behaviors. However, this list did not correspond particularly well with Westin’s (1967) functions of privacy (personal autonomy, emotional release, self-evaluation, and limited and protected communication) and so their validity should perhaps be questioned given that the initial list was based on existing literature on the subject.

Omarzu defines situational cues and individual differences as key factors in determining goals. In Omarzu’s (2000) model, interpersonal factors are accounted for late in the decision process – after particular goals have been activated, people are hypothesized to evaluate whether or not an appropriate target is available and whether disclosure is an appropriate strategy. It seems more likely that the impact of the target would occur earlier in the model, meaning that the presence of a particular person can serve to activate certain goals. For example, being the recipient of a disclosure from a friend may make intimacy goals more salient and so encourage disclosure, even if the context is not ideal, as is the case when one is speaking on a mobile phone in a restaurant or other public place. In this case, the relationship goal may override other goals. Indeed, Fitzsimons and Bargh (2003) find that the mere thought of other people primes specific goals; the goals that one’s mother primes are different from those elicited by one’s relationship partner.

The idea that communication target is integral to communication goals is implicit in Pederson’s (1979) definition of intimacy with family and intimacy with friends as two
different types of privacy. The target of disclosure is a core element of the definition; however, including the target in this way may contribute to the difficulty in creating a clear definition of privacy. The target of privacy and disclosure is important at a fundamental level, but Pedersen’s model does not make clear how it contributes to the theory. What can be seen from this definition is that the people from whom one wishes privacy and the people with whom one wants intimacy are both important elements in discussions of privacy needs and goals. While it seems paradoxical to integrate the target of disclosure into a definition of privacy, the fact that this occurs in the literature demonstrates the importance of providing better theoretical links between these concepts.

Another issue with defining the target of disclosure is in situations where the target is not entirely clear, or when the target is clear but others are just as clearly able to overhear. When someone has a private conversation in a public place, he or she is essentially designating anyone who may hear the conversation as socially invisible. Similarly, when people have personal conversations using their Facebook wall, a virtual message board that all contacts can see, they might be sharing information that they do not consider private, using linguistic mechanisms to communicate their message differently to their different audiences, or choosing to treat other potential readers as invisible. In this way, control over information is not the gathering of personal information, but is instead the ability to choose which potential audiences matter and which do not. Communicating broadly but with the intent or hope of reaching specific others has been referred to in the literature as the imagined audience (Marwick & boyd, 2011). This idea dates back to Mead (see Cronk, 2005), who, in the tradition of symbolic
interactionism, believes that people take on or imagine the perspective of other people and in this way come to define themselves.

Rauhofer (2008) argues that because people are willing to give away their information in exchange for very small rewards (for example, the convenience of having a phone conversation anywhere), they must not place much value on their privacy. This is the economic view of privacy, seeing information as something that can be kept or traded. It carries with it the assumption that privacy behavior is rational, however, these decisions may be hampered by incomplete information and bounded rationality, meaning that people use imperfect heuristics in deciding whether to disclose or not in a particular situation (Acquisti & Grossklags, 2007). Using faulty or inappropriate heuristics may therefore lead people to part with their information in situations where there may in fact be more costs than anticipated. This behavior may in turn give the impression that someone does not care about their privacy as much in practice as they claim to, or that their privacy can be bought for fairly insignificant rewards.

**Reasons for maintaining privacy.** According to Pedersen (1997), his six types of privacy (solitude, isolation, intimacy with family, intimacy with friends, anonymity, and reserve) serve specific functions (contemplation, autonomy, rejuvenation, confiding, creativity, disapproved consumptions, recovery from stressors, catharsis, and concealment). Solitude and isolation have some similarities, where both provide opportunities for contemplation, autonomy, and rejuvenation. Solitude also enables people to explore their creativity and isolation provides the opportunity to engage in activities that may not adhere to social norms (disapproved consumption). Anonymity serves a recovery function, which Pedersen interpreted to mean that people feel safe with
strangers because they do not experience social pressures from them. Anonymity also provides opportunities for autonomy and catharsis, though Pedersen does not speculate as to why this might be. Reserve enables people to recover from social stressors, allows them to experience autonomy, and enables them to conceal information.

Anonymity is often associated with the internet (Bargh & McKenna, 2004) and so it is interesting to note that in Pedersen’s study anonymity provides an opportunity for catharsis. This finding is consistent with research showing that people sometimes behave in highly negative ways online, as is the case in cyberbullying using anonymous websites or applications on Facebook (Dehue, Bolman, & Vollink, 2008) or flaming, where someone attacks another person online (Dyer, Green, Pitts, & Millward, 1995). However, anonymity is not relevant to all online environments; social network sites, email, and instant messaging are not generally anonymous. Social network sites have been described as anonymous, because while people have some level of privacy, the information they post is linked to their real identity (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). In the case of anonymous environments, if people desire privacy their best strategy is reserve, or choosing to hold certain information back. However, reserve may be difficult to employ in environments such as social network sites, where participating involves sharing information with others.

Interestingly, when people have private conversations in public spaces, they are attempting to gain intimacy with their conversation partner (with family or friends), but are using anonymity to accomplish this. In this way, anonymity may be a function as well as a type of privacy. If intimacy is a key motivator and outcome of disclosure, then how can it also be a type of privacy, as has been proposed by Pedersen (1997)? The answer is
that the term *privacy* has been used to refer to *goals, mechanisms, and behaviors* and some privacy-related terms have been used in more than one way. For example, someone can desire intimacy (the goal), meaning that they seek privacy (the goal) from other people in general, by seeking intimacy with family (the mechanism) in order to disclose (also a behavior) to another person or people specifically. The confusion here is that the term privacy has been used to mean all of these things without defining the various elements. While the general term *privacy* is used to describe both general and specific elements of the concept, the specific term *disclosure* is used to refer to a series of behaviors that may actually serve privacy goals or be mechanisms to achieve privacy.

On social network sites, people share personal information with a large group of people; sometimes they do so in an undirected way, such as when they add information to their profile, and at other times they do this in a directed way, as they do when they post something on a friend’s wall. In both Pedersen’s and Westin’s descriptions of intimacy, people are able to achieve intimacy with a specific person by isolating themselves from other people. Perhaps what is different in the online environment is that people are achieving intimacy simply by targeting their disclosures at a specific person, rather than by limiting their disclosures only to a particular target. What is important is who has been tagged as the target of disclosure rather than who actually receives the disclosure, since many others are likely to receive it. This behavior may have evolved as a way of obtaining privacy in a medium that offers primarily public ways of interacting.

**Reframing disclosure.** In describing self-disclosure, there are a few theoretical issues that have not been addressed. Self-disclosure has been defined very loosely as the verbal sharing of information (Cozby, 1973), but Fisher (1984) questions such an
inclusive definition. He believes that what has been traditionally described as self-disclosure is in fact a broad class of information sharing behavior, not all of which should be labeled self-disclosure. According to Fisher, in order to define something as self-disclosure, it must be truthful, sincere, intentionally communicated, novel, and ordinarily private. In this way, he distinguishes self-disclosure from a group of related constructs that are all types of self-reference. Other self-referential behavior includes self-presentation, self-misrepresentation, self-revelation, repetition, and self-description.

Self-presentation is believed to be different from self-disclosure because the information that is shared is for the purpose of creating a certain image, which Fisher views as insincere. Goffman (1959) also described self-presentation as a way of managing the impression that one gives to other people, which makes it a performance process with the goal of creating a desired impression. This process of self-presentation also serves to create an idealized version of ourselves, which may not be true for self-disclosure. While someone may disclose a piece of information in order to attain a certain goal, Fisher views this process as different from self-presentation because the goal is affiliative rather than in order to maintain a certain image. However, distinguishing self-disclosure and self-presentation in this manner has some flaws because presenting one's best self, or a version of the self that is tailored to the situation can also be seen as a way of better connecting with other people. In this way, self-presentation and self-disclosure are both affiliative and so the distinction between them is largely artificial. Also, some would argue that the self (or how the self is presented through disclosure) cannot be understood in the absence of others (Mead, see Cronk, 2005). In this view, the self cannot
be disconnected from the communication environment because it is relational rather than absolute and is in fact created as a result of the way one expects to be viewed by others.

According to Fisher, self-misrepresentation is also insincere, since the goal is to share false information in order to provide an inaccurate impression. In self-revelation, the sharing of information is done by accident and so is not intended as a disclosure. Repetition involves sharing information that is not new. Finally, self-description is similar to self-disclosure, except that the information that is shared is not considered to be private. This analysis of self-referential information is useful to a discussion of privacy because of one of the key claims about privacy in our current context: that people are willingly sharing information that is ordinarily private. Perhaps though, what they are sharing is not considered private to them and should instead be considered repetition or self-description.

In Omarzu’s (2000) model of disclosure, she outlines the process by which people decide whether or not to disclose. She describes situational cues and individual differences that lead to possible disclosure goals such as approval and intimacy. However, in Fisher’s (1984) conceptualization of self-referential behavior, the goal of approval would lead to behavior such as self-presentation or self-misrepresentation. These behaviors aid in maintaining a desired identity, and so the information that is shared is intentionally misleading. Similarly, sharing information that is widely available should not be considered self-disclosure, according to Fisher. For example, when someone shares a listing of her favorite shows on Facebook she may not be disclosing under some mistaken belief that it will lead to intimacy. Instead, since it is normative to share this type of information, she may consider it to be self-referential rather than self-
disclosure. In this way, she may be using self-referential behavior to maintain privacy while still participating in her social environment. As such, someone may simultaneously share information and care about privacy if they do not perceive the information they share to be private. This idea is consistent with research showing that students share extensively on Facebook, while reporting that they care about privacy and controlling their personal information (Livingstone, 2008).

Petronio (2002), on the other hand, takes a different view of self-disclosure in the context of privacy. Her approach considers one’s own information as well as other people’s information as being potentially private because privacy boundaries could be individual or could surround information that is shared by a group. If information is owned by a group then it may be private and therefore have the potential to be disclosed, without being about the self. Because privacy decisions may or may not involve sharing information about one’s self, Petronio drops the “self”, and terms these disclosures simply as the sharing of private information. In this way, she slices the spectrum of information differently than does Fisher, which may be important to my goal of understanding privacy-related decisions. Petronio’s approach would also disagree with Fisher’s in that while seemingly superficial disclosures may not involve much risk, they may still be private and simply reflect the fact that the discloser has a more transparent privacy boundary than someone who chooses not to share such information. In addition, Petronio would likely view self-revelation as the disclosure of private information that is in conflict with the person’s rules. This situation is likely to result in turbulence, meaning that it may make them uncomfortable and lead to a re-evaluation of their rules, because it involves revealing information that was deemed too private to share.
Individual Differences

The idea that people may have different perceptions of what is or is not appropriate to share with others points to the fact that there may be individual differences in approaches to privacy. Smith, Dinev, and Xu (2011) refer to these factors as privacy antecedents because they predict privacy orientation (which they term privacy concern), which in turn has been used to predict privacy behavior.

Gender. Some individual differences have been better explored than others. For example, there has been considerable research on the issue of gender differences in privacy and disclosure decisions, though the conclusions are not clear. The issue of gender is not a straightforward one since the gender of the discloser and the recipient must both be considered (there may be greater differences in same-sex disclosures than disclosures between men and women), definitions of gender must be questioned (sex, gender, or sex role), topic of discussion may have an effect (typically masculine or feminine), and reporting measures may yield different results (self report, ratings by the target of disclosure, or observer ratings; for a summary of these issues see Buss, 2000 or Petronio, 2002).

Historically, it has been argued that privacy has favored males in the sense that it shielded what went on within the home to the detriment of women’s wellbeing (Siegel, 1996). As a result, one might expect men to value privacy more than do women. Early research on self disclosure found that women disclosed more than men, which was attributed to the male role as tough and independent (Jourard, 1971). More recently, Dindia and Allen (1992) conducted a meta-analysis of 205 studies of self-disclosure and found that women disclosed slightly more than men, though this finding depended on
whom they were disclosing to. Derlega, Durham, Gockel, and Sholis (1981) also found that disclosures depend on the topic of discussion. Current research on privacy and disclosure online shows mixed findings regarding privacy concerns and resultant behavior (Youn & Hall, 2008). As a result, while one might expect to find some differences in approach to privacy between men and women, the nature of these differences is challenging to predict.

**Age.** Age may also have an impact on privacy. Studies suggest that children have different definitions of privacy at different ages (Wolfe & Laufer, 1974), but there is no research that pinpoints when children become mature in their approach to privacy, or even whether such an event occurs. Adolescence is the time when children attempt to separate themselves from their parents and want to develop their own sense of self. Indeed, late childhood and early adolescence are important periods for personality development (Soto, John, Gosling, & Potter, 2011). Teenagers value being alone and will withdraw to the privacy of their bedrooms in order to retreat from their families (Larson & Richards, 1991). They also use online media to share with friends but maintain privacy from parents (boyd, 2007; Livingston, 2008). Because my current interest is in privacy in adults, I have chosen to limit this research project to the study of privacy in adulthood, leaving the study of privacy in childhood to developmental researchers.

Clearly, the need for privacy develops over childhood, but whether this development process is a lifelong one is unknown. The research on this topic has generally been conducted in an online environment, so little is known about privacy differences generally. Our own research shows that age differences predict differences in online disclosure in an adolescent sample, but not in a sample of adults (Christofides et
al., 2012). There is some evidence to show that adults of different ages may act differently in protecting their privacy online, but the research is mixed as to whether older or younger adults are more active in protecting their privacy. For example, Nosko, Wood, and Molema (2010) found that Facebook users disclosed less with increasing age, though their sample tended to be fairly young (mean age was 22). As a result, it will be important to consider the impact of age on privacy.

Culture. Petronio believes that privacy rules may reside at the group or the individual level. Her theory accounts for the effect of culture in privacy rule development. Cultural criteria are believed to be one of the five factors that affect privacy rule development (other criteria include gender, motivation, context, and risk-benefit ratio; Petronio, 2002). Cultural factors may influence not only privacy perceptions, but also privacy-related behaviors, or what mechanisms are used for obtaining privacy (for example, see Altman, 1977). However, for the purposes of this research, I have chosen to focus on privacy in North America. Because of the variety of cultures that exist, and the multiple ways that one can define culture (at the group level, family level, community, country, East/West, etc.; Straud et al., 2002) I believe that the question of culture’s effect on privacy is better served by a focused study of privacy in different cultures. For this reason, I have set aside the issue of culture, though I recognize that if culture is seen as an individual difference factor its effect cannot be negated.

Socioeconomic status. According to Schwartz (1968), privacy is something that is not equally available to everyone. Historically, people with less money or lower status were allowed less privacy in that they lived in more cramped quarters and were unlikely to have as much separation from their neighbors. This is still true today, in that, for
example, more expensive homes typically are larger and have more property around them. More recently, Fiddy and Finighan (1980) describe how privacy comes with power, as when a rising businessperson is rewarded with the keys to the executive washroom. In that way, privacy is a goal to strive towards, as well as being something with high value. However, it is unclear whether privacy is still valued to the same extent that it was at that time, and Rauhofer (2008) argues that people do not value their privacy as they are willing to give away their information in exchange for very small rewards. As a result, it is important to consider the way SES may impact approaches to privacy and the ability to obtain privacy.

**Personality.** There are several elements of personality that may affect people’s approach to privacy, however little research has focused on these issues specifically. There is some evidence that those who are more extraverted are more willing to accept workplace monitoring technology (Zweig & Webster, 2003), which may indicate a lesser need for privacy. Extraverts also use social networking sites more (Gosling, Augustine, Vazire, Hotlzma, & Gaddis, 2011), which may point to greater importance of social connections. However, as Smith and colleagues (2011) point out, this topic has not been studied extensively. For this reason, I believe that the links between privacy and personality warrant further investigation.

**Other differences.** Petronio (2002) includes motivational factors as contributors to privacy rules. While some of these factors may be better explained as elements of the interpersonal relationship, need for control, need to express oneself, and perceptions of risks and benefits may all contribute to individual differences in privacy management. Trust has been shown to impact disclosure (Schofield & Joinson, 2008), and my own
research has shown that the need for popularity (Christofides et al., 2009), awareness of the potential future consequences of disclosure (Christofides et al., 2012), and having had a bad privacy-related experience (Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, In Press) all impact privacy and disclosure decisions. All of these issues are important to consider in my examination of privacy and they ways that individual differences may have an impact.

**Gaps in our Current Understanding**

Existing research has given us clues as to how the pieces of the privacy puzzle fit together. For my Comprehensive Examination paper I attempted to create a framework for the existing research that would identify gaps and generate testable hypotheses. I proposed that privacy behavior could be predicted by understanding individual orientation towards privacy, privacy goals, and the interactions between these components (please see Appendix A for a schematic). I anticipated that individual differences determine a person’s orientation towards privacy, and that privacy orientation is relatively stable. Both situational and interpersonal factors were seen to affect current privacy goals, which in turn affect privacy behaviors. Situational cues include norms of a particular environment, and cultural aspects that impact what is perceived as appropriate in a particular situation. Interpersonal factors are elements of the relationship between a person and the target, as well as individual factors of the target him or herself. Certain environments may normalize disclosure or, at the other extreme, may normalize closed privacy goals. Cues that make a situation seem more intimate, factors that make privacy risks seem less immediate, and information about other people who are present may all normalize disclosure. In addition, the effect of many people disclosing in a particular setting may normalize disclosure in that environment.
This model identifies several important gaps in our knowledge of privacy. For example, the existence of privacy orientation as a trait has not yet been conclusively demonstrated (see Margulis, 2003a). It is also difficult to test these factors because there is little correlation between different measures of privacy orientation (Pedersen, 1996), and measures of privacy behaviors such as self-disclosure are largely out of date (Pedersen & Higbee, 1968; Wheeless & Grotz, 1976). Many scholars have also lamented the poor correlation between privacy concerns (which can be seen as a proxy for privacy orientation) and privacy-related behavior, calling this the privacy paradox (Norberg, Horne, & Horne, 2007). In addition, given the advances in communications technology, our existing understanding of privacy can no longer be assumed to apply to the current context. Many contexts and situations now exist that were not in place when much of the privacy research was conducted, though some scholars did anticipate that advances to technology would make the challenges of obtaining privacy greater (Westin, 2003).

As such, I propose that one must first gain a better understanding of what people mean when they use the word privacy, and how they manage their privacy in the current world. I also believe that, while it is important to have current and useable tools for measuring privacy, something that I have found lacking in my previous work on privacy management online, these tools can only be created with a thorough understanding of privacy as a concept and an information management process. As a result, I decided that a qualitative exploration was the most appropriate way of gathering information on these issues.
CHAPTER 2: RECONSIDERING PRIVACY

My research aims to contribute to our understanding of what privacy means to people, what situations they consider to be private, and how they manage their privacy in the variety of contexts in which they find themselves. Overall, my goal was to better understand the experience of privacy and process for obtaining it. I have used the existing literature from psychology and related fields to sensitize me to the issues that relate to privacy, the many ways in which the word can be used, and the contextual factors that may affect beliefs about privacy and ways of attaining it. While I previously developed a model of privacy that is based on the research literature, I use this experience only as a way of understanding the existing research, rather than as a limiting factor in my exploration of privacy. In this dissertation I set out to gather data on people’s experience of privacy as well as their own process for managing it in the current context.

Research Questions

While my dissertation is exploratory in nature, I aimed to answer several research questions through the development of a substantive theory of privacy. I proposed to explore the following questions:

• What does privacy mean to people?
• What situations do they consider private and what steps do they take to protect their privacy?
• How does their perspective on privacy affect their relationships with other people?
• How do their ideas about privacy affect who they are as people and how they manage their own identity?
• How do these processes for managing privacy translate to technologically mediated environments?

Methods

Grounded Theory Methodology

My dissertation explored the meaning of privacy as a concept, with an emphasis on understanding people’s approach to and experience with privacy. Because I was interested in creating and advancing a substantive theory of privacy, I chose to conduct my research using Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM), as described by Charmaz (2003), Corbin and Strauss (2008), Daly (2007), and others. GTM is a research methodology that was developed by two sociologists, Glaser and Strauss (1967), and it has been both widely used and widely criticized (for an example see Thomas & James, 2006). Glaserian GTM states that the researcher should come to their topic unencumbered by extensive reading and literature review, and that the researcher should discover the theory that emerges from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I was unable to uphold the first criterion because of my interest in privacy theory and past research on privacy management online. Charmaz (2003) would argue that no researcher comes to a topic as a blank slate and she does not see this as a detriment. I also see my past experience with this topic as an advantage, not a detriment, because I came to the project sensitized to some of the issues around privacy that lack sufficient understanding and I had a better idea of what types of people to sample in order to gain a range of perspectives on privacy.

In general, I believe that Charmaz’s (2003) constructivist approach to grounded theory is more in keeping with my own perspective for a number of reasons. First, I set
the research agenda and created an initial list of questions, albeit flexible ones, that I wanted to explore. Second, my own experience affects how I interpreted the responses of the participants and what issues I believed to be important and thus encouraged through my verbal responses and body language. My experience also affects the interpretation process, meaning that the interpretation of data is not something that can be done objectively and without researcher influence. Charmaz believes that the research process is a dialogue between researcher and research participant and that the researcher does not simply collect data, but rather is involved in creating and directing the research conversation and constructing the interpretation of the participants’ experience. Similarly, Pidgeon and Henwood (1997) argue that it is our knowledge that constructs how we understand what we see and hear. While I sought to be open to the experiences of the participants, I was also aware of the ideas and experiences that I, as a researcher, brought to the interview and interpretation process. As such, the research design, data collection, and interpretation were all active processes – research is not a passive discovery process (Charmaz, 2003; Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). Similarly, the final research product is thus a combination of the experiences that participants have described and the researcher’s interpretation of the meaning of those experiences.

Reflexive practice is an important part of the research process because it enables researchers to become more aware of their own biases and gives others (for example, the reader of the research product) a better idea of the interpretations that the researcher brings to the research (Daly, 2007). My own thoughts and reflections on the data and on my own relevant experiences went into the memos I wrote. Similarly, the researcher is not absent from the final research product (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In presenting the
research and resulting theory, I am using the first person in order to avoid the appearance of distance from my data. The memos that I wrote during the data collection and analysis process have been used in the creation of the final research report and the stories of the participants are used to bring the theory to life (Charmaz, 2003). In addition, my own stories and experiences have been incorporated into the memoing process and influenced my interpretation of the data and presentation of thereof.

**Participants**

I interviewed 32 participants, using purposive sampling to recruit an even number of men \((n=16)\) and women \((n=16)\), evenly distributed in ten-year age brackets, from 18 years old to over 78 years (my eldest participant was 85 years old, \(M=53\); see Table 1). These two factors were chosen in advance because of the potential for gender differences (see Petronio 2002 for a review) and the general belief that young and old people have different views about privacy. The importance of privacy develops during the teenage years (Wolfe & Laufer, 1974), though it is unclear when people mature in their orientation towards privacy. I chose to focus on adults’ perspectives on privacy, because I believe the study of privacy development to be a different question that may be better suited to an examination of developmental issues more broadly. In keeping with the legal definition of adulthood in Canada, I defined adulthood to begin at 18 years, though I recognize that this is unlikely to be a clear demarcation, and the period between 18 and 24 years is also sometimes called *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2010).
Table 1
Summary of participants by age and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-27</td>
<td>Lloyd, Joe</td>
<td>Jasmine, Lotus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28-37</td>
<td>John, Bob</td>
<td>Diane, Samantha, Edith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38-47</td>
<td>Jimbo, Colin, Patrick</td>
<td>Elizabeth, Maria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48-57</td>
<td>D.P., Walter</td>
<td>Ann, Johanna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58-67</td>
<td>John Paul, Max, Charlie</td>
<td>Linda, Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68-77</td>
<td>Midas, Ian</td>
<td>Anne, Roberta, Evelynne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78+</td>
<td>Edward, Arthur</td>
<td>Baba, Iris</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I purposively sampled participants in order to achieve diversity on factors such as socioeconomic status (SES), extraversion, level of technological knowledge, and past privacy-related experience, which the literature indicated may be important in explaining people’s perspectives on privacy (Christofides et al., In Press). I did not assess SES directly, but I asked a number of questions about participants’ education and type of work. The responses to my questions lead me to believe that my participants were primarily in the middle class, despite efforts to achieve a more diverse sample. While they generally had some degree of comfort financially (all lived on their own or shared a residence with their partner or family), they varied in the education level they obtained (from no post-secondary education to several graduate degrees), the type of work they did (from manual laborer to professional), and their employment status (unemployed, student, self-employed, employed, or retired).

Some participants reported that they did not use computers at all (D.P., Arthur, and Iris), while others were experts in a computer-related field (John and Jimbo), with considerable variability in between. Similarly, some participants had never thought much
about privacy issues (Samantha, Edward, Iris, and John Paul), whereas others had done so extensively, either for personal (Elizabeth, Bob, and Roberta) or for work-related reasons (John, Jimbo, and Ann). I decided in advance to limit my exploration of privacy to the North American context. In practice, this was difficult to do because many of our older population immigrated to Canada or the United States. As a result, my sample includes three participants (Midas, Charlie, and Evelynne) who grew up in England, but lived in Canada for their working lives and their retirement (more than 30 years each).

I aimed to interview a sufficient number of participants to reach theoretical saturation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In grounded theory, this means that the theoretical concepts and categories are sufficiently developed and elaborated such that new interviews do not provide additional clarification (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). However, because of the need to determine in advance approximately how many interviews will be conducted, I chose to interview 30 participants since this number met or surpassed the guidelines that exist in the literature (Daly, 2007; Kvale, 1996; McCracken, 1988). As the interviews progressed, I did not feel that there were any differences that emerged such that I would need to interview additional participants in any particular group. That said, it was easier for me to find participants who were more similar to me (white, middle class, mid-30’s, female, with post-secondary education) and as a result I had to work harder to find participants who were male, in later adulthood, and with less education. This also meant that although I aimed to have at least two participants in each age group, I sometimes had to turn people away or conduct additional interviews with people in groups that already had sufficient participation. As a result, I interviewed 32 participants in total, with two to three participants per age group, for each gender.
Recruitment

Participants were recruited using a number of methods. Qualitative research often begins with identification of the group of interest, but with privacy anyone can be expected to have an opinion. This meant that there were in theory no restrictions on participation, however, I did not want to recruit only participants who had a vested interest in privacy issues. While these viewpoints are important, it was also important to speak with people who may not have thought about privacy as extensively. I believe that the process of coming to define one’s orientation towards privacy is as important as the final stated beliefs on the topic. This is especially true since, according to the theory of planned behavior, an awareness of the inconsistencies between one’s beliefs and one’s behavior may well lead to behavior or opinion change (Ajzen, 1991).

I sent out a brief email describing my study to my school, family, friend, and employment contacts asking if anyone knew of people who would be willing to participate, but specifying that my direct contacts could not be involved (see Appendix B for the general recruitment script, which was then adjusted for the specific situation and recruitment needs). I believed that it was important that the participants did not know anything substantial about my previous research, as the process of thinking about privacy issues may alter their perceptions of privacy or create demand characteristics such as wanting to appear more careful with their private information than they are in practice. I then asked participants if they knew of any other people who may be willing to participate in an interview. As a result, only five of the participants were people I had met previously or occasionally seen in social settings.
As the interviews progressed, my recruitment became more targeted in order to ensure that I had interviewed men and women in all age groups with a diversity of backgrounds. Some of my contacts and participants took the initiative to recruit more widely. For example, one friend of a friend posted a sign at the community centre where she volunteers and another posted a message on her Facebook page. Towards the end of the process I conducted more targeted sampling by asking contacts if they knew of anyone of a particular description (for example, men over 68 who grew up in Canada and do not work in the education field – in this instance I excluded people who worked in education because this field was already well represented in my sample) who may be willing to participate. While this approach was undoubtedly slower than putting an advertisement in a newspaper, I believe that it was preferable because I did not need to turn away as many participants and could recruit participants as needed, rather than having to schedule them far in advance and risk them becoming busy once the interview date arrived.

**Interview Procedures**

Once I had made initial contact with participants, I scheduled an interview date and time. I informed participants in advance that I audio record the interviews so that we could choose a place to meet that would be sufficiently quiet. Often the interviews took place in people’s homes, though they also sometimes occurred at my office, my home, or in a coffee shop. However, one interview in a coffee shop was found to be too loud and so we moved to a park bench instead. This location also provided some distractions, but this was also the case to some degree when children, pets, or people’s roommates or partner passed through the interview area. The other interview I had in a public place did
have some noise distractions, but this did not seem to bother my participant, who touched on a topic that many other participants found too private even to mention (sexual issues). The greatest concern I had in terms of location was that the presence of other people would inhibit the conversation. As a result, I encouraged people to select a private location or offered my office when it was convenient. One of my participants lived in a small apartment and so her husband was nearby, though he was watching television in an adjacent area. While I was aware of his presence, it did not seem to bother the participant, and she in fact discussed some private issues with more ease than most other participants.

I believe that if anything, these situations seemed to have more impact on my comfort than the comfort of my participants, and that is perhaps because I am a fairly private person and because I was responsible for the privacy of my participants. Luckily, the participants who chose these locations were generally less private. However, it is an important issue to consider in selecting interview locations, especially with more private participants. Public locations may not be ideal for some types of conversations, but the comfort of the participant is also important, and I did not want to suggest a location that would have lead the participant to feel uncomfortable. Ultimately, my approach was to recommend a quiet spot such as my office or the participants’ home, but to leave it to my participants to choose where to meet.

At the beginning of our meeting, I explained the purpose of the research study, showed participants the consent form and asked them to read it and ask me if they had any questions. Informed consent was obtained in writing prior to beginning the interview (see Appendix C), and there was no deception involved. Once informed consent was obtained, I began recording, using a digital audio recorder. Participants were asked to
make up a name that I could use in referring to their data (though in a few cases if they had not chosen one, I assigned a name that I felt was consistent with their age and gender). They were informed that every attempt would be made to make them unidentifiable through their quotes. This involved changing the names of people in their lives, changing references to identifiable places, and if necessary, altering idiosyncratic details or using descriptions instead of direct quotes. I also informed participants that while I would be asking them about privacy, I would not be asking them to divulge anything private, unless they chose to do so in their use of examples. These steps were taken in order to ensure that participants felt comfortable sharing their private thoughts and feelings. In some cases I provided this level of detail prior to scheduling the interview, and in one case a participant agreed to participate and then called to cancel prior to the meeting because of privacy concerns.

The interviews typically lasted approximately one hour, as I tried not to keep them beyond the time frame that they had agreed to in advance (30 minutes to one hour). However, some participants were happy to talk for longer and a few were less talkative, so the recorded time ranged from 28 to 78 minutes. Often the discussion continued beyond the recording as participants asked questions about me, our mutual connection, my interest in privacy, my schooling, my research, or specifics of certain technology (primarily Facebook since I often provided more explanation about my previous research after the interview).

Following each interview, I asked participants if they had any additional questions. Often they asked me what stage I was at in the research process and what I hoped to find from the interviews. I explained the process of obtaining a doctoral degree
and the specifics of my dissertation. I also attempted to summarize what I felt I had learned up to that point and explained what the final product would be. Many of the participants indicated that they had enjoyed the interviews and found the topic very interesting, despite not having thought about it very much prior to the interview. Some participants indicated that they would be interested in learning about my findings and I offered to send them the findings once I had finished.

Participants were then provided with $25 as a small token of appreciation and at the request of the University of Guelph Finance department, were asked to sign a form indicating their receipt of the money (see Appendix D). I hid the details that previous participants had entered in order to guard their privacy, and I explained that the purpose of the form was to ensure that I had provided the participants with the money. However, given the nature of the interviews and the focus on privacy, it is perhaps not surprising that several participants asked if they should use their real name and wondered whether I needed all of their details (the form asked for date, name, address and signature). As a result, I told them that they could use the name they created for the interview or leave out any information they would rather not enter, though none of the participants took me up on the offer.

**Materials**

I created a preliminary guide of the interview questions, which was designed to provide a broad understanding of the topic of interest, with sufficient room for elaboration (see Appendix E). The questions were developed by reviewing the existing privacy literature and using the knowledge I had gained while conducting several prior studies about privacy in social network sites. This background research provided me with
an understanding of some of the theoretical issues that may affect the management of privacy and sensitized me to topics that may be important to discuss with participants. This question guide was treated as a starting point for conversations with participants and additional questions were added as the interviews progressed. These questions (see Appendix F) were added in order to provide further detail, to clarify areas that I felt needed further explanation, and to follow relevant topics that were raised in discussions with previous participants. Corbin and Strauss (1990) note the importance of considering broad conditions surrounding the research, even if the research questions themselves are quite focused. As a result, the interviews began with general questions about privacy and then focused on the types of things that people consider private, the management of privacy in relationships, the relation of privacy to the self, and the approach to privacy when communicating using new technology.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

My approach to GTM combined Corbin and Strauss’s approach (1990, 2008), which outlines a set of canons and procedures that characterize research that uses GTM, with the more emergent approach advocated by Charmaz (Charmaz, 2002; Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). The first of Corbin and Strauss’s procedures describes the interrelation between data collection and analysis. Similarly, Charmaz and Henwood (2008) emphasize the importance of simultaneous data collection and analysis, and I will therefore describe these two elements together in this section.

As described in the *Interview Procedures and Materials*, data was collected through individual interviews, with a series of questions that served as a loose guide for the initial interviews and was then supplemented as the interviews progressed. The
interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed to enable line by line coding of the data (Charmaz, 2002). I transcribed the first few interviews myself and then enlisted the help of an experienced transcriptionist to transcribe half of the remaining interviews (see Appendix G for the confidentiality agreement). For each interview that I did not transcribe myself, I verified the transcript by listening to the audio recording prior to coding. This coding was done with the aid of computer software for qualitative research (MAXQDA) that has been used extensively by grounded theorists (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Data was initially coded based on the meaning that I perceived within a particular line of text, and was then compared with subsequent comments by the same and other participants. Codes were thereby combined, divided, renamed, and reordered based on the ongoing data collection and analysis. This process, called constant comparison (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008; Corbin & Strauss, 2008), involves merging the process of data collection and analysis by comparing new data to the emerging concepts, categories, and theory and adjusting these accordingly. Concepts are the basic units of information, categories contain groups of related concepts, and theory is built with these categories and from an understanding of participants’ processes related to the topic of interest (in this case, the process of deciding whether or not to share something).

According to Charmaz and Henwood, constant comparison must occur at each level of analysis. Additionally, these informational groupings must serve to account for patterns of variation, meaning that they must take into account the regularities in the data and that the researcher must search for more information when such regularities are not apparent (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). As the researcher analyzes the data, the concepts become more abstract, and these abstract interpretations are again checked against the
observed data (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). This checking process is done with existing data and by returning to the field to conduct more interviews, termed theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Once data collection has begun, theoretical sampling guides the process of further data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). However, Charmaz’s (2002) perspective is that theoretical sampling should be conducted later in the research process so as to allow data and research ideas to emerge without being forced into categories too early. In practice, I engaged in some degree of theoretical sampling earlier in the process where I added questions to the interview guide. For example, I observed that participants seemed to make a distinction between different types of information that I believed might have theoretical significance. As a result, I asked about this issue in subsequent interviews, but only after asking participants to discuss types of things that they found private without my direction first.

Throughout the research process, I met regularly with members of my dissertation committee to discuss the interviews, the research process and methodology, and the code system. These meetings helped me to clarify the ideas that I had about the interviews, my understanding of my participants’ approach to privacy and what it meant for the theory that I was developing. They also served as an opportunity to engage them in the interpretive process and receive critical feedback and advice. At various times I also consulted the existing privacy and psychology literature when issues were raised by participants or my own reflections on the interviews that I believed had been explored previously. Consulting the literature allowed me to learn how these issues had been approached by other researchers, though the experience of my own participants was
given equal, or in many cases greater weighting. This is an important issue since my goal was to create a theory that is grounded in data and in the current context, and as described previously, not all privacy research was conducted recently.

I also engaged in memoing, which is a system for keeping track of emerging concepts, categories, and theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The type of memo that one writes depends on the stage of research and the level of development of the theory (Strauss, 1987). In some cases they are designed to simply keep track of ideas or to elaborate on codes, concepts, or categories, and in other cases may serve to differentiate between categories. Essentially, memoing serves to externalize the inner dialogue that a researcher has during the research process. Theoretical memos also form the basis for the final research product. During the research process, these memos helped me to explore my thoughts on the data and to develop hypotheses about the relationship between concepts and categories, which were then tested in subsequent interviews. I also found that, in writing this document and getting feedback on it, my thoughts about the data and the analysis I had already conducted further evolved. As a result, the process of data collection and analysis was integrated with the writing process to an even greater degree than I anticipated. Reading more about the writing process in qualitative research, it became clear to me that revisiting the data during writing is a common occurrence and something that is in fact recommended by grounded theorists (van Manen, 2006).

In order to develop a grounded theory, some proponents of GTM advocate selecting one key category or concept as the central idea for constructing the substantive theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In conducting the interviews, I quickly discovered the substantial range and scope of privacy as a topic and in the ways that people think about
privacy. While I proposed to find answers to a number of related research questions in an attempt to bring the various pieces of the privacy puzzle together, it became clear that giving each of these questions equal prominence during data collection, analysis, and reporting would hinder the task of theory development. This issue may in part explain why researchers have not generally attempted to tackle the entire puzzle and instead focus on specific aspects of privacy. As a result, choosing one core category was an important practical step for ensuring that I developed a clear theory that went beyond simply describing the data.
CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS

During analysis I moved from a system of categories that described what privacy means to people, what issues they consider private, how they decide whether or not to share and what privacy related behavior they engage in, to an approach that was unified around a core category. I determined that the central aspect of the data is managing privacy. That is, the way that people manage their privacy and the process that they go through in order to decide whether to reveal something to someone or whether to keep it for themselves. This is the core story that the data tell, and each of the other pieces contributes to the story and helps to explain privacy management. For example, whether one shares a particular piece of information depends not only on one’s approach to privacy, but also on the information that is being shared and whom one is interacting with. As a result, this substantive theory of privacy management focuses on the decision process regarding any particular privacy decision (see Figure 1).
While I attempt to use participants’ language in describing the categories and the theory, in this case, I use the term management not because it was the word that participants used to describe their behavior, but rather because it is what participants described doing. At the core of this process is the person and who they are in relation to privacy. The information they are considering revealing, their relationship with the person they are interacting with, and the context in which they are interacting all impact the risks and benefits associated with revealing elements of themselves. These considerations in turn affect the decisions that people make regarding their privacy. People have a number of privacy-related behaviors at their disposal that help them to reach their desired level of privacy for a particular situation. When I asked people how
they dealt with their privacy, participants did not immediately identify what they did as privacy management. In fact, Edward did not feel that he had anything to manage because he felt that there were few reasons to keep something private. However, their description of the balancing and negotiation of their own needs, their relationship needs, and the needs of others reminded me of some of the other ways in which the word *manage* is used. People manage their lives, meaning that they balance the competing demands on their time and resources. They manage their finances, meaning that they choose where to spend their money and successfully monitor their savings and debts. They manage their subordinates, in that they direct what needs to be done and how it is done. They manage their emotions, meaning that they decide how to react to them and what to reveal of them. And they just plain manage, meaning they cope.

These various meanings of the word highlight the fact that, while privacy is something that is not necessarily consciously on people’s minds, they nonetheless make decisions about their privacy all the time. It is only under duress, when adequate levels of privacy are not achieved, or when someone is learning to manage privacy in a new environment that they think about it explicitly. In this way, management is something that has become automatic and is therefore often not considered. I will not get into details about how people’s approach to privacy developed, as it was not a core focus of my research, however, the situations that people described often showed the importance of making mistakes, observing others’ experiences, and learning from having revealed too much. As with privacy decisions themselves, how effortful a process this is depends on the person and their experiences, as well as on the people around them. To what extent
one successfully manages versus simply copes varies, as with all things related to privacy.

While I will describe each of the elements of my substantive theory in the following sections, I should note that in moving from a more descriptive set of codes and categories to a grounded theory of privacy management, some pieces of data were set aside. I had difficulty leaving these things for future projects because these pieces of data were in some cases very interesting (for example, how people developed their approach to privacy, what they had learned about privacy over their lives, their beliefs about technology and approach to using technology). However, they were not immediately relevant to the developing theory and continuing to focus on them would have meant that I could not fully direct my mental resources and my questions to the problem of privacy management. As a result, the following sections present a theory of the way in which people manage privacy in their lives, and the other issues that I encountered have been excluded from the present document.

**Privacy: Who You Are**

My goal was to learn about how people managed privacy in their lives, but in order to do this I first had to get a sense of what people meant when they used the word *privacy* and how they viewed themselves in relation to privacy. Speaking about privacy with people often gave me the feeling that essentially I was asking them, “Who are you?” For me, this is part of what made conducting the interviews so enjoyable. I soon found that every conversation was different and the examples and approach to the topic of privacy varied enormously, which made them extremely interesting. However in some ways, this also made the process of analysis more challenging. When I asked participants...
what privacy meant to them or how they managed it, conversation seemed to turn to core
elements of their personality and their approach to relationships. I had asked participants
if they could think of any ways of describing privacy and they provided a rich array of
metaphors, which I will describe throughout this findings section and summarize in the
discussion. I include Diane’s metaphor here because it highlights two aspects of privacy
that struck me through the interviews – privacy is something that is very personal in
nature, and yet it remains, on the whole, an unexamined part of one’s personality:

Privacy is like, like your fashion sense almost, like what suits you, what
you’re comfortable with, but there is no real, I don’t know. I haven’t given
it enough thought to have a really good reason, but it’s like you know, you
just, you might see a piece of clothing that someone would say this would
look great on you and it’s not me, right?

There were several key aspects to people’s approach to privacy, including their
perceived privacy, their level of openness, their sense of confidence, and their values.
Although there are areas where each of these concepts overlap, for example when people
described the extent to which they believed openness as a person and openness with one’s
information went together, I believe that each should be considered separately for a
number of reasons. First, people made an effort to distinguish them from one another and
to look for the relationships among privacy, sociability, and values. There were also times
when their stated privacy level seemed to conflict with their sociability or their values.
For example, Linda attributed her discomfort in speaking with me and answering
questions about privacy to her high level of privacy but also told me that she felt it was
important to be open and enjoyed sharing her opinions and experiences. Conversely, Maria explained:

I think I’m really open and I talk about things… I mean there was a point there, you know, renovating a house I felt, sometimes feel like all I’m doing is talking about my renovations. But yet my boss actually recognized and said, I don’t think you’re very [open], I don’t, I told him I’m pretty open and stuff and he said, ‘No, I think in some ways you’re private.’ I’d like to ask him that question, why he thinks I’m private.

Self Perception as (Not) Private

While many of the people I spoke with did not think about privacy very much, they generally had a strong sense of how private they were or were not. People varied in the extent to which they perceived themselves as private, with some people identifying as “a private person” and others identifying as “an open person.” In a few cases people based their self-description on others’ perceptions of their level of privacy, but in most cases they had their own opinions about themselves. While there was considerable variability between being very private and being very open with their information, people tended to identify with one end of the spectrum or another and then qualify their statements, as necessary. In addition, some people identified with both of these statements at varying points in our conversation, indicating that they may not be mutually exclusive or may not be true of all aspects of an individual person or of all situations.

I’m a private person. People who described themselves as private explained that they kept their information close. While some people were willing to describe themselves as private, there was also negative stigma associated with this description. Diane
described a tension where privacy is valued in Canada but so are outgoing personalities. As such, people often felt inclined to justify their need for privacy. For example, Ian explained: “My friends have said to me, ‘You’re very very private.’ And it’s not that I’m reclusive, it’s just that I, there’s a lot of things that I don’t need to share with people. I don’t feel I need to share with people.” Similarly, Lloyd defended his privacy as something that he wants to maintain, but not because of a need to hide something: “I mean, I’m not, I’m pretty private and reserved, like I said, but at the same time I’m not really like hoarding any secrets or something. I just like to, I’d rather not share everything, I guess, like things that are kind of sort of trivial, I guess, but they still, I don’t know, I still sort of have them logged in my brain.” Ian and Lloyd’s comments both highlight the way in which being private can be misconstrued as keeping secrets or having something to hide. Keeping or having secrets was generally believed to be different from privacy and participants seemed to feel that it implied misdeeds or a desire to hide something about themselves.

Several participants used metaphors for privacy that emphasized its fundamental importance. Describing privacy as a life force or water indicated that they believed it to be a basic necessity. Max remarked:

It’s one of the things that I do have control over in a world where there’s not always a lot of control on things. There’s so much happening to you externally that at least you can have the ability at guarding your privacy a little bit. It’s one thing to voluntarily give it away but if it’s taken from you then that’s, isn’t that the study why people become activists or something? That kind of an issue is a very strong issue, I think.
I’m not private, but. That said, even people who described themselves as private had numerous caveats around this description. For example, they would describe themselves as being unwilling to share information with people they do not know well or being private in comparison to friends. They also described a more deliberate process of deciding whether or not to share something. Indeed, John questioned the idea of being private or open with one’s information as two ends of the same spectrum. Instead, he felt that being open was one end of the spectrum and sharing more deliberately was at the other end: “I wouldn’t say that, I re-characterize that as saying I was maybe more on the end of being, like, putting more consideration towards what I do.” These issues lead to a tendency to descriptions of being “private, but” or open, but.”

Some people described privacy as a core issue and fundamental right, but one that was sometimes taken for granted by people who did not claim to value privacy: “Like if it was taken away from them I think they’d notice it isn’t there, right? We might take it for granted, especially here where it’s generally respected” (Diane). The idea of privacy as a fundamental right became especially apparent when people who did not describe themselves as private stumbled on exceptions to their general approach. I found myself looking for exceptions when people told me they were not private and I did find some examples. Several participants reported using privacy at various times in their lives, despite feeling that they were not private people. For example, while Edward did not consider himself a private person, his use of privacy to deal with transitions in his life indicated that privacy was nonetheless useful to him. In all of my conversations with people, privacy was something that was assumed to be attainable, whether or not it was currently infringed upon. In this way, whether people described themselves as ‘private,
but’ or ‘not private, but’, they always behaved as if there was the possibility of accessing privacy when needed.

**I’m not a private person.** However, just as some people were unapologetic about their need for privacy, so others were with their openness. Jasmine described her personality and comfort sharing with others: “I’m also the kind of person who would be willing to share things with strangers. Whereas some people are very, more closed with that. So I think that it depends on who you are.” Similarly, Joe explained that he does not hold back information between his relationships. “I would have to say no just because, uh, like, I’ll talk about anything Sarah and I do with my friends. Like, I’m not too private about that, that kind of thing. As for like, my family, I don’t really, same thing. Like, I don’t keep anything from anybody.”

While few people reported that they think about privacy often, people who described themselves as open indicated a level of effortlessness around the management process and did not feel that privacy was something that came to mind often. “No, I don’t have a plan or a policy, or, I don’t seem to have much to manage, I guess” (Edward). Similarly, Johanna described the difficulty of being private as effortful and therefore subject to failure: “I’m not a very private person, so I don’t worry too much about, I mean, if I have an opinion and people find out about it, oh well. If information gets leaked out that I kind of hoped wouldn’t be leaked. There’s a lovely verse in the bible… ‘What is done in secret will be shouted from the rooftops.’” In this way, Johanna linked privacy with secrecy and openness with morality. Some participants who reported being open with their information linked openness with goodness in this way, indicating a belief that a lack of privacy is not only about honesty, but also about being good.
However, even people who described themselves as very open were aware of the potential for interpreting that self-description negatively. Being open with one’s information and open as a person was generally seen as a positive thing, but several participants were careful to note that being open did not mean that they broadcast their information or promote their own interests. Again, this linked to the moral aspects of behavior since self-promotion is not good, but neither is secrecy.

**Openness**

Participants often described their approach to privacy in conjunction with their approach to socializing with other people. When I asked them about their level of privacy they often used terms like open and outgoing, or reserved and private. In first talking to them, I got the impression that they were talking about the same thing as information privacy, but after probing, it became clear that when they described openness or reservedness, they were not necessarily talking about their approach to their information. Upon reflection it became clear that when people distinguished privacy from openness, they were generally talking about their receptiveness to social communications with other people as opposed to their approach to their information. For this reason, I have titled this section *openness*, though I will also use the word outgoingness, since people also used that term. Once I began to understand this distinction, I probed further with participants about their beliefs about the similarities, differences, and relationship between these two concepts.

Participants’ descriptions of these various elements of privacy and sociability highlight the fact that common terminology is not necessarily in line with the terms used for key psychological constructs. Consistent with grounded theory methodology, and
because I did not measure actual levels of extraversion and introversion, I have used the terms that participants used to describe themselves. In some cases approach to privacy and approach to social interactions coincided, as with Johanna who is both outgoing and not a private person, but in other cases they did not. For example, Patrick is very talkative and social but considers himself to be very private and does not share his personal information, except in carefully chosen situations. As a result, people sometimes had to negotiate a tension between their own level of privacy and what they valued or felt that society valued.

**Open but private.** Several comments from participants clarified the distinction between being open as a person and being open with one’s information. For example, Roberta said, “I’m a pretty open person but I don’t go around telling people all about me, but I really like to be with people and I think I can make them feel comfortable in a situation like that, but I don’t come across as just saying everything about me.” This comment highlighted the way in which our terminology regarding privacy is insufficient for describing people’s experiences. As a result, Roberta had to describe her personality and then explain what she meant by the words she used. Charlie also described being both outgoing and private:

I mean, I keep my own information. I’m generally not very generous with uh, dishing out my personal information or my own private information unless I’m absolutely sure that the person or group or organization receiving it is going to use it for what they say they’re going to use it for. Right now it doesn’t matter, I’ll talk to you… But that’s only because I have the gift of the gab and I can talk.
When I asked Charlie to clarify what he meant by “the gift of the gab” he explained that being outgoing and talkative enabled him to choose what to share. Similarly for Patrick, being social is important, but so is controlling what he shares: “Because I am outgoing, because I’m a type A personality I control the message… I’m not an active sharer.” In this way, both Charlie and Patrick were able to socialize with others without compromising their privacy. Other participants felt that, while privacy and sociability did not necessarily vary together in theory, in practice they did because being outgoing is sharing about one’s self. For example, Ian explained:

You’re asking, is it related? And in a way it is. Uhm, I don’t want to reveal myself until I know who I’m revealing myself to. Because sometime when you open your mouth and you declare who you are, very clearly, and sometimes you can fake it. But most times you can’t.

Ian’s comment revealed self-reflectiveness and an awareness of privacy as more than simply what one says. He was conscious of the fact that it is difficult to say anything without revealing aspects of one’s self. This issue highlights the fact that even if privacy and openness are separate concepts, they must have some overlap in the way they impact behavior.

Openness was usually presented as a good thing, though in some cases it also presented a pressure to share more than is comfortable. This was another way in which people’s approach as both open and private sometimes caused them internal conflict. They wanted to be socially open but did not necessarily want to be open with their information. This issue sometimes posed a challenge when it came to connecting with other people. People reported wanting to be open to others and valuing social connections
but also valuing privacy. Some participants also felt that society valued openness and that this value was increasing in importance with the advent of new technology, which created pressure for them to share more information than they would choose to. For example, Jimbo explained:

Before people wouldn’t even consider that, you know, there was no such thing as Facebook. But now it’s like, there’s pressure to share, rather than the opposite. So the norm is moving towards being very transparent, and I think, overly personal, and of over-sharing private information.

**Open ≠ private.** Other participants did not feel that sociability and privacy could be separated. For example Johanna described her approach to social situations in relation to her approach to privacy: “I think people are rational. Like, I mean, I’m a social person, I’m an extravert so I have a book group. So I tell these ladies in my book group lots of personal private things and we all do.” Similarly, Lotus described: “Somebody who’s really open and sharing a lot about themselves, like, they’re going to draw more people in. So I feel like I have an outgoing personality and I’m more likely to share about myself.” Lotus’s comment indicates both the social value placed on being open and the way in which being outgoing is seen as being equivalent to not being private. Joe also felt that privacy and openness went together, not just for himself but also for people in his life: “Yeah that’s totally me. I’m that and Sarah is totally opposite from me. She’s a more private person, she doesn’t go out, she’s not one to go out and meet new people.”

Not only did some people feel that sociability and privacy were related, they also felt that these characteristics said something about people’s personality. While being outgoing was generally valued, there was also a sense that people who are outgoing may
be less trustworthy: “Some people who are shy are less likely to share about themselves and in some ways for a relationship partner that’s kind of made me think that some people might be more safe” (Lotus). Lloyd also felt that someone’s degree of sociability may impact their approach to privacy: “I know a lot of extraverts will just sort of blabber and what would stop them from sharing personal information that I’d given to them?”

These quotes highlight some of the positive perceptions of being introverted as being reliable and safe. However, the negative interpretation is one of introversion and secrets:

We’re okay with an introvert who looked morose having this deep dark secret. Like, oh, you could have seen that coming, but never saw this guy. He was so nice and friendly and open, what do you mean he was, you know, abusing his children? (Johanna)

Participants also described valuing being approachable and open and valuing when other people are open with their information. Bob explained, “I feel like no matter what the topic is, no matter what somebody asks about… there’s a way to discuss it.”

Another participant described the importance of being open even about topics that may be uncomfortable, such as one’s feelings. Joe explained how he came to value openness and learned to share how he felt about the events in his life:

I’ve had a lot of stuff going on in my life when I was a kid and stuff. My parents fought and stuff like that. So I mean, I always had to kinda, I, when I was young I kept it in, all that stuff I kept it in. And then finally when I got old enough to realize that you’re supposed to talk about the stuff then that’s kinda when it turned for me. When it started, I just let everything out.
In describing the value of openness it often related to the importance of relationships and the way in which being open fosters relationships. Edith explained, “I like to be more open than maybe some people… I find it hard to make connections with people that are very private, like, really private. Because then you’re like, it feels superficial.” In this way, Edith equated privacy with a lack of willingness or ability to make social connections. Similarly, Edward felt that in his life he had benefited from being open with others: “I think anybody that’s not open must not be as happy, they can’t be as content. It seems to me that it’s an extremely important part of one’s life. Otherwise why live it? Yeah, so it’s worked for us.” In this way, values of openness highlight a belief in openness with information as openness to social interactions.

**Confidence**

Participants referred to confidence in several different ways in relation to their privacy. I use the term confidence, but the word belies the complexity of the concept in that it refers to confidence in one’s self and one’s image as well as strength of conviction. Other words for this include strength, being secure (as opposed to insecurity), sense of self and self-image.

**Confident in revealing myself.** Bob described the way in which issues of self-confidence are related to privacy:

I don’t know. I’ve just always had a very strong sense of self and so I think that drives my feelings of privacy in a lot of ways. Because privacy seems like a lot of times it’s an identity issue. People want to control what their identity is to the public.
However, Bob was also reluctant to label this characteristic as self-confidence because he felt that it implied a certain level of arrogance. Iris did not approach this issue as confidence per se, but rather saw her personality as a reality that existed outside of people’s evaluation of her. Similarly, Samantha felt that worrying about what others thought was a pointless endeavor because it is not possible to control their feelings or thoughts. As she said, “Those people are going to judge you regardless.” For them, the issue of confidence had nothing to do with arrogance, instead it was related to the confidence to be one’s self since it is not possible to control other people’s perceptions. Several people indicated that they actively avoided people and relationships where they felt pressure to be a certain way, indicating that who they are is not up for debate and does not need to be hidden.

In his description of certain transitional points in his life, Edward further illuminated the link between confidence and privacy. In general, he felt strongly that confidence is an important element of character and something that should be encouraged in people. He also felt that privacy is in general neither useful nor good. However, he had experienced a few instances where his confidence in his convictions wavered and it was at these times that he felt the need for privacy. As he said, “There have been times when I was absolutely convinced that that is right and then it becomes painfully obvious that it isn’t.” These crises of confidence highlighted the importance of privacy for someone who generally did not find much use for it.

While participants generally did not describe actively working on giving a particular impression, some did feel that having privacy allowed them to keep private elements of themselves where they lacked confidence. Baba did not feel that others were
more right in their approach than she was, but she also did not feel comfortable revealing certain details about herself and so she valued privacy in those instances. Similarly, Max explained that his own insecurity might explain why he does not feel comfortable sharing too much of himself. Other participants described how their confidence levels had changed over time such that they no longer needed as much privacy. As Elizabeth said: “There’s an element, I think, of getting old when you just no longer give a shit. Yeah you get over 40 and suddenly, like, ‘Wow, I’m still bothered? I’m 40 for god’s sake.’ And there is something to that.” Similarly, Lotus felt that gaining confidence came with age and this lead to greater security: “I know how other people see you does have an impact but I think as you get older and more secure in yourself I think other people’s opinions of you are less likely to shake who you know you are.”

**Confident in not revealing.** Confidence may help people feel comfortable revealing themselves to others, but it also gives them the ability to decide not to reveal themselves should they prefer not to. This type of confidence was more important to some people than to others, but no matter how open they felt they were, all of the participants had some things that they preferred not to share in certain situations. In this way, confidence enables them to resist requests that they feel invade their privacy. Many of the participants described situations where someone had asked them something that they felt was private. Some people had difficulty declining these request. Diane described the struggle to hold back things that she would rather not share:

I still struggle with that. I still find that I let myself be sort of pressured into things, but definitely not as much as when I was younger. Like, I have a much better sense of who I am and am more okay with being rejected,
even if that’s what ends up happening. There are times when I just won’t compromise, or won’t compromise very much. Like I sort of am willing, but I have a limit.

While some participants did have difficulty holding on to their privacy, others felt confident keeping it. Edith felt that her confidence gave her the ability to maintain her privacy: “You don’t have to do what the other people are. If they’re divulging private things, you know, you don’t have to necessarily do it yourself… I feel strong enough myself that I don’t. I don’t if I don’t feel comfortable.” This confidence was seen as something that developed with age and experience. Many of the participants described how their approach to privacy had changed over time such that they no longer felt obliged to answer something they would rather not share. Maria explained:

I know with me, with age, it’s with age. I would have been more likely to do it when I was younger and that’s why I kind of talk to Gabriella about it. Yeah, definitely I would have. I would have given my information out more easily. And as I get older, and it’s not because, yea, it’s just because I want to say no. I don’t need to give you my information. There’s no reason why you should have my information. So it’s more of that stance. It’s more this, not feeling obligated.

In this way, Maria used confidence to fight the urge to respond to questions that she felt invaded her privacy. These questions were not necessarily invasive in their content but simply asking them posed an imposition. With age she came to recognize that she has a choice not to answer certain questions and her increased confidence enabled her
to exercise that choice. Anne described the relief that comes with this increased confidence:

Well, I think finally having reached a point in life where I no longer feel I have to explain why I say ‘no’ to things or why I say ‘yes’ to things. You know, it’s just I guess more or less a ‘take it or leave it’ because what you see is what you get.

This privacy, or rather, the ability to obtain privacy as needed, in turn leads to greater feelings of confidence. “I feel good to know that people, like not everybody, can see me in my lingerie on Facebook… I feel confident that not everyone can see that” (Lotus).

Values

People had a number of values that impacted their decisions to share or not share with other people. I have already described the way in which people value and feel that society values privacy and openness. In this section I present additional values that affect disclosure decisions. People reported valuing treating other people as they would like to be treated, being honest, and having a choice of how and what they shared.

Doing unto others. Participants described a number of beliefs and values that prescribe both how they should behave and how they believe others should behave. Some people referred to this as “the golden rule”, meaning that one should do unto others as you would have done unto you. Other people described it simply as others having a right to their own opinions, and the importance of not judging them. While the specific behavior that this value related to may have varied, the commonality was a respect for other people’s autonomy of opinions and actions. Johanna described how she teaches this
value to her children: “I often tell my children, your opinions are yours and you can have whatever opinion you want, you just can’t speak to me that way.”

In this way, doing unto others implies a provision of privacy and lack of intrusion into other people’s heads. This was not always easy for people to do as they did tend to have their own opinions, but they felt it was important not to share them where it intruded on other people’s privacy:

I really do believe it’s not my business to be judging other people, uhm, which is so easy to fall into. That’s one thing I always am fighting against with myself, is, everyone has their own way of doing things and that’s okay, even if they’re wrong. (Mary)

Throughout the interviews, I found myself considering this value and trying to reconcile my own perspectives on privacy with those that my participants stated. I consider myself to be a fairly private person and as a result I had no trouble relating to other people who also described themselves as private. But when people considered themselves to be not private, I found that I had to put more effort into understanding this perspective even though I appreciated the importance of hearing different perspectives. I strongly believe that the diversity of people’s perspectives on privacy represent a valuable and enjoyable diversity of personalities in the world and so I valued these different approaches and the importance of enabling other people to present their perspectives, no matter how different they were from my own. Furthermore, this range of standpoints serves as a critical perspective in the consideration of how people manage their privacy.
Being honest. Honesty was another value that related to privacy, though it did not necessarily mean openness. Some participants felt that being honest was an important attribute that in some cases lead them to share their information, but in other cases required that they indicate an unwillingness to share. However, several people felt that others might not share their values of honesty. Maria explained her experience with online dating: “It’s incredible how people would meet me and say, ‘Oh my god, you look like you did, you said what you said.’ I was like, ‘Yeah, why would I say anything different?’” However, Walter also found that because not everyone has the same expectation of honesty, his own honesty has sometimes been misinterpreted as rudeness.

While some people believed that honesty should guide their disclosures, others used honesty as a check on their own actions and believed that needing to keep secrets was a warning sign. Because they valued being honest, they felt that if they did not feel they could be honest then they were not behaving correctly. Once again, this linkage between privacy and secrecy highlighted the moral aspect of privacy. Lotus explained:

I feel like this has happened to me in the past, that if you have to hide something, then you probably shouldn’t be doing it. So I would prefer to just carry myself in a way that I don’t have to keep anything secret. Like, my parents can know about it, my employers can know about it.

Valuing choice. The importance of choice came out in a number of ways. Many participants referred to the ability to choose what to share as an essential element of privacy. Having this ability means that when they share they are doing so freely and without pressure from other people. As Charlie described, “It enables me to share or confide, you know, anything personal about myself that I wish to because I wish to do it.”
Similarly, those that valued this right conferred it to others: “I wouldn’t give another friend’s, that I considered his private information. If he wanted to give it out to the other friend he could, but I wouldn’t” (Midas). In this way, choice indicated a freedom to make one’s own decisions in relation to privacy.

Taking the importance of choice further, some participants used the word control to describe their privacy. They wanted to be able to control what information was released about them and what happened to it from there. This was an important element of privacy, particularly online, but it also related to relationships and being able to share one’s own story. This issue of control relates to the power that others seize in sharing their information without their consent. People who had experienced someone else sharing their information felt that their privacy had been breached, as in Baba’s example:

It amazes me, I’ll be standing there and somebody will tell them my story, and I think, ‘That’s my story, why are you telling it?’… I don’t know why.

I guess it’s just, it’s my story, it belongs to me. ‘I own it, why are you using it?’

For Edith, controlling her information was not a strong driver, and she also recognized that there are elements of privacy that are beyond control. For example, interacting with one’s children in public gives others a wealth of information about you, about how you raise your children, and other beliefs that might otherwise be considered private. While many of the participants recognized that some private things are beyond control, others emphasized the importance of personal responsibility in privacy protection. As D.P. said, “If you don’t want something out there you have all the rights in the world not to put it out there.” Similarly, Bob felt that he could control what he shared:
“I would never ever let out anything that I didn’t think, that I wasn’t willing to get out.”

In this way, participants valued the ability to choose or control their information, to varying degrees. Values aside, they also varied in their beliefs about their ability to control their information.

**Privacy Considerations**

When people described their approach to managing privacy, they provided a series of caveats. In some ways, the caveats provide a richer explanation of the decision to share or not share than people’s individual approaches. People were not always able to articulate how they decide whether to share something, and the process was sometimes described as relying on a “gut feeling” and involving an element of risk. Anne explained: “Well I first go into a situation it’s very important. I think I have my feelers out all over the place. And that becomes less an issue if I continue to be a part of that situation.”

Feeling out the people and the situation was a process that was sometimes difficult to put into words, as highlighted by Iris: “Oh dear, you got me. If it felt ok to do it you’d do it, I guess.” It was also sometimes difficult for people to know whether they made the right decision: “Yeah, it’s certainly a grey area and I mean, you do your best to judge which way you should go” (John).

Despite the complex and fluid nature of this decision, participants also described the process as a weighing of the various options or a series of management decisions. As a result of this fluidity, the simplest answer to my questions about how they decided whether or not to share came from Elizabeth: “Basically, there isn’t a definitive answer to that. It depends.” Lotus described some of the things that it depends on: “It’s very contextual. It’s who, what, where, when, why, right? Then I guess you’re, I never
realized that you’re constantly judging. Is the person safe? Can other people hear? Is this a space where I can…?” The ordering and weighing of these considerations varied from person to person and situation to situation. In some situations or with some people one element may take greater importance or even drop off the list of considerations entirely. For example, for some participants, their default action was to share information, unless it was seen to have an unnecessary negative impact, and for others, their default was not to share, unless it was of high importance to the relationship. However, these are simplified examples, and generally people considered who they were sharing with, what information they were sharing, what the risks or benefits might be, and contextual elements that may override privacy or increase its importance. I have chosen to present these considerations in this order because I felt from my discussions with participants that the relationship was of primary importance and was key to determining whether or not a particular piece of information was considered private. The context surrounds the person and impacts the risks and benefits of sharing.

**Assessing the Person and the Relationship**

Who they were sharing with was one of the most often mentioned elements that influenced a person’s decision whether or not to share something. There were a number of considerations that lead participants to feel that they would be willing to share with someone, some of which applied to both existing and new relationships, and others that applied only to one or the other.

**Trust.** Trusting someone was one of the most common reasons for sharing with them. To put it simply, “The more trust, the less privacy” (Baba). Samantha described trust in a similar way and felt that it was a core element of privacy. When I asked
participants what other words they associated with privacy, trust was a common response.

Trust was such an important issue that even people who described themselves as very private felt that if trust was there they would have few barriers. For example, Max described himself as quite private, but trust was the factor that would override that privacy: “If it’s me and I trust the person, then yeah I’ll confess my soul, right?”

Questions that were described as an invasion of privacy typically were ones asked by someone who had not established the appropriate level of trust. Elizabeth described the way in which a bridge must be built to enable one person to access another’s private world: “You don’t ask questions unless you build a bridge first. So you can’t cross over and ask really intimate questions unless you build a bridge of trust. So if that happens it will feel like an affront.” This metaphor was one that resonated with other participants when I repeated it to them: “Exactly, exactly. There’s got to be the trust that these people are going to handle the information in uh, with the respect it deserves” (Ian).

Given the inherent importance of trust to privacy decisions, I felt that it was important to understand what trust meant to people. Like privacy, it was a somewhat difficult thing to put into words: “I was going to say trustworthy but I don’t really mean that. I don’t know it’s a feeling that you get, I would think… You just feel that ok, you can tell them and they’d keep it” (Iris). An element of trust Iris alluded to is being confident that information shared with someone will not be shared further. Johanna explained that in her relationship with her group of friends, she trusts that information will not be distributed to other people, “I trust them enough that they’re not going to broadcast how I feel about things… So it’s sort of like confidentiality that’s sort of an
implicit contract between friends.” This trust affects her approach to the relationships and means that within those relationships she can share freely.

Typically trust was something that increased within an existing relationship, and for this reason, some people found it difficult to trust companies or technologically-mediated situations. As Jimbo explained:

Here’s the core issue: trust. Do I trust the medium, do I trust the person? I don’t trust the internet at all. I don’t trust the people who are doing it for their own motives. If I talk to someone on a one-to-one basis about something I better trust them.

**Judging who to trust.** Judging who to trust is something that participants typically described as a feeling that is built over time and experience with a particular person. As a result, some people chose not to share anything until they had a chance to assess the other person and determine whether it was safe to share with them. For Lloyd, this judgment process was important because he believed that his standards of privacy were greater than other people’s: “I’ve found you can’t hold people to the same standards so you have to exercise your own caution.” Some participants reported a deliberate process for determining whether someone could be trusted. For many people this involved starting by sharing something relatively insignificant: “I guess in any relationship you start off and share little bits and you see how that’s treated. It’s like, testing the water, right?” (Mary). Other ways of testing the water were asking questions related to the topic that they wanted to talk about, telling stories about similar occurrences with other people and judging the reaction, or eliciting disclosure from them in order to determine what kind of person they are. Joe explained:
Depending on what kind of feedback they give you. If it’s bad then I’d just totally forget the whole thing. Then I know, like alright, this is not the person to talk to about that. And then again, on the other hand, if they give you something good then, like, okay I can go into the actual thing that I wanted to talk to him about.

In most cases though, the process for judging whether someone could be trusted was not a deliberate one. Each time they shared something it was seen as a risk, but with time and a history of interactions where the person had behaved in ways that were consistent with their expectations, the feelings of risk decreased. One of the key expectations is that whatever they share will not be repeated. Joe explained, “I guess just like, you know, how well they can keep your private secrets or whatever. You know, if they’re out telling everybody else and somehow it gets back to you, I would think, ok, rethink talking to that person.” Similarly, Walter explained that how people treat the trust that he has given them would directly affect how he would share in the future: “If every time I tell you something you’ve betrayed my trust, even if you’re close knit in my circle, it’s you know, ‘screw you’, I’m not gonna, you know, ‘What am I doing next weekend?’ ‘It’s none of your business.’” As Walter described it, a betrayal of trust would impact his relationships to such a degree that he would not share even trivial information in the future.

Betrayal of trust was a key reason not to share again, but another was the reaction that they received to their disclosure. Roberta described one friendship where she had learned not to share anything personal:
I think it’s just a knowledge, knowing the type of person you’re dealing with. It’s not even so much that she’s going to tell anybody what I say. It’s her reaction, I think to it, and it’s like, ‘Why did I bother telling her that?’ That’s what it is.

Similarly, Elizabeth explained the way in which acceptance in past disclosures leads to future disclosures: “I’ll see how you handle that piece of information. If you handle it where I don’t fear rejection from your response then I might tell you more about my life. It’s kind of that process.” In this way, the process of trusting someone is one that involves taking risks and learning from mistakes. In some cases what they learned about the other person led them to disclose more in the future, and in other cases it led to fewer disclosures or an end to the relationship.

Regardless of the consequences to a specific relationship, participants reported honing their skills at judging the character of other people and what to share with them. As Edith explained, “It’s funny because I feel like I’m still learning all the time.” This is another issue that relied largely on “gut feeling”, as Roberta put it. Trust was something that could not necessarily be assessed but often had to be felt. Evelyne explained:

I think sometimes it’s just instinctual. It’s the way personalities, you know, you just go in and you see what they bring, you might have an assessment for a minute or two, but I don’t think it’s necessarily a sort of a conscious assessment even. Just something that you just, you know, you in your mind just sort of instinctually assess that and you think, okay, that’s it.
In addition to the sense that people get about the character of another person, there are some specific clues that people used to judge whether that person could become a confidante. Their own experience was important, but so was their observation of the way the person interacts with other people. Lloyd explained that observing their behavior towards other people is a big clue to how they might behave with him: “If they have a ton of friends that they go through and there’s a bunch of people who they were best friends with last year and now they’re bitter enemies, yeah, this probably, someone’s probably at fault there.” Similarly, Evelynne observed how people talked about others and John was conscious of the reputation that someone had. Their social circle was another consideration in assessing their trustworthiness. This involved not only their interactions with other people, but also the level of risk involved with sharing with them as a result of the types of connections they have with others.

**Professionals.** Luckily, some relationships come with trust built in and so do not require the complex set of judgments needed to assess new relationships. Relationships with people in professional roles typically fell into this category, since the other’s purpose is not in question – the reason for sharing is to access assistance oneself. Physicians, priests, lawyers, and therapists were all described as being trustworthy because they were legally or morally bound to keep client confidences. At times my own role was also described in this way, both because I had laid out the terms of my agreement not to use their information for any purposes other than those described in our confidentiality agreement, and also because of my role as a researcher and psychologist. Jasmine explained that if she were sharing something that she felt was truly private, the only person she would tell about it is someone who is legally required to keep her secret.
Bob explained that those relationships are different from other relationships because of the assurances that are built into them: “You’re giving information that you wouldn’t otherwise give… You’re opening your private thoughts, releasing something from the private domain of your head that you otherwise wouldn’t have. Because there’s been a promise made to you that that won’t be repeated.” Edith explained, “I mean in a situation with a doctor I wouldn’t have a hard time. I would be able to share anything if it’s going to help me.”

**Privileged relationships.** In many cases, people shared something because they had a particular relationship with the other person. Certain family relationships, long-time friendships, and intimate relationships were given privileged status such that an assessment of trust was not or no longer needed. These relationships were often based on trust, but there were additional elements that characterized them. Some of these factors were unsaid, or described simply as closeness or quality of friendship: “Just how close I am to the person I’m talking to, to be honest. I have to be comfortable with the person I’m talking to. They would have to be a really close friend” (D.P.). Closeness was also described as layers of an onion, with those closest having a more intimate relationship. When I shared this metaphor with other participants it resonated with them and they provided additional metaphors with a similar meaning. Other metaphors described relationship partners as concentric circles or orbiting planets with varying levels of overlap.

This closeness implies not only intimacy, but also a shared history, as indicated by Lloyd: “It’s definitely something I wouldn’t share with someone unless I knew that I had established some kind of attachment to the person beforehand.” This description of
attachment to another person also implied a shared future, or commitment. Diane described these relationships as privileged because the commitment is based on caring not need: “I guess it’s information no one really needs, right? So to get it is a privilege because of that alone, like it should be people who are involved in your life and care about you so they have it for the right reasons.” Other relationships were privileged because of the end goal, though they had not yet stood the test of time. For example, Lotus described her approach to romantic relationships:

I guess the other thing I would say about that is that kind of, ideas about, like, honesty and lies. Like, I mean I feel very uncomfortable, especially in romantic relationships, lying because I like to be on a foundation of honesty and trust.

In privileged relationships people wanted to share in order to further the relationship. Essentially, sharing within privileged relationships is part of what makes them special: “You want to save those things for the people that matter” (D.P.). Just as they wanted to share with those closest to them, they also hoped for some level of reciprocity. As John put it, “I don’t particularly count on people to meet my openness expectations, I just kind of consider it a courtesy.” When people did share with someone with whom they felt they had a privileged relationship, they felt that doing so strengthened their bond. Samantha explained, “I think that’s how friendships grow. You get to know the other individual on a deeper level… You know things about them, you know why, what makes them tick, what makes them happy, sad, what annoys them.” This sort of reciprocity also typified privileged relationships.
Elements of the relationship. Participants also reported that they tailor their disclosures to the norms of the relationship. In fact, Charlie’s description of privacy highlights this fact: “Privacy is information, thoughts, opinions that, as I can say, you can share with some but you don’t share with everybody.” People generally felt that they had friendships with greater or lesser levels of intimacy and as a result, they did not share equally with everyone. However, intimacy was not the only relevant issue and other details of the personalities and relationship came into play. Ann explained, “There’s certain things you might share with your child that you don’t share with your husband or vice versa.” Joe felt that he was very open with everyone in his life, but after reflecting further, he realized that there are things he would keep private from certain family members.

Characteristics of the person. In some cases, participants may not have had any relationship with someone, or may have had a more limited one with them, and yet decided to share nonetheless. Their decision to share was sometimes because of a shared role or shared experience, as described by Baba: “I blab about not sleeping at night to people who don’t sleep at night… You do need people that have the same problems that you can discuss it with.” Having these common experiences led to feelings of comfort at discussing a particular topic. For example, I was pregnant at the time that I conducted my early interviews and when one of the participants saw this, she disclosed to me that she had just found out she was pregnant. This happened in the early moments of our meeting and so we had not yet formed any sort of relationship. In addition, she was only a few weeks pregnant, which is something that, in my experience as a pregnant woman, people often considered private. However, I was in the position of having just experienced some
of the feelings and having some of the questions that my participant had and so we shared a common role. As a result, we were able to discuss issues that might otherwise be considered private and might not be relevant to other people who did not share that same role.

Participants may also have determined that the person they are speaking with has a common interest, and so in that case, the common interest might be considered good conversation, whereas in other cases it may not be seen as being of interest to the other person. While a shared role may lead to feelings of similarity and closeness, in other cases it led people to rule out the possibility of a relationship. Several people felt this way about making friendships at work and therefore did not want to share personal details in that context. Evelynne explained, “In normal circumstances at work I don’t think it’s necessarily advisable… I think a lot of people might regret that.”

Deciding to share with someone else was sometimes as simple as having a feeling of connection with them. Anne explained, “Just some people that you warm to quite easily and others that you just feel not that drawn to.” People tended to enjoy experiences where they met “a kindred spirit”, as Linda put it. Patrick, who generally preferred not to share his feelings, described having an experience where he connected with someone quite unexpectedly and shared things that he had not been able to previously. In this case, the relationship was a professional one, but for him that role alone was not enough, and the feeling of connection was essential. I found that this same dynamic seemed to affect my interviews in that some conversations seemed to flow smoothly and easily and others were more effortful. These differences were not only attributable to differences in privacy between participants because I had several conversations with quite private people that
occurred with ease. Sometimes, it seemed that we had a connection that enabled disclosure and a lessening of privacy boundaries.

At times, participants also attributed their disclosures to the skills of the other person at eliciting information. This ability to elicit disclosure was not usually presented as a negative thing, but simply something that they realized after the fact or knew to be true of certain friends. Some people also felt that if someone chooses to ask a question or make a statement, then they are indicating their willingness to hear a response, no matter what it might be. Walter described this questioning process as the initiation of a contract between two people: “When you ask a question about ‘XYZ’ you’re giving me your consent to discuss it.”

**Considering the Nature of the Information**

When participants described the types of things that they believed were private, there were a few key things that they considered. If the information belonged to someone else it tended to fall into a different category than information that was theirs alone. I will discuss information of this type when I consider how people deal with other people’s information (see *Privacy Behavior: Managing Other People’s Privacy*). In some cases information was shared between two or more people, and in that case they had their own and the other person’s sense of privacy to consider. Information that did belong to them (alone or in part), generally fell into one of three categories: Functional Information, Emotional Information, or Normative Information.

It became clear fairly early in the research process that people distinguished between different types of information and activities that might be private, but the way in which these differed became clear only gradually. In addition, I had considerable
difficulty naming the types of privacy because there is some overlap between the
categories at the subcategory level. For example, banking personal information numbers
(PIN) are private in a different way than one’s spending habits. The clearest distinction
came as a result of the properties of the information in these categories, especially the
way this information was managed and the reasons for keeping it private, or
consequences of revealing it. Some things were private because they needed to be in
order to function effectively, some were private because they had an emotional
component, and others were private because society generally dictates them to be and
therefore revealing them may lead to judgment.

These distinctions seem quite clear now, but it was a revelation of sorts to me
because when I first considered the types of things people share there seemed to be a lot
of overlap between things that people treated quite differently. In some of my early
interviews, several participants started by considering only functional information and
did not mention privacy in the context of relationships. For example, when I asked Ann
about privacy in relationships she responded, “I don’t think people think about
relationships as privacy… When you say privacy to a person I think they think in terms
of their personal information out there in the world.” In fact, these participants were
somewhat surprised to find that I was interested in the way they manage information in
their interactions and claimed to have never thought of privacy in any sense other than
the security of their information. Participants’ focus on privacy and information security
was initially a source of frustration to me because I saw this type of information as
simpler and therefore less in need of investigation. Over the course of those interviews,
we gradually touched on other types of privacy and participants highlighted some of the ways the types of private information are different.

It also became clear through these and subsequent interviews that these various types of information are both the same and different. They are all aspects of privacy, but they are managed in different ways, primarily because of the consequences of disclosing them and the nature of the disclosure decision. Had I not explored the more straightforward (in my view) functional information with participants, the reasons for the distinctions between different types of information would not have become clear.

**Functional information.** Participants generally agreed that some pieces of information needed to be kept private only in certain situations and for particular reasons. This type of information included things like contact information, certain aspects of finances and banking, one’s Social Insurance Number (SIN), Health Card number and other pieces of identification. This information is of a functional nature, and is different from things that are private because of more emotional reasons. Samantha explained, these pieces of information “can mess you up if someone else were to get a hold of them.” People also felt that they had less control over this type of information in that it could get out despite their best efforts to keep it private. They also did not always feel that they were well equipped to maintain this private information, especially when using technology. However, the reasons for sharing it were much clearer than with the other types of information.

**Contact information.** While information such as name, address, email address and phone number were not considered private per se, they have implications for privacy and so were discussed as private in some ways. Several participants pointed to the phone
book as an indicator of their privacy on this issue and seemed to use a logical process for determining why their number is not private, or is not exactly private. Johanna explains, “I guess we distinguish it [this type of privacy] because we’ve had things like phone books for a while now.” Things that are in the phone book cannot be considered private because they are publicly available, but, this is largely true only because the choice has already been made. As Maria explained, “I won’t, say, put my number, my name in the phone book, but if they automatically do that doesn’t bother me.” Having their information in the phone book or online therefore does not indicate much about their privacy: “I just haven’t taken it off. But it’s not because of a firm belief that it should be there (Edith).” While phone numbers can be made private, doing so requires an action that is effortful and has a financial cost.

**Banking details.** All of the participants I spoke with said that they were concerned about keeping their banking information private. This type of information was considered private primarily because it needed to be in order to serve its purpose. Bank account numbers, credit card numbers, PINs and the like were private only because of the purpose they served. As Edward explained, “It isn’t going to be effective if it isn’t private.” This comment highlights the way in which this category of information is different. Banking details do not serve any emotional purpose; they simply enable you to keep your money in your bank account. Similarly, a piece of information such as one’s mother’s maiden name is not private because of the family history that it provides, but because it is often used as a banking security question. Bob found this issue with privacy strange: “There’s things that are private that are ridiculous that they’re private. For
instance, your mother’s maiden name— anybody can look it up, but it’s used as a security mechanism, but it’s public record.”

**Identification numbers.** Participants were concerned with keeping their identification card numbers private because of the amount of information that it released about them and perhaps also because they had been taught to guard these cards carefully. In part, these cards provided proof of identity and access to valued services (such as health care, in Canada). Social Insurance Numbers were of particular concern because they provided access to government services and a wealth of personal and financial information. As a result, all of the participants considered their SIN private and would be unlikely to share it unless required to do so. Interestingly, the number of situations where SINs are required was felt to have increased since they were first introduced. Participants pointed out that many institutions now regularly require one’s SIN in order to provide services, especially financial services and to hire people for jobs. For example, Mary generally was not concerned about keeping her information private but did feel that the way SIN cards are used goes too far and does violate privacy: “The only one that bothers me is the SIN number … You can’t even get a job anymore without them having all the information.”

**Emotional information.** In contrast to functional information, emotional information is a category of private information that is much more idiosyncratic. Information and details about things such as experiences, opinions, feelings, financials, health, and habits are all things that may be considered private, depending on the person and who they are speaking with. All of these pieces of information have some emotional content, and it seemed that the more emotionally-charged an issue was, the more likely it
was to be considered private. Elizabeth explained, “Anything that’s personal, that’s causing some kind of an emotional reaction from me, I’m sad, I’m disappointed, I’m angry, maybe even ecstatic.” Johanna viewed privacy as a quadrant, with private and public on one axis and personal and social on another. In her conceptualization of privacy, this type of information would be both private and personal in that it is about one’s self and it is something that can be kept. In this sense, personal information can be controlled by the owner and either released or not. In theory, this is also true of functional information, but participants felt that technology and other factors eroded their ability to control that information.

*Thoughts and feelings.* While all types of information in this category may have an emotional component, thoughts and feelings about things are people’s responses to the events and experiences that they encounter. As a result these are things that happen internally and so people have a choice as to whether or not to share them. Max explained that he did not always want to release his thoughts and observations about the world. In fact, a few people believed that these internal experiences are the only things that are completely private. For example, Bob said, “The only thing that’s truly private is your own thoughts in your head and, I mean, after that there’s, you know, a gradation of privacy.”

Participants described keeping this type of information to themselves and feeling protective of it. Ian explained, “Privacy is something I hold close, okay? Privacy is… my inner thoughts, my inner feelings, uhm, it’s a very important thing… So it’s something that I want to protect. Okay, like I feel like putting my arms around that.” Participants felt that this is information that they should not have to share and demands for it made them
uncomfortable. Lloyd described how invaded he felt when his girlfriend wanted to read his childhood diary. Even though he had shared many of the experiences with her, he felt that the thoughts and feelings that he had expressed were private and he did not want to share them.

Some participants reported that these types of things were things that they worked on internally. They liked to be able to work through their thoughts and feelings on their own. Others explained that part of the reason for keeping feelings to themselves is that they did not want to experience them again. For example, Baba explained, “I don’t share really deep emotional things with people, you know... I don’t even share them with myself, most of the feelings that are, really mean a lot to me… I’m not sharing them with people because it would be bringing them up and I don’t want to do that.”

Transitions. When people were involved in a transition of some type, they were especially private. For example, Edward described a time where his opinions about something changed and he needed privacy during this transition in order to determine his new perspective. In this case, his current opinions or feelings may be temporary and so he did not want to share them until he was sure of them. He equated this with preparing a surprise, for example a surprise birthday party, which is private only because it is not yet complete. Other types of transitions include ones where they are trying to come to a decision, such as the decision whether or not to end a relationship or move to a different job. Feelings and opinions may also need to be worked out, as in situations where people were trying to determine their feelings in response to a new piece of information or were experiencing a change in religious belief. Changing religious beliefs, or even being unsure of what one’s beliefs are was a difficult thing for people to discuss. In these cases,
people did not want to share what they were feeling because there was the possibility that they may feel differently later – there was a recognition that their future self may not agree with the opinions that the current self was considering. In these cases, people felt private about their opinion because of the potentially transient nature of their opinions but also because of the desire to be certain about the opinions or feelings that they present.

Some people wanted to work on these transitions on their own, whereas others wanted to work through them with other people. If they did share details of transitions with other people though, they were letting them enter their private thought process. Jasmine explained:

   If I haven’t fully worked through in my head or how I’m feeling, how I’m gonna respond to a situation then that’s what makes it private. Because I’m not there yet. It’s like a draft email I have to maybe work through it before I hit send… I need to talk through things and get opinions from other people before I make my decisions.

*Formative experiences.* Participants reported that they held certain experiences close and most people had aspects of their past that they would rather not share. Lotus described these details as things that people had to earn and were therefore not for more general disclosure. Similarly, Edith explained what she considered private: “I think it would be, sort of, be things that, things in your life that happened in the past maybe. Things that may have made, make you the person that you are today.” However, she pointed out that these things were not private from her husband. While the facts of the experiences may not be considered private, the details often were. Evelynne explained,
“I’m pretty open to that, but I wouldn’t necessarily go into detail within the detail, if you know what I mean.”

Sometimes these experiences were things that participants were not proud of, or as Edward described, “most, I think would come in that category where one would later say that they wish they hadn’t done it.” In some cases, these were things that they were later able to reflect on and view more lightheartedly, but in other cases they kept them private because of the potential to hurt others or themselves. As with thoughts and feelings, these experiences tended to be emotional and sometimes they were private because they were upsetting. For example, Samantha did not want to talk about her mother’s death because she might become upset in front of other people. From Edward’s perspective, this sort of information was fact and therefore could not be kept private, whereas Samantha viewed it as private because it had an emotional component.

**Family and close relationships.** Participants felt that some matters are private to them, others are private within their family or within particular relationships. The privileged relationships that participants described came with their own privileged information as well. In part, this information was private because it was shared, but it was also private because it impacted people emotionally and because they felt protective of their family and friends. Again, the types of things that were private were at the level of details, rather than generalities about these relationships. Evelynne explained, “I would only share stuff about my children that’s general… Even if they’re having any problems or whatever, even to my close friends.” Iris also felt strongly that activities, events, and opinions expressed within the family should stay there: “Family things, they should remain in your family.”
Keeping family information private was a lesson that several of the participants remembered learning as children. For example, Charlie described receiving a clear message about what could be talked about and what could not: “I think it all stemmed back to the discipline… to get the message through that this is our business and it’s not their business.” Iris also remembered learning these lessons and teaching them to her children and grandchildren. Similarly, Maria, a single mother, described how her daughter seemed to have instinctively learned that information in their house stays with them and information in her father’s family is private to them. In this way, people learned the norms of their family environments. However, other participants described a different process, where they became more open about family information as they grew older, thereby freeing themselves of these family rules. This process may have occurred as a result of a redefinition of family, in the sense that it occurred when people moved out on their own and thus away from their parents.

**The little things.** As with the private goings-on in their homes, some participants felt that their daily habits and details were private. Max remarked at the level of detail that some people provide: “There’s a certain level of personal details that I wouldn’t want to expose.” Several people described this type of information as fairly trivial, but something they wanted to keep to themselves regardless. These things were sometimes habits, idiosyncrasies, small details such as what kind of pajamas one wears, or just “plain old everyday business”, as Roberta put it. Lloyd explained:

I think the things that I keep inside aren’t really, they’re not like a burden or anything. Like, I’m not bottling anything up or anything like that, they are just small kind of silly things that help shape the person I am today,
kind of thing. And even when I have shared them in the past because I’ve
been pressured into it, the reaction was just like, ‘Oh, well that’s kind of
dumb that you would keep that from me.’

Similarly, D.P. felt that even though these things are trivial, keeping them is
important. As a result, he described his privacy as “red smarties”, because the things he
keeps private may be fairly small and insignificant, but they are nonetheless important
and enjoyable. Smarties are candy-coated chocolates in a variety of colors and a
longstanding marketing campaign showed people saving the red ones for last, meaning
that they are saving the best for last. I found this metaphor interesting because it was so
different from the other metaphors that people used to describe privacy. While most
metaphors centered on the protective aspects of privacy, red smarties highlights the
enjoyment of private experiences. It also illustrates the way in which the ability to obtain
privacy is valued even if the things that privacy protects would otherwise be considered
relatively inconsequential.

**Health.** Participants felt that details of their health were private and they were
reluctant to share them. This reluctance to share health information tended to be the case
where people had more serious medical conditions, or where they were concerned about
such a condition. For example, Patrick described the issues associated with having a
lifetime heart condition. He knew from experience that sharing this information could
have many unintended and negative consequences and so he was very careful about how
and to whom he shared this information. Bob and Lotus both described how they would
feel if they were to find out about a major health concern such as an unwanted pregnancy
or HIV status and believed this would be a situation where privacy would be essential.
Similarly, participants reported being sensitive about having their information shared in a medical context, both with the doctor and inadvertently with other patients in the waiting room. Misunderstandings about health issues were also seen as an invasion of privacy, as in Anne’s example: “It might be… I’m sitting in the waiting room of the oncology hospital and someone comes up and says, ‘Oh you poor dear, what cancer do you have?’… You know, that kind of thing would be quite off-putting.” Some people considered their age to be private and in part, it seemed to be related to a concern about the assumptions that others would make about their health and ability to take care of themselves.

In some cases, health and family information overlapped. Several participants had experienced the invasiveness of being asked why they do not have children, or why they do not have more children. Baba explained, “It’s an uncomfortable question to answer. If it’s, ‘I don’t care for kids’, or you’re having a problem or something and you don’t particularly want to, I won’t say admit it, but talk about it.” Interestingly, the overlap between health and family is a point at which many privacy boundaries change. As I mentioned previously, I was pregnant at the time of my early interviews. Once pregnancy is observable, it seems to open the door to many conversations. When I was not observably pregnant, strangers would rarely ask me about my health, family life, or plans for children, but being pregnant changed this. In part, it confirmed that I was planning on having children but it also seemed to open a door to more personal questions. People suddenly felt comfortable asking how I was feeling, whether I had been ill, where I was having my baby, whether I had other children, whether I was planning on having more, or even whether becoming pregnant was planned.
Health and sexual matters also tended to be considered private, though Charlie described finding humor in the side effects of his blood pressure medication. He recognized that his resulting erectile dysfunction was something that his wife considered a private matter and that negatively affected their sex life. In his case though, he chose to share it in certain situations in order to relieve tension and help other people.

**Financial details.** There were several aspects of people’s finances that they considered private. While they may or may not feel that general aspects of their financial status are private, people generally felt that details of their finances are. As Baba explained, “I don’t mind people, uh, knowing that I’m not in dire straits. Uh, I wouldn’t want people thinking I was a millionaire. So in between, you know, that I can take care of myself, that’s ok.” Their spending habits, savings, and debt were all aspects that people did not want to share with others. For example, Colin did not consider himself very private but did not want to share details of his finances: “I guess I’m private in that way, for monetary issues. Just more along the lines of, you know, how much has been accumulated or how much you’re making an hour.” Similarly, Jasmine explained, “No one needs to know how much I have in my bank account or how much my mastercard bill was last month, uhm, or where I spend my money.”

While there were a variety of potential consequences to people knowing one’s banking details, financial details seemed to be private for different reasons than their banking numbers and access details. A few participants provided clues to this difference. For example, Walter explained that even with close family members he might be reluctant to discuss investments because they may have different perspectives on the ethics of certain investment choices. Elizabeth cited spending details like how much she
spends on shoes and groceries as private. Similarly, Linda felt that how much she owes on her house is something that is private. Johanna explained that while she was not a private person, she did feel that finances are private: “I can’t think of many [things that are private]. Probably finances would be and I don’t know why. It’s not like I have a lot of money and should care. But it’s sort of like, I don’t really want to discuss it.” These descriptions gave the impression that while participants could not describe exactly why these financial details are private, they generally preferred not to share them.

**Normative information.** In describing things that they feel are private, some participants dismissed certain topics as being “in poor taste”, not for “polite company” or “taboo”. Participants found that taboo topics were sometimes difficult to identify because they varied from group to group. Being in poor taste seems to be a lesser stigma than an actual taboo, but some participants were even reluctant to discuss what might be in poor taste and I often found myself using euphemisms, such as “relationships” or “intimate” to probe into these issues. To some degree this was an ethical problem because I had informed participants that I would be asking them about privacy but not requiring them to reveal private information. As a result, I felt reluctant to ask direct questions about things that I believed they considered off-limits and would therefore find uncomfortable, but it was important to determine what types of things were truly beyond discussion. This process also involved an examination of my own taboos, since in social situations I am not inclined to probe on topics that I believe people would find private. However, I had to address this reluctance in order to ensure that I was fully exploring privacy.

Religion and politics were topics of discussion that people were aware of and could identify as potentially off-limits, as was salary. Sexual details were another issue
entirely and emerged as something that was private to the point of being difficult to name. The commonality between these issues is that people felt that they had the potential to lead to judgment and cause divides between people. While emotional information was something that they may not want to talk about, normative information was something they felt should not be talked about.

Religion and politics. Many participants identified religion and politics as topics of discussion that may be better to avoid. These topics were not necessarily considered private, per se, but they could lead to disagreements, judgment, or heated discussion and as a result, some participants preferred to avoid them. As Ian explained, “When you’re talking about something as sensitive as religion there, I have found that people are, the rationality is not always on the table.” Similarly, while Edward chose to share this type of information, he identified that it is difficult to change someone’s mind, especially on religious issues. Edith explained that she had always been told not to talk about religion and politics, but that she does not feel these topics are private, especially since she has a strong interest in politics. However, she recognized that other people are sensitive about these issues and so she felt that talking about them could infringe on the other person’s privacy.

The treatment of religious and political information is an area where people sometimes felt that there were age differences. For example, Arthur explained:

A lot of people like to talk about politics, for example. I don’t. I have my opinions about how things should be, or how I like them to be and uh, how I vote and things like that. But uh, I consider that my uh, my personal information, my privacy, and uh, so uh, maybe I’m a bit old fashioned.
Generally, opinions were seen as being private, but many people reported that they would share their opinions if asked. Being asked about a particular topic was seen as an indication that the other person was willing to hear their opinion, no matter what it was. While some participants were wary of disagreements, they felt that asking for their opinion was an implicit agreement to have a discussion about a matter that may normally be considered private. Charlie explained,

About opinions, I have opinions on, from religious, political points of view and things like that, and as a rule I don’t talk about them… But if I get questioned or someone else brings it up, the subject, and starts a conversation on religion or politics I will join in and if they don’t like my opinion then too bad. Don’t ask if you don’t want to find out.

Salary. Salary was identified as a topic that should not generally be discussed and many participants felt that if they were asked their salary they would not share it. For example, Ian said, “I think that’s always private.” Jasmine also said that she was unlikely to share her salary, but in her case it was not because she felt that it was private, but rather because she felt that others found it to be private: “I think that I should say that [it’s private] because I think that my parents would say that and it’s just what people should say when you ask what they make.” Interestingly though, Mary pointed out that because most people feel that salary is private they do not normally ask about it. That said, many people recognized that there are situations where salary cannot be kept private. For example, people who worked for public companies or for the government were unable to keep their salary private and they recognized the value of this practice. But those who had experienced a change in status (for example, retirement) were then
able to keep those details private and preferred to do so. Reasons for keeping salary private generally centered on the consequences of sharing it. People were reluctant to share salary details because it may lead to a divide, where they or the other person feels bad or judgment occurs. Johanna described her concern with sharing her salary: “Money can be a big divide between people and so I don’t really want to have a financial barrier between people… I don’t really want to discuss it because it changes how some people view me.”

**Sexual details.** Most people could talk to me about the types of things that are private, but topics relating to sex were rarely given as an example. Edith remarked on this issue, saying, “I was going to say sexual details… I don’t know why I just didn’t.” In several cases, I spoke with people who reported keeping very little private and who seemed to be very open, but did not once mention sex. As a result, I found myself asking questions about the types of things they may consider private and offering examples of things that some people consider private, such as financial and sexual details. In that way, it became clear that sexual details were private, though it sometimes seemed as if we were speaking in code about them and so it was not clear exactly what aspect of these topics were private. For example, Charlie explained, “Personal intimacies are subjects that most people don’t like to talk about.”

Other people were more direct about what aspects of sexuality are private, explaining that sexual performance, techniques, and fantasies are private, even if the topic of sex itself is not taboo. That said, in the right circumstances, participants reported that they may share this type of information. However, in that case, the purpose of sharing became especially important. Edward felt that intimate topics should not be
discussed because doing so might give the impression of being open to experiences, which would be a mistake. In part, it seemed that sexual details were considered private because they included someone else. Johanna explained, “What my husband and I actually do is private… it’s between him and me.”

**Things that are not private.** Participants identified a number of things that they felt are sometimes believed to be private but that they do not personally feel are or should be private.

**Just conversation.** Participants felt that there are certain types of information that are not private because they make up one’s interface with other people. Joe explained, “Names and that kind of thing aren’t usually a big private thing. That’s what you use to talk to people.” People felt that these things could not be kept to oneself, were generally exchanged with other people, and therefore were not private. As with any aspects of privacy, there was variability from person to person and there were always exceptions, but information such as name, age, gender, marital status, and number of children were often not seen as private. As Elizabeth put it, “Lots of people know the demographics of me, married with children, yadayada.” Similarly, there were some types of information that people felt were “just conversation” and therefore not private. For example, Patrick was generally careful about what private information he shared, but also liked to talk and socialize with people and so he felt comfortable sharing any number of things as long as they were not emotionally-charged or controversial. He described his blogging as a diatribe, meaning an educated rant: “It’s just fodder. It’s relatively safe. There’s a couple of things that are contentious, you might go, ‘Ooh, debatable,’ or whatever. For the most part it’s just fodder… I keep it cool.”
**Feelings and opinions should be shared.** While people varied in terms of what they considered “conversation”, meaning conversation that is not private, some people had strong opinions about the importance of sharing feelings and opinions. For these people, sharing feelings and/or opinions is important for a number of reasons. Participants described making an effort to be open and honest about their feelings with the person that those feelings relate to. Sometimes they had to wait to do this so that they were able to present the feelings without seeming too emotional. For example, Mary described a situation where a coworker criticized her work in a way that she felt was unfair:

I believe that if I’m feeling something, I work very hard at letting, if somebody’s upset me about something, say, I won’t react right away cause I try to go and work it through. But I do talk to them about it and not, though, in an accusing way.

Similarly, opinions were sometimes believed to be important to share. Some people, such as Edward, felt strongly that if one has an opinion it should be shared on moral grounds. Others, like Anne believed that sharing opinions is simply an enjoyable way of connecting with other people: “Opinions, no, I don’t think they should be private, because that’s how you find out about other people and have amazing discussions and stuff like that.” Several participants reported being unable to hold their opinions back and perhaps sharing them too easily, but on the whole, they did not feel this caused problems in their relationships.

**Being Influenced by the Context**
The effect of context is difficult to separate from all of the considerations that affect privacy management. That said, there were identifiable elements of the interpersonal context, the physical, and the technological environments that influenced privacy-related decisions. Participants also identified a number of situations that impact their awareness of privacy issues and their willingness to share.

**Interpersonal context.** People’s decisions to share their private information depended in part on group dynamics. In some cases social situations may make people feel more comfortable sharing. People felt more comfortable in settings where other people were also sharing their private information. However, in other cases, being in a social setting led people to feel wary of sharing anything private. Ultimately, the decision to share seemed to be based on their comfort levels. Evelynne explained, “Sometimes if I get uncomfortable in a situation I’m quieter. So I would say that I’m a little bit different for each situation.” However, some people also described a particular approach to sharing that either depended on the context, or existed regardless of context.

**Reading the situation.** Many people that I spoke with felt that in deciding what to share, they paid attention to the details of the situation and then made their decision. Reading the situation in this way was seen as an important interpersonal skill. Max explained,

I think it facilitates good communication, right? There are some situations where you can be a little more tailored and that’s all to the greater good. Being the same in every situation would be pretty boring I’d think. Boring or inappropriate.
Participants who reported tailoring what they share to the particular situation felt that this skill was something they had developed with time and experience. Ian felt that this was a difficult skill to learn and one that he had honed throughout his life. However, other participants were concerned that in saying they tailor themselves to a situation they could be seen as superficial or inauthentic. Joe explained, “There’s a lot of times I think about, uh, who am I? What makes me?” But in assessing these aspects of himself, Joe realized that he can have a core self without being the same in every situation. Some participants felt not only is it not possible to be the same in every circumstance, it is not desirable either. Elizabeth explained, “If I’m hanging out with a bunch of young people I might behave differently, a bit more relaxed than if I was sitting at a stodgy business table. And that’s a work skill, quite frankly.”

In addition to tailoring themselves to the situation, some participants also tried to keep their various environments separate. This separation was most commonly described in relation to work, where people wanted a distinction between work and home and wanted to maintain a professional work persona. Johanna explained,

I think it’s sort of the point of the relationship. I’m here, I’m here to work.

When I’m home I’m in a family. When I’m at church I’m in a faith group. Different things are happening there which allows for different activities and different revelations of yourself, and I don’t think you reveal the same things everywhere.

Some participants also felt that others expected them to be different from one situation to the next. Bob explained, “It’s important because people expect it. If you don’t then you’re a sociopath in people’s perspective, right? I mean, if you don’t change your
demeanor or your behavior for situations people will think you’re weird and socially inept.” Just as Diane would not wear her pajamas in public, Elizabeth would not use slang or put her feet up in a business meeting. When participants described the importance of reading the context in this way it seemed so straightforward, but it highlighted the many ways we manage our privacy without even realizing that we are doing so.

**Overriding context.** However, some participants believed that being authentic was important, and being authentic meant being the same in all situations. Edward explained, “I’m probably the same with everyone because I don’t try and project an image that isn’t there.” Similarly, Maria felt that being consistent in how she shares information is important. In her work she has to communicate clearly and consistently and she carries that through to her personal life: “I think consistency, for myself, as far as divulging information, yes for me I’m consistent, in that, I would say, the way I am at home is the same person pretty much what I am at work.” Samantha felt that way as well, but when she started managing people she learned that this approach was not always appropriate. A friend shared a piece of advice with her that she found particularly helpful: “Don’t treat people the way you want to be treated, treat them the way they want to be treated.” This quote taught her that it is important to meet other people’s needs and expectations and not only your own.

Some participants found a middle ground between their desire to be authentic and their desire to tailor to the needs of others. This compromise position involved keeping the same standards and values, but tailoring what they share based on the situation. Jimbo explained, “I try to keep the same theme, no matter. I have the same principle whether
it’s professional or personal. I try to uphold the same way.” Many participants saw no conflict in upholding values of authenticity and honing their relational skill. Ian explained, “I don’t see the development of the skill in any way compromising your authenticity. None whatsoever.”

Skill and authenticity aside, some participants felt that regardless of the situation, they would hold certain pieces of information for themselves. Some participants described this as an inner core that they would not share. For some people this core would not be shared even in their closest relationships, whereas others shared this, but only in a privileged relationship. Just as these participants did not want to share everything, they also did not feel the need to know everything about the people they interacted with. Evelynne explained, “Really, do you want to know everything about that other person? You know, I think it’s good to have some private moments.”

**Place as context.** The location where an interaction happened was also seen to affect what was shared. Some places were considered to be inherently private, whereas others were clearly public.

**Private places.** One’s home was the most commonly described private place. Midas explained, “I guess an old English saying is a man’s castle is his home... You should be able to do what you want within that, without feeling watched.” Within the home there were also more or less private places. Bathrooms and bedrooms were seen as private, as were bathrooms outside the home and bedrooms in hotels. However, children may have lesser privacy within the home, as described by John: “When people talk about privacy it’s all like, ok like, ‘I have to share my bedroom with my brother and have no privacy because he’s always there.’” Some participants indicated that they placed a
premium on homes that offered privacy. Both Jimbo and Ian had chosen their homes based on their ability to obtain privacy. Diane explained that property is termed private for a reason – ownership is part of what makes it private. Other examples of private places include one’s car, one’s office, and a woman’s purse. In these places, people expected privacy both because they could control access and because there were norms and expectations of privacy. When these expectations were violated, people felt uncomfortable. For example, Baba explained how she felt when she believed that she had found evidence that someone had entered her apartment in her absence:

I came in and found a little lapel button right on the middle of my floor and I was quite shocked… But I gather that it fell down into a corner somewhere, my cat dragged it out and there it was. So it wasn’t anyone that came in, so I was relieved.

Public places. In contrast to private places, people felt that in public places they could not control access. As a result, people tended to be more aware of their privacy when in public. They were also surprised or uncomfortable when other people shared in a public environment. For example, Ann described how fellow commuters on the train would speak very openly about their work and personal lives and then suddenly look around and wonder what had been overheard. She was also shocked at the conversations that people had on their cell phones: “I don’t want to hear you talking to your husband or whatever or arguing. I mean, did you ever hear people fighting on the phone? In public?” Bob felt that friends have a responsibility to let each other know if they are sharing something too private in a public space. Public spaces include physical places such as parks and restaurants, but they also include some technological spaces. For example,
several participants referred to Facebook as a public space in order to highlight the irresponsibility of sharing private information in that context.

**Privacy in public.** While some places were seen as public, participants did believe that there are ways of experiencing privacy in those environments. For example, Anne chose to take long walks in nature, and she felt this met her need for privacy. Diana described ways of indicating that one desires privacy, either through body language, placing her purse on the empty seat next to her, or by taking up a lot of space at a table. Samantha described some of the rules for giving others privacy in public:

> I think there is privacy in both instances, so if I think of, like, public space, for example a park. If I’m sitting somewhere and there’s like twenty, it’s like the washroom rule, or the urinal rule for men, right? If they’re all open you don’t go to the one that’s right beside someone else, right? You go to a different one because you respect that person’s privacy.

While privacy was seen as attainable in public, people also described situations where they or others misread the situation and chose to share, despite the fact that they were in a public space and may therefore be sharing more widely than they intend. This misguided sharing is apparent in Ann’s example of fellow train commuters divulging private information. Presumably they misjudged the situation in some way, or something led them to share more extensively than they would normally in that environment. For example, having too much to drink was seen to lower one’s inhibitions and therefore lead to more disclosure than would otherwise be usual for a particular situation. Bob explained that he had shared more than he intended in this context: “I’m sure I do occasionally, especially if I’ve, like, had too much to drink or whatever and I mean you’ll, you can
walk down a street and have, you know, start having a private conversation with somebody.”

**Technology as context.** Technologically mediated situations were also commonly cited context for bringing out privacy concerns. Participants attributed this increased awareness to a few factors, one of which is the effect of the media in informing them about privacy issues. Arthur explained, “I am a little bit concerned with privacy in today’s world. I realize from various things on the news that people’s privacy is infiltrated from time to time and, uh, and so I have those concerns.” Similarly, Linda felt that she had heard enough horror stories about the dangers of sharing online to affect her behavior. Despite some of the misreading of public space that I discussed in the last section, many participants felt that anytime technology was involved they approached privacy somewhat differently. Midas explained, “I guess I’m on the computer quite a bit, yea, and in regards to the computer I’m a little concerned about how much information is going out over the Ethernet.”

On the whole, people felt that these contexts changed the norms of privacy, made the consequences of disclosure greater, and made it harder to maintain privacy because it was difficult to control where information goes or how it will be used. There was a general feeling that they could not trust technology and therefore wanted to be careful with their information. That said, most of the participants I spoke with did use technologically mediated forms of communication. Participants explained that they had greater privacy concerns when they were unfamiliar with their environment, the norms, or the people, and some people felt this way about the internet. However, some also felt they had shared information in that context without really thinking about the
consequences. However, they recognize that they may need to improve their knowledge of the technology or of the norms of those contexts. For example, John said:

I think I’m as guilty as anyone else of kind of just, like, throwing thoughts out there and not really considering, like, where they could potentially end up… I guess I’m coming to terms with how I need to moderate my behavior in order to make sure I don’t have difficulties in that regard.

Contexts that override privacy. Just as some contexts increased awareness of privacy concerns, others were seen to override privacy. By this I mean that in some situations, participants felt that things that would otherwise be considered private must be revealed for either individual or greater good. Edward explained, “It depends on whether there’s any possible harm that might develop as a result of keeping it quiet.” Participants provided a few examples of situations that override privacy, though there are undoubtedly more.

Crime. In cases where people were told that a crime had been committed or was being planned, participants felt it was justifiable to break someone’s privacy. For example, Colin explained, “I’m not going to go break your privacy oath or whatever it is and go tell the police you jaywalked, but I’ll probably tell them you robbed a bank.” Walter gave several examples of corporate crimes that he felt should be reported. For example, if a company was dumping chemicals then he felt that their activities could no longer be considered private. In order to decrease the risk of certain crimes, for example identity theft, participants indicated that they would give up some of their privacy. Similarly, people were willing to give up some privacy in order to ensure public safety.
For example, Baba felt that it was reasonable to register her car or a gun, if she had one, because these things could be used for crimes or could injure or kill other people.

**Use of public funds.** Another issue related to the greater good is the way in which public funds are spent. Government officials and CEOs of publicly traded companies lost some of their rights to privacy because they were acting on behalf of the public and using public funds. Walter explained, “CEO’s of public companies, they’d better expect to be looked at from, in terms of financial, [we] can then discuss the ethics of how much money they make.” Similarly, Baba pointed out that charities are open to public scrutiny in terms of the way they spend their money because the money has been donated for the benefit of society.

**Child welfare.** Any issue that related to the treatment of children or to their welfare was believed to override individual privacy rights. For example, Diane described privacy as a privilege that could be lost: “Family and Children’s Services, right? Your home is a private space, but… there’s things you can do that would, where you lose the privilege to your privacy because of living in a society that has agreed on certain terms.” Johanna also felt that issues relating to sex were not always private because they could lead to pregnancy, which in turn affects the life of a child. She explained, “What people do in the privacy of their own bedroom has an impact on society, so it matters. We should care about, you know, we should care about teen pregnancy… You’re having a baby. That baby is going to affect society… So sex is not private. Sex is at some level public, but it’s personal.”

**Life and death situations.** In situations where someone’s life was at stake, participants tended to feel that private confidences could and should be broken. The most
common example was that if someone confided that they were thinking of committing suicide, then participants felt that they would have to tell someone else. Jimbo explained, “If it’s critical, if they’re going to commit suicide, then definitely I’m sharing.” Similarly, participants felt that there were certain health issues that may override privacy concerns. For example, Walter described the issue as situational ethics in the sense that breaking a privacy agreement may provide more benefit than harm in certain situations. In his example, a doctor may need to share private information with a patient’s family in order to aid in making treatment decisions:

I would expect, if a doctor said, ‘We need to do this on your dad but he’s not communicative right now or he’s resistant to this because of his current mental state,’ for example, I would expect that private information could be shared to even those I haven’t given explicit, who have obviously clear interests.

**Weighing the Risks and Benefits**

In deciding whether or not to share with someone, not only were people assessing the person, the information, and the context, but they were also judging why the other person might want to know something, what purpose disclosing might serve, and any associated risks. The risks and benefits varied with all of the aspects of the decision process that I have described, and as a result, how people judged these elements ultimately determined their privacy decision. I use the words judging and assessing interchangeably here as most people used the term “judging”, but Walter pointed out that judging is normally associated with a good or bad outcome.
Participants described sharing something as a risky endeavor, but one where they weighed the benefits against the risks. In this way the decision process sounded measured and rational. Edith explained, “If I share this piece of information how is it going to benefit my relationship, right? Or what are they going to think, that kind of thing. Or why do I feel the need to share, really?” However, the risks and benefits that people described generally had an emotional element to them, which meant that people were in some senses weighing competing emotions. Elizabeth described the way that emotions, especially fear, impacted her ability to come to a reasoned decision: “When I had the fear I definitely had, ‘I want to, but I’m afraid’… So I have a better sense now of evaluating what’s the real risk here.”

**Benefits.** Participants described considering their own motives and the benefit that sharing a particular piece of information might provide them, as well as the benefit it might have for someone else. Diane explained, “Are you sharing because you want people to get to know you, or are you sharing because you want to present a certain image?... There’s many different reasons why… So I think about that.”

**Benefiting from sharing.** People experienced a number of benefits from sharing something with another person.

*Feeling connected.* The simplest of these benefits was a feeling of connection with another person. Diane explained, “That’s what relationships are. Sharing your experience, learning, feeling a part of something else, feeling connected, feeling like you belong.” Participants enjoyed this feeling of connection both with people who were close to them already and with new people they met. This motivation to connect led some people to share private things with others, even in situations where they were not already
close with the other person. Other people felt that because of the importance of trust, feeling truly connected with another person was a rarity. D.P. explained, “How many people in your world can you actually say you can do that to? There’s very few… When you do have that I find it very good, I enjoy it.” Elizabeth explained that this feeling of connection comes from having someone else truly know you, which can only be achieved by sharing one’s private information. She said, “I want the most inner parts of me to be loved and cared for, right?”

*Unburdening.* In other cases, people shared their private information for their own purposes, rather than for relational reasons. Participants described this as needing to unburden, needing to vent, blow off steam, or to get something off their chest. Charlie explained, “Everyone needs somebody to talk to… This has happened and that has happened. I’m really happy about it or I’m so ‘f’ing mad… that’s what helps society to get along with itself.” This unburdening, when done with the right person, was seen as a way of releasing tension. In this way, sharing a burden freed people’s mental resources for other emotions or experiences.

The word unburdening is particularly apt in that participants felt emotionally lighter. Lotus described sharing a secret that she had thought was too terrible to share: “I was trying to hold back that horrible secret for myself and I ended up telling them [her family] and it was such a weight, a release for me.” Similarly, Johanna described an experience where she shared with a large group something she had never told even to her husband. Sharing an experience that she had always wanted to hide left her feeling freed and she felt that people respected her for presenting a story that others might find shameful.
Getting help. An instrumental benefit of sharing that participants described was when they provided information in order to get assistance of some sort. Baba explained, “If I was looking for a new car, I think I would tell everybody I was looking for a new car that I felt that, you know, was in a position to be able to find me a car or knew a good place to go to buy a new car.”

Accessing help was also the main reason for sharing information with professionals. Participants reported being willing to share private details, for example, details of sexual functioning with their doctor, in order to get their assistance in solving the problem. Similarly, they were willing to share information with friends or others if they felt the other person could help them in some way. Jasmine explained that she shared her thoughts in order to gather other people’s perspectives and Evelyne described how sharing with a stranger gives the opportunity for feedback on an issue without the potential relationship costs. This was also the type of sharing that occurred online for a few of the participants who posted career-related information. Both Jimbo and Edith reported that they shared certain information online because they thought it might help them in building their professional reputation.

Accessing products or services. Participants also described how they shared their private information in order to get the products or services that they wanted. For example, they shared financial information to get a mortgage, a credit card, or even to demonstrate their suitability for adopting a baby. Similarly, they shared their information with the government because this was required in order to access services or aid the government in providing services (with the census, for example). They also shared their information with companies because this was required to purchase products and services, especially
online. Evelyne explained, “You buy something and you’ve got to use your credit card or whatever and they’re asking you this and your email and I’m thinking, oh. I know sometimes you have to do it but I really don’t like it.” Participants saw sharing in these contexts as a tradeoff. They may not want to share their private information, but doing so provides them with benefits that they require or desire.

**Helping someone out.** When information was seen to help the other person, participants felt much more inclined to share. In fact, many people were pleased to share their private information and felt a certain responsibility to do so when they thought it would help.

**Learning experiences.** There were three ways in which they felt their information might help another person. In one case it was the opportunity to share an experience that the other person might be able to learn from: “It’s that education that I’ve acquired over the years that has helped me to live, and so that’s the kind of thing I would share with young people, grandchildren, the kid down the street” (Charlie). Similarly, Charlie described sharing a health-related experience with others in order to warn them about it, even though it involved sexual details that could be considered private.

**Showing understanding.** The second way in which people felt that it was helpful to share their feelings or experiences was in order to make the other person feel more comfortable, or validate their feelings in some way. For example, D.P. explained, “How many times do you think you’re the only one who knows this or feels it or whatever?” This type of disclosure helped people to ease social situations and to make the other person feel less vulnerable when they shared something private. Elizabeth explained,
“Sometimes I share for the sake of the other person, because I care and it could be helpful. ‘I have also had this experience.’”

*Building trust.* Sharing in this way was a relational tool and therefore was used not only in reaction to others, but also proactively to build trust. Lotus described how sharing helps her in relating to people so that she can better help them in her work:

People tend to come to me and tell me a lot about their problems, and I think that’s like that openness about me… Sometimes I will share something about myself that they could judge me on just so that they know that they can feel safe.

Roberta also found that sharing with others helped to make them more comfortable and better able to share with her. In Patrick’s work, this type of sharing was vital for showing that he was not only a professional, but also a person. He explained, “I know his impression of me has been elevated because the trust factor. That’s a personal thing to share with someone. And so I respect him for that and I’m hoping he respects me in return.”

*Feeling obliged.* In other cases, people felt an obligation to share because the information affected the other person in some way. At the extreme, this might be information that they knew would have a negative impact but that could not be kept secret. An example of this came from Mary, who described learning that her brother in law was cheating on his wife, her sister. She did not want to share this bad news with her sister but felt a responsibility to do so. This sort of obligation to share came from the fact that they felt that sharing was the right thing to do. In Mary’s example the information was not hers, but this decision was equally relevant when the information was their own.
Participants asked themselves whether the information they had would have any sort of impact on the relationship. If it was determined to be important to the relationship or to the other person then they shared it. For example, Colin described sharing with a girlfriend the fact that he had cheated on her: “That didn’t go well. So, but you know, I didn’t want to keep that private. I could have easily done that, but that wouldn’t have been good.”

*Assessing the person’s motives.* If people felt that the other person had any sort of ulterior motive for asking a question, then they were much less likely to share. Baba explained, “I’m a bit suspicious that they might be manipulating me. Especially when you get to a certain age that you know that you’re not as quick as the young people are. You know, and some simple questions could actually be prompting me to give out more information.” This question of motive was not restricted to the online environment or with strangers, though it seemed to occur more often in those contexts, perhaps because motives are less likely to be known. When companies asked people for information they sometimes questioned this practice. Often they felt that the purpose was to market products to them or for marketing research, and many people did not approve of this behavior. Ian explained, “I buy a $60 piece of software from some company… and they ask you your income. I just never answer. That’s nonsense, you know.” Other people reported having difficulty turning down these sorts of requests for information, despite feeling that in some ways the request violated their privacy.

In the interpersonal context, the question of motive more often came down to curiosity. Participants were loath to share information when the other’s sole purpose for knowing was their own curiosity. In this situation they saw no benefit to sharing. Both
Lloyd and Colin used metaphors for privacy that highlighted the way in which having or wanting privacy can lead others to want to invade that privacy. Lloyd explained:

> It’s kind of like a little black book, I guess, where what’s inside of it people will always wonder, but to me, the owner, it’s kind of, like, not that big a deal but its mere existence just sort of creates this curiosity for the unknown.

Colin used an even stronger metaphor to describe the way people’s curiosity invades privacy: “Privacy is like a twisted pretzel. People take bites out of it around the edges and try and get in to the middle of the inner core of people’s private issues. They wanna know them for some reason.” As such, if curiosity was seen as the motive, the result was privacy rather than sharing. Curiosity was also related to gossip, in the sense that both cases involve the sharing of information for no purpose. As Mary explained, “Sometimes people ask you really intimate questions, people, like, and I’ll often say to them, ‘Why would you want to know that? What would you possibly need to know this for? Are you just nosey, what?’”

**Risks.** There were a number of reasons that would lead someone to feel more protective of their privacy and less likely to share. These negative consequences may affect the person who discloses, the person who receives the disclosure, or the object of discussion, in the case of information that is shared about someone else.

**Emotional risks.** Participants experienced or anticipated a number of negative feelings or emotions as a result of sharing something private.

*Feeling vulnerable.* The most common was the feeling that disclosing something private would leave them feeling more revealed than they would like to be. Max
described vulnerability as the key to deciding whether or not something is private. He said, “How do you decide if something is private or not? Well, I guess to the degree that you’re exposing yourself to another person.” Similarly, Edward explained that if there was no benefit in talking about something and it made him uncomfortable to talk about it, he would keep it to himself. Baba explained, “We don’t want anybody to know anything that would make us feel uncomfortable and I guess we all have a different limit of that.”

Often, participants classified disclosing under these circumstances as a mistake, or a moment of weakness. They found themselves in a situation where they decided to share a private feeling or experience and later regretted it because they felt that sharing was unnecessary and left them feeling more open to the other person than they would have liked. Ann explained, “Sometimes you are vulnerable and you’re upset or whatever and you just kind of splutter all out and then afterwards you think, ‘Oh, that wasn’t a good idea, you know, I should have listened to myself first.’” The concern that someone else would expose something that would make them feel too revealed was another issue that left participants feeling cautious or even fearful.

This feeling of vulnerability was not necessarily related to concrete consequences, or a change in the other person. Several participants described experiences where they shared something private and immediately realized that doing so was a mistake, even though nothing bad came of it. I asked participants how they knew this and they tended to describe it as an internal feeling, or a “stirring of discomfort”, as Lotus put it. They also labeled this type of disclosure as unnecessary. Edith explained, “It was just more thinking to myself, like, why did I do that? What was, why, what was the point of that, sort of thing?” D.P. felt that just knowing that a particular piece of information is known by
someone else is uncomfortable. He explained, “I don’t have any big dire secrets out there anyways but it’s just knowing I should have kept that to myself.”

*Feeling ashamed of behavior.* Another reason for keeping information private was that participants felt embarrassed or ashamed of their own behavior. In some cases they felt that revealing this type of information would make them look silly. Roberta explained, “I shouldn’t have done that but now I can say, ‘How stupid I was and hahaha.’” This type of embarrassment tended to diminish with time and perhaps could be revealed to a privileged other. Max felt that telling his wife would be okay because of her unconditional love for him: “If it’s my spouse I can pretty much say anything I want because she’s seen me at my worst many times and she’ll tell you that too.” This ability to share even the most private things was part of what defined those privileged relationships. However, there were exceptions, and some people had experiences that they considered too private to share. These were often things that they were not proud of, where they felt they had done something wrong or described as regrettable. Often these types of experiences were ones that they believed would interfere with relationships. Lloyd explained, “If you are trying to make connections with someone and you reveal yourself to be an awful person, err, yeah, I wouldn’t do that.”

*Reliving negative feelings.* Some participants kept things private because in doing so they could shield themselves from thinking about them. Experiences that were upsetting or sad were ones that they preferred to avoid. Baba explained, “I’m not sharing them with people because it would be bringing them up and I don’t want to do that.” In this way, avoiding talking about certain experiences was a protective mechanism. When these issues were raised in conversation by someone else, participants had to find ways of
avoiding the topic. Patrick explained, “I didn’t want to deal with it. If I wanted to deal with it I would have disclosed it in the first place.”

**Safety and security risks.** In addition to the negative feelings that people might experience, sharing private information also has the potential to cause material harm.

**Physical safety.** Participants identified three main physical threats that they feared. The first was the risk of being attacked, usually as a result of who they are or what they do. For example, Colin described working as a bouncer and having friends who were jail guards or police officers. In these roles, there are real dangers in people knowing names and addresses. For that reason, Colin kept that information private and went to great lengths to hide his identity when he was at work. He explained, “That’s completely on the side of self-preservation… You’re dealing with some bad people.” Several of the female participants mentioned that they were or should be concerned with the way revealing information might compromise their physical safety or make them open to stalkers. Lotus explained, “Having somebody following you or kind of keeping tabs on you that you don’t want. I guess you could say stalking. Not that, I’ve never experienced that but that could be a consequence of sharing too much information.”

The third physical risk that participants identified was one that concerned parents, especially parents in less traditional parenting situations. Several participants described their fears around the possibility of their children being kidnapped or taken away from them for some other reason. This fear was voiced by a single mother, an adoptive parent and by a friend of a young mother. These situations were seen to put them at greater risk for losing their children and as a result they were more protective of their and their
children’s information and the details of their family life. Linda explained, “You become very protective of things. Other single mothers I know are the same.”

_Theft._ Participants were also concerned with the possibility that sharing their information might put them at risk for theft. Theft was another broad category that included several types of theft, though the main consequence was financial, regardless of the method. Participants worried that revealing functional information such as their PIN would result in someone emptying their bank account or using their credit card fraudulently. Similarly, having that information stolen could result in identity theft, which has primarily financial repercussions, but also was seen as a difficult and upsetting experience. Several of the participants had experienced identity theft or fraudulent use of their credit card, and while they were able to resolve the situation, it was a time consuming process and one that had an emotional impact. Samantha explained,

I went to use my Interac card, it’s when I first started working so I was like, ‘I’m not a student anymore, I don’t need to, like, pray that my Interac card’s going to go through.’… Basically I was rejected at the McDonald’s drive-through. It was very embarrassing… They [the bank] treated it pretty well, but I had to wait for my money back and go through a questionnaire process, and it was very, like it was a little bit humiliating.”

Theft of financial or physical resources was a key concern and so some people were also wary of sharing their address, even though this was not generally considered private information. Several participants also identified negative consequences that could occur as a result of sharing their ideas. Linda, an artist, described the risks of sharing her designs and ideas online: “I see so many artists that have put their work on [the internet]
and my line of work and everything is just stolen from them and they’re not given credit.” For Linda this was not only an ideological issue, it also had financial costs in that once ideas are stolen they can no longer be sold.

**Losses of autonomy.** Participants described a number of risks of disclosure that related to their ability to be the person they wanted to be or choose the life they wanted for themselves.

**Losing one’s self.** Perhaps the most difficult risk for participants to describe (and for me to explain) is the way in which losing privacy affects people’s sense of self. When I asked people what privacy meant to them and why it was important, they sometimes described it in a way that not only highlighted its importance but also indicated a fundamental relationship with who they are as people. Roberta described it as “a very personal possession.” D.P. had another metaphor: “You give everything out and you’re left with nothing, the plate’s empty, and I want a little plate with something left on it.” This idea that sharing everything somehow results in a loss of self or loss of existence was one that Charlie shared. He said, “If you don’t maintain that you’ve got nothing, absolutely nothing. Because the outside world knowing what’s on the inside of you, then you’ve got nothing, and everything goes pffft.”

One way that participants described this inner information or this inner place had certain religious connotations. Evelynne said:

I suppose maybe it [privacy] safeguards something. I’m trying to think what it would safeguard. Safeguards some parts that you would consider to be sacred about yourself. You know, your own sort of spiritual soul… You want to just keep part of that for yourself.
Charlie referred to this inner place as his inner sanctorum or sanctum, meaning a holy place. While other participants may not have used such strong imagery, they nonetheless felt that safeguarding this inner self was important and that losing it would have negative consequences in terms of their ability to be the person they are. Ian felt that keeping this inner self private enabled him to have some control over his thoughts and feelings, which is critical to who he is emotionally. As a result, he felt that it is important to protect his private self. Similarly, Midas described privacy as a cocoon and explained, “It’s not that I feel that I have a secret as such from people, it’s, it just maintains something of me, I guess, within that boundary.”

Several participants also felt that keeping one’s inner self private allows us all to maintain our own individuality. Colin seemed somewhat cynical about this in describing that people just want to have something that no one else has, but Diane felt that having this separateness is part of what makes us human. She explained, “We’re not all that different, in a way, and in a way we’re also very unique so I guess to give you a sense of individuality. I think privacy contributes to that.”

*Losing decision-making power.* Participants were also reluctant to share where they felt that doing so might impact their ability to make their own decisions. In some cases, they disclosed something in order to receive advice but then felt that they had to report back to the person they shared with in order to explain their final decision. In other cases, they worried that if they asked for advice they may have to follow it or may have to give more information than they would like. In this way, they risked opening themselves up for further losses of privacy. Evelynne explained, “I think some people would say, ‘Why, why are you doing that? Why are you doing that?’… You have to be
strong about saying, ‘Well, that’s, that’s my life.’ And if you don’t want to get into that you just don’t say it.” Generally, people felt that no matter what sort of advice they received from others, they ultimately needed to make their own decision. However, having to explain their decision to someone else was not something they wanted to do.

_Losing control of private time._ Similarly, participants did not want to explain how they spent their time and wanted control over their daily activities. Mary explained, “I just want to be left alone to do my thing.” Being able to choose how they spent their time was important to people in a number of ways. They wanted to be able to decide what type of life they and their family would have. For example, Anne explained that even though she is now retired, she still values spending time alone and with family on the weekends and so she guards that private time. Marketing calls were seen as a great intrusion into their private lives and private time. Similarly, unwanted emails took a long time to deal with and so reduced their ability to choose how they spent their time. For this reason, many participants were unwilling to share their phone number and email address, despite the fact that these things were not considered private.

_Losing control of the future._ Just as participants were concerned with their ability to choose how they spend their time, they were also concerned with their futures. Maintaining their privacy allowed them to maintain a certain level of predictability, in that they knew what to expect from other people. It also meant that they were not giving people information that might give them the opportunity to adversely affect their future. This was the primary way in which people saw privacy as being related to power. They felt that by giving up privacy they may be giving other people power. Bob explained,
I guess the thing is that if something gives somebody a lot of power over you to change the course of your life, or in a profound way, be it positive or negative, then that’s probably information that’s worthy of being private.

Several participants had experiences where they felt that someone else knowing something about them had an adverse effect. For example, Patrick found that telling others that he had a heart condition resulted in them treating him differently and had even meant that he was not offered a job that he felt he would have been offered otherwise. Lotus felt that being too upfront about her relationship goals gave boyfriends the upper hand and meant that they were not always honest about their own intentions. In this way, they were able to affect the direction of the relationship in ways that she could not predict. Similarly, Baba sometimes kept her age private and Johanna kept her income private because they were worried about the way these pieces of information would affect their interactions with other people. Participants were concerned about the way this information affected their ability to impact the future of their relationships. Being seen as ill, old, or rich all carry with them a particular set of assumptions that participants sought to avoid.

Several participants used metaphors for privacy that highlighted the importance of being able to predict how others will treat you. Jimbo’s metaphor of privacy as a house indicated that he felt that it was important to control his own space (be it physical or mental) and control the conditions under which people enter that space. Another metaphor, Baba’s reference to privacy as a car, indicated a desire to know the rules of the
road, meaning that she felt that privacy helped her to know what to expect from other people in terms of how they enter her personal and mental space.

**Relational risks.** Risks to the relationship that people could have with others was the greatest source of concern for participants. While they were concerned about the potential for emotional or autonomy-related consequences, many of these issues also had the potential to affect their interactions with others.

**Affecting others’ perceptions.** Participants were concerned that things they share may affect the way the other person sees them. In some cases they wanted to be able to control the impression they gave. For example, Lloyd explained, “I guess it [privacy] gives you, like, an assurance that you control the image that you’re projecting.” In this way, privacy related to their sense of autonomy as well as their relationships with others. However, privacy often was not a matter of trying to control the image they projected so much as trying to present certain aspects of themselves more than others. Generally this tweaking process meant showing their more positive characteristics rather than ones that may make them less proud. Lotus explained how this process works online: “I think everyone’s projecting this image of themselves that they want people to see online… I’m not going to put on Facebook my inner pain of the day… I like to reflect my creativity.”

In that environment she way not be expecting others to know her fully, but other participants described a similar process offline. For example, Colin explained that he kept his poor eyesight private for many years because wearing glasses was not consistent with his sporty image.

Participants also sometimes disclosed selectively when forming new relationships. For example, in the process of developing a romantic relationship, they
may share only what seems relevant and appropriate at the time. Patrick explained:

“They’ll share components that matter the most to the person of whom they’re engaging.”

This issue related not only to romantic relationships but also to work relationships. For example, Edith was careful about what she shares online because she wanted to be sure that employers get the right impression of her. In this way, privacy served to help people project their desired image and avoid some of the negative consequences of being overexposed.

*Being judged.* One of the most commonly cited consequences of sharing too much or sharing the wrong thing was that the other person would judge them for sharing or for what they shared. Linda said, “Judgment, I think people are always worried about that.” Any feeling that the other person was judging them led people to shut down and meant that they might not share something with that person in the future. As described previously, this was a key element in building trust in a relationship. For this reason, people reported sharing selectively. For example, Baba described how she might tell one friend that she got a good deal on her clothes because that friend also liked bargain hunting. But she would not share it with another friend who was always polished and stylish because that friend might think she was not looking after her appearance. In this case the judgment did not necessarily come from the other person, but was something that she anticipated the other person would feel. However, judgments did also come from others, and people were very sensitive to that experience. When I asked how they knew that someone was judging them they explained that they could sense it from sometimes very subtle changes, the way the other person reacted, what they said, or what they did.
Experiencing conflict. Some types of information were either significant or sensitive enough to cause conflict between people. Often, participants sought to avoid conflict and therefore chose not to share certain pieces of information. This was most often the case with differing opinions. Arthur explained, “A situation can develop where you’re talking to somebody who has a very different political outlook than you have and uh, they get uh, you know, it can get into a heated argument, which I don’t want.”

Fearing info may be shared further. Given the variety of things that people considered when deciding to share something, it is perhaps not surprising that they should be concerned that the person they share with might share their information with someone else who they have not considered so carefully. Edith explained, “I like to be open with family, but at the same time I feel I have to be prepared that in my extended family there are people who talk a lot… So that’s another thing that I would factor in.” For some people, this was reason enough to hold on to anything that they considered private. Keeping something to themselves was seen as the only way of ensuring that it remained private. Breaching privacy might be done intentionally, as in the case of gossip, but participants were also concerned that their information might be unintentionally disclosed. One of the reasons that having information shared further was seen as a problem was because the new recipient of the information may not have the same relationship with the discloser and may not understand the context. For example, Ann explained that if she said something that was not nice, she would not want it repeated. In this case, she may also wish she had not shared it in the first place, but sometimes participants felt that the person they shared something with would understand even though others may not.
Risks to the recipient. In some cases, participants were wary of disclosing because of the effect it might have on the recipient of their disclosure.

Hurting them. They were primarily concerned with hurting the person, in one way or another. Sometimes this involved sharing feelings that might hurt them, as described by Ann: “You see by someone’s face that you’ve said the wrong thing, or there’s that look and you realize, ‘Oh, they didn’t want the truth.’” This issue of whether or not to tell the truth about one’s feelings was something that several of the participants had struggled with. In some cases they believed strongly in the value of being truthful, but many people felt that this was no reason to be hurtful. Sometimes this meant that people moderated how they said something in order to deliver it more sensitively, and at other times it meant keeping their thoughts or feelings to themselves. Colin explained, “It’s [privacy is] probably a helpful tool towards other people as opposed to spitting out the god’s honest truth to every single person you run into.”

The issue of disclosing hurtful information also related to the decision as to whether or not to disclose fully. Several people explained that feelings or experiences that happened in the past have the potential to hurt someone (most often their relationship partner) in the present. Participants did not categorize these things as secrets or infidelities, but rather, saw them as private experiences that could cause emotional hurt. Ian explained:

I’m not talking about trust, breaking trust, I’m talking about, uhm, some feeling that you might have had, uh, about another party that, why, and if that would upset Party A, why talk about it to Party A? Live with the feeling, okay?
Another aspect of sharing fully is the possibility that one’s feelings may be transient or only be shared in the heat of the moment. This is one reason that people described considering their own motives for sharing something. If they were sharing in order to make a point or win an argument, this was seen as a bad decision. Jimbo explained, “Sometimes an instinctual unconscious feeling, just to say that that did not feel right… I know that if I’m really pissed off and I say something out of anger usually that’s the wrong choice.” I also found myself considering my reasons for sharing participants’ stories in this dissertation. While the purpose of the interviews was to learn about people’s approach to privacy and to share what I learned, I felt that the interviews were a personal conversation and I was therefore concerned about the effect that sharing something might have on a participant. In my view, it felt as if there was the potential for violating their privacy, even though there was no deception on my part and I fully disclosed the purpose of the interviews and answered any questions participants had about the process or findings. In order to address this feeling, I considered my motives for sharing the stories to ensure that doing so would aid in the goal of presenting my substantive theory and did not have the potential to hurt the participant (in addition to the usual considerations of identifiability and research ethics).

Participants were also concerned that sharing their feelings, emotions, or opinions may make the other person feel judged. Feeling judged was something they did not like experiencing and making someone else feel that way was upsetting. For example, Samantha described a situation where a group of women were playing truth or dare about their sexual experiences. She made a flippant remark about her own perspective and then realized that someone else in the group felt differently. This experience was
uncomfortable for Samantha because she realized that she had made the other person feel judged, which is something she sought to avoid. She explained:

- It made them feel really uncomfortable. So that would be an instance where you are aware of the other person’s reaction, it’s private, it’s not necessarily what people are judging you for, but you kind of judge someone else for it, right?

**Burdening them.** Participants were also aware of the possibility that their disclosures might be difficult for someone else to handle. In this case, sharing their private information would not necessarily hurt the other person or lead to judgment, but it might nonetheless cause an emotional response or be effortful for the person to keep confidential. This was one reason that some participants felt it was important to work through their own issues and emotions independently. For example, Patrick explained that based on his wife’s life experiences, she was not as well equipped to handle difficult family issues and so he was reluctant to share his own family issues with her. Similarly, Evelynne was careful in what she shared with her children because she did not want to worry or upset them. She explained, “If they’re a little fragile, or if they’re a little stressed out, or a little, then I think, you know, you’re just not going to get into that, necessarily get into details.”

**Risks to the object of discussion.** Participants were also aware of the risks of sharing something when it related to another person. On this issue, they had many of the same concerns that they had for themselves. They were concerned about the other person’s feelings as well as their safety and security. They were also reluctant to make decisions on the other person’s behalf. Johanna explained, “How much should I tell
people about my child’s birth history? Cause it’s not mine, it’s my child’s right? But it gets tricky because you’re parenting.” This was a challenge in that their own needs to share may conflict with their sense of what is best for the other person. This may help to explain why people were sometimes quite comfortable sharing things with strangers. Doing so enabled them to share their private information without risking someone else’s privacy. Patrick encountered this issue online, where he wanted to make a comment about the death of a relative, but was concerned that the news might not have been disseminated to his extended family or they may not have wanted to see it discussed in that way. He explained, “So the tension is coming down to how, okay just because it’s right for me, I have to constantly look to, is it right for everybody?”

Privacy Behavior

In managing their privacy, many of the behaviors that people engaged in involved making careful choices about who they shared what piece of information with and in what context. However, there were times when they could not avoid sharing completely, when something was shared about them, or when someone shared something private with them and in these situations, people had to decide how to respond. These responses depended on their own personality and what they wanted to communicate about themselves, as well as the variety of considerations in relation to their privacy.

Managing Their Own Privacy

The people with whom I spoke described several key strategies for maintaining their desired level of privacy or restoring privacy.

Gatekeeping strategies. In order to ensure that they maintained their desired level of privacy, participants engaged in a variety of gatekeeping strategies. These
strategies were employed to ensure that they protected their privacy. The strategies that people employed online tended to be somewhat different from the strategies they used in their relationships.

**Choosing interactions.** Many participants felt that privacy concerns or a mismatch in approaches to privacy might affect their friendships and social interactions. However, participants differed in the way their friendships might be affected. For some, how people deal with privacy is an issue of critical importance and as a result, they may choose not to continue a friendship if they felt that someone could not be trusted with their private information. Ian explained, “It’s a contract. And if the person breaks that contract then they’ve broken a major trust. And that will probably break the relationship forever.” Jasmine did not consider herself to be a private person, but she also chose her friendships carefully. In this way, she did not have to worry about privacy because she was surrounded by people she trusted. Other participants guarded their private time and information by being selective about placing themselves in situations where their privacy might be compromised. For some people this involved advance planning, such as who sits where at a social event, or deciding in advance what topics they might be willing to discuss. For others, this involved choosing the social activities they engage in.

**Guarding information.** When participants used technology, they employed a different set of gatekeeping strategies to protect their privacy. For some people this meant not using specific websites or applications, not using the internet, or not using computers at all. Jimbo explained, “I make a conscious decision, you know, I don’t have a Twitter account, I don’t have a Facebook account.” For others though, they used these technologies but did so with caution. For example, many participants reported that they
gave out only limited information online or gave partial information. The availability of one’s contact information was generally seen as a somewhat uncontrollable element of privacy and for this reason, some people felt that it is important to limit the spread of this type of information, wherever possible. As a result, they took care to consider whether or not to release it. Maria explained, “Things where people ask me to divulge information, postal codes even, sometimes I don’t. Sometimes I don’t give that information. I don’t give that up too easily.” Other participants, like Lotus, used fake information: “When I’m signing on to online sites I often will use a different last name and I never put my real postal code.”

Others reported using the internet passively, in the sense that they would take information but would not give out anything online or on specific websites. For example, when I asked John Paul if he used Facebook he said no, but reported having a login and using the site to keep informed about what other people were doing and to see their pictures. Many people felt that the phone was another medium where caution was required, and as a result they were careful with what they shared. In that case though, they were concerned mostly with who was on the other end of the phone, rather than the phone itself. Mobile phones were one exception in that one participant identified that mobile phone calls can be intercepted. For this reason, Jimbo generally did not conduct private business over his mobile phone. Other participants reported that they were careful to use anti-virus programs in order to maintain privacy on their computer.

**Employing rules.** In my discussions about the way people managed their privacy, I asked what ways they had of maintaining it or obtaining the degree of privacy they desired. People often interpreted this question in the context of their relationships and as
a result, they often said that they did not have any particular way of managing their privacy. When I asked whether they had any rules or rules of thumb around their privacy many responded that they did not. Participants did not report using rules for managing their emotional information, but when it concerned their functional information, many participants had rules for what they would share when. These rules were designed to avoid what participants saw as the more obvious privacy risks. It is perhaps for this reason that none of the participants described rules for sharing emotional information – risks were generally less clearly defined. These situations were seen as much more fluid and therefore rules were not generally deemed appropriate. Interestingly, they did not describe their treatment of normative information as rule-based, though much of this information seems to ascribe to rules such as “Never share X” or Never share X in Y context.”

There were very few situations that were as absolute as to lead participants to say that they would never share a particular piece of information. While participants may have indicated that their SIN, salary, and sex life were private, participants did sometimes have to give out their SINs, would occasionally need to discuss salary, and might find themselves in a position where they needed to seek advice on sexual issues. For this reason, most rules had caveats. Usually, rules around sharing particular pieces of information applied to certain contexts or with particular people. The most common rule was the following: I never share my credit card number over the phone. Similarly, people often had rules about what they shared by email or online. Edward explained, “We have a policy that you give no personal information about your circumstances over the phone or by email.”
I found myself considering these rules in my own behavior and attempting to determine where I used rules to protect my privacy. Upon reflection, I determined that rules might be helpful in ensuring that one does not behave in ways that are inconsistent with one’s goals. For example, when shopping at certain stores, the clerk at the checkout asks for the customer’s postal code. I have always found this situation awkward because I would rather not share my postal code but did not have an easy response to the question. As a result of participants’ description of rules, I decided to create a rule for myself as to what to say in response (telling the clerk to make up a number to enter). When I used this rule I found that declining to share my postal code was not an uncomfortable experience and I felt happier afterwards because I had not unnecessarily shared my information. It seemed that this rule enabled me to protect my privacy by providing me with a pre-prepared response such that I did not need to assess the particular disclosure situation.

In addition to employing rules for their functional information, participants also described normative rules they had heard, such as “Never talk about politics, religion in public” (Edith). Some did report using these types of rules, but many people I spoke with felt that they could be broken if someone asked for their opinion. This did not seem to be the case with rules about functional information, and participants did not seem to feel that social pressures would sway their decision to stick to those rules.

**Being explicit.** For some people, maintaining privacy was something that happened more in the background, and so making their concerns explicit was not something they were likely to do. However, for other people or in certain situations, they felt that it was important to be explicit about their privacy needs.
Don’t tell anyone… Prefacing a disclosure with ‘don’t tell anyone’ was the most common way of indicating that something was private. For most participants, if they were sharing something that it was very important to keep private then they felt they had to use this phrase. In this context, making it explicit served a number of purposes. It communicated that keeping the information private was important and served as an insurance policy against misunderstandings. In some cases, participants felt that misunderstandings were possible because of the variability in what types of things people consider private. For this reason, they felt that being explicit was the safest option. Joe explained.

I would just tell them, just to be on the safe side. You’re backing yourself up that way if the information did come back to you, you would know you’d told them. It’s not like they could say, ‘You didn’t tell me I was supposed to keep it a secret, blah blah blah.’

In this way, being explicit about the private nature of the information ensured to participants that they had been clear about the information and that they knew that the other person understood the terms of their disclosure. Some participants described this as getting a commitment from the other person. It also allowed them to assess whether they felt comfortable disclosing under these circumstances. This process of making an agreement was something that participants generally did for things that were extremely private, would have negative consequences if they were disclosed, or affected someone else. For example, Samantha described how employment-related information might be shared in this way: “If it’s something at work, like if it’s going to be job losses and it
can’t go anywhere, then I have to say, like caveat it with, ‘This can’t be shared beyond these walls.’”

However, some participants reported that they would not tell someone that what they were sharing was private and could not be shared further. For some participants they did not need to make it explicit because the issue was not critical enough to warrant the extra protection. For others though, they felt this way because they thought that the other person should know already. Maria said, “Well yeah, that’s a given.” This assumption was typically the case with close relationships such as one’s spouse, family, or very close friends. For example, Midas explained, “No, I would expect them, our close friends are close enough that they know, really know us, and so if I’m telling them something I’m really confident they wouldn’t tell anybody else.” Other participants explained that they would choose carefully whom they were disclosing something to such that adding the phrase, ‘don’t tell anyone, but…’ would be unnecessary. For them, the expectation of privacy was the same as for others who made this expectation explicit. This expectation was as common as it was to say, ‘don’t tell,’ which highlights the difficulty in assuming that one’s privacy expectations are understood.

*That’s private.* For some participants, there were also explicit ways of letting someone know that what they had asked was private. The most direct was simply to say, ‘That’s private.’ For questions that came from a stranger, or questions that invaded their privacy because there was not a close enough relationship, these participants simply told the other person that what they were asking was private. Arthur explained, “My response would be, ‘That’s my private information and I don’t share that.’” Interestingly, these were not necessarily the same people who felt it was important to say ‘don’t tell’ when
disclosing. For them, if someone was bold enough to ask a question that invades their privacy then they would have no trouble responding directly. As Joe explained, “Straight to the point, like I said. I don’t have a problem hurting people’s feelings usually, if it comes down to mine or theirs.” For others, responding in this way was simply the honest thing to do. For example, Maria liked when other people told her that something was private because they were being direct and their boundaries were clear.

Although some people would use the words, ‘that’s private’ as needed, others would use it only under duress. Ian explained,

I would at first say, ‘Why do you ask? Why do you need to know that?’ and if I was feeling, uh a little confronted, I would say, ‘What business is it of yours?’… And if that doesn’t work, ‘That’s private, I’m not interested in discussing that subject.’”

There was a perception that using these words would offend the other person and was a harsh thing to say. As a result, some participants were very reluctant to say, ‘that’s private’ because they perceived that it would end the conversation. For this reason, there were a number of phrases that people used that conveyed the same message but avoided the terminal phrase, ‘that’s private.’ These phrases varied in their degree of directness, where some communicated essentially the same message, for example, “I don’t really want to talk about that” (Johanna), and others acknowledged the question without answering, for example, “Interesting question” (Elizabeth), or, “I don’t know, why?” (Lotus)

Some participants said that regardless of the circumstances, they would never use these words or even indicate that they felt that a question invaded their privacy. For them,
this was simply too rude or too harsh. Jasmine explained, “If I was to hear someone say, ‘Oh, that’s private,’ you’d think that they’re mad. And you don’t want to come across that, unless you’re wanting that, but I would think that you wouldn’t want to come across that way.”

**Indirect methods.** Participants had a number of indirect means of guarding their privacy. I had originally termed these behaviors ‘Avoidance behaviors’ because in some instances they are ways of avoiding a topic that they would prefer not to discuss. In some cases, these behaviors were designed to direct conversation elsewhere without having to reveal that they felt that something was private. In this sense, indicating that something is private is in fact disclosing, which was not always desirable. However in other cases, the behaviors did communicate a need for privacy, but simply did so in an indirect manner. For this reason, I chose the more neutral term, ‘Indirect methods’.

**Skimming the surface.** The most common way of maintaining privacy while still interacting with someone was to provide some but not all of the information they might be looking for. Being able to hold information back was a key element of privacy and several participants defined privacy as their ability to choose what to share. Perhaps for this reason, the most common metaphors for privacy indicated a selective access rather than a complete barrier. For example, Ann described privacy as a cloak, Elizabeth described it as a veil, Midas described it as a fence, and Evelynne described it as a mirror, where the details are clear to the owner but less detail is visible from the distance of another’s perspective.

In addition to holding information back, participants also reported sharing, but leaving out details. In this way they were sharing information, but not information that
they considered private, since details were often the aspects that were private. For example, Edith explained, “Probably just, maybe you don’t divulge all of it. Maybe just say part or, you know, say what is gonna appease the person, kind of thing, but not really the whole thing.” Participants described this process as dancing around or skirting the issue. One of the other aspects that participants considered private was the emotional component. For this reason, many people described explaining a situation but leaving out the emotion. In this way, they could respond to the other person without revealing how they felt or displaying how they felt to the other person.

**Taking control.** Another method that people used to maintain their privacy was to take control of the conversation in one way or another. Many people reported steering the conversation elsewhere or changing the subject. For the most part, participants found that this tactic was successful. For example:

I was confronted by an individual that was asking me [something private] and I just deflected. But I was very polite in, and tried to just smooth it, just smooth it onto another path. And I was successful in doing that. That’s what I normally try to do. (Ian)

Some participants reported taking a more active role in choosing the topic of conversation and directing discussions to areas that they were comfortable speaking about so that they were able to avoid private conversations before they occurred. For example, Patrick described how he directed conversation at a funeral he had recently attended in order to ensure that the discussion stayed away from topics he would find sensitive. For others, this process may have been less conscious. For example, Maria did not think of herself as private, but realized that she tends to ask a lot of questions about
other people. As a result, much of her conversations with other people are about them rather than about her: “I tend to always put it on another person. I like hearing about people’s stories, I don’t really make it about me.”

**Minimizing the issue.** Participants used a few different methods for minimizing issues that might be emotional in nature or might reveal something private. One way in which people did this was by using humor or sarcasm. For example, Lloyd described using Facebook, but filling out the information sarcastically rather than truthfully. He explained:

I feel like unless you’re 16 it’s kind of, it kind of makes you look silly if you like, say, like, ‘I’m a really sensitive guy who likes walks on the beaches,’ and stuff like that. Cos I wouldn’t, totally would not share that information with anyone who searches ‘Lloyd’ on Facebook.

The other thing that people did was to minimize their emotional response. For example, Patrick said, “Psha, it’s not important, no big deal. No big deal.”

**Giving signals.** Certainly, any of these methods of maintaining privacy may have communicated to the other person that they had touched on something private, but most were not designed to communicate this fact. However, participants did describe a few methods of indicating a need for privacy or achieving privacy. For example, Anne and Max both did something active, like going for a walk or running. Elizabeth communicated an unwillingness to converse through her language or her tone. Midas and Anne both read books. Midas explained:

I guess in my case I read and I may, in that book I’m maintaining a certain level of privacy and my wife knows I’m reading it and she’ll talk to me
and she says, ‘I know you’re listening because your toes are twitching.’

But I’m trying to read, so I try to maintain a certain level of privacy in that regard.

**Managing Other People’s Privacy**

When it came to other people’s privacy, there were a number of issues that people had to manage. As I mentioned in previous sections, people’s approach to privacy tended to differ somewhat when they were dealing with other people’s information. Ann explained, “You can be a very open person, you know, spread your information around, as long as it’s yours. There is a difference, spreading your information as opposed to spreading somebody else’s.” When someone shared something with them, they first had to determine whether or not what was shared was private. If they determined that the information was private they then had to decide what to do with it, and finally, they sometimes also had an emotional reaction to the disclosure, or the fact that the person had chosen to disclose to them.

**Judging if something is private.** Sometimes, judging whether something is private was not as easy as one might expect. Participants used a few different approaches for determining this, but there were times when they had trouble knowing. Some blamed themselves for this, and felt that they were not very good at reading other people. But others felt that they listened carefully and yet could not always tell the difference between a disclosure and conversation. Walter explained, “It can be difficult. Sometimes you have to say, ‘Are you serious, you don’t want me to tell anybody?’ But people are people and we misinterpret signals all the time.”
Picking up their signals. For this reason, participants appreciated it when others made explicit the fact that something was private. Joe said, “I would hope they’d tell me.” This was generally considered the clearest signal that something is private, and some participants considered it the other person’s responsibility to be clear in this manner. Others said that if there were any doubt they would clarify. For example, Johanna explained, “I mean sometimes you can tell, ooh this is a big deal. So I’ll actually ask for clarification. ‘So you don’t really want me telling anyone?’” Another reason people appreciated being told if something is private is because they felt that if they never shared anything other people said then they seemed too closed. Bob explained that friends tend to expect to hear about how other friends are doing so that they can help out if needed. In his view, this was part of the responsibility that a group of friends has for each other. On the other hand, some participants saw the phrase, ‘Don’t tell anyone, but…’ as a signal for gossip. Baba explained, “You know what’s gonna happen. You’re going to be thinking, ‘Should I tell them?’ Or have to keep my mouth closed because it could slip out or something.”

While some signals were explicit, others involved changes to body language or the way in which something was said that indicated a degree of intimacy. Participants generally had no difficulty identifying signals such as moving in closer, not making eye contact, or lowering their voice as indications that the topic was private. Similarly, disclosures that came with a lot of negative emotion, such as crying, signs of stress, or feelings of hurt were also often considered to be private.

Using their standards. Another signal that participants picked up on was the degree to which the other person appeared to be private about that issue. This was
something that they learned about the other person over time and experience with them. Several participants reported that they had a friend or relative who was more private than other people they know and so they were especially cautious when that person shared something with them. In those cases, they tended to interpret the information as private. They also tried to understand why someone was telling them something and what they wanted in response. For example, Patrick explained that he had learned to just listen when someone else told him something. Samantha explained that the length of time someone took to share something was a good indication of how private they felt about that topic:

> If someone finds something private, they don’t necessarily share it right away. It takes them like a month or two to be able to actually speak to you about it, in which case you know that if it took them that long to actually share something like that, then it is private for them and it is very personal.

**Using own standards.** Ultimately, most participants reported that they had to use their own standards to determine whether something was private. Basically, this meant that in describing what topics would be considered private, they were often reiterating their own private topics. Some participants recognized this issue and felt that there was really no other way of judging whether or not it was private. Ann explained, “I mean none of us would want things repeated sometimes so I guess it’s a personal judgment based on your own values and experience, I would guess.” This approach relates back to the value of doing unto others as one would have done unto you. Participants felt that if they considered something private then they should apply the same rules to someone else’s information. In my experience writing about the data, I found that I struggled with
this issue. Because I am private, I considered many of the things that participants told me to be private, even though they had been shared for research purposes. As a result, when using their examples I carefully considered whether there was any way in which sharing something would violate participants’ privacy.

**Using heuristics.** There were a few problems with using one’s own standards as a way of approaching other people’s privacy. It worked well for people who were very private themselves because they were unlikely to breach other people’s privacy. However, when participants did not consider themselves private then they had to work harder to determine if something was private. Often, they used heuristics, or an educated guess based on certain clues, to determine this. For example, if there was any type of social stigma or taboo associated with the disclosure then they judged it to be private. Johanna explained, “I have to work really hard because I am not a private person, so I could leak really easily. So I try really hard then. It’s easier [to know] if, you know, they told you something truly horrific.” Participants felt that this heuristic worked best for topics that were obviously private, but sometimes smaller issues that were not so obviously private caused problems if they were shared further. Bob explained, “There’s smaller things that are harder [to judge] that often end up being bigger issues in the long run.” Participants also recognized that there were cultural differences, both in terms of local cultures and country of origin, so they also tended to take this information into account in determining whether something would be socially acceptable to share.

Another heuristic that participants used was their degree of closeness with the other person. For privileged relationships, participants assumed that disclosures were private. Under these circumstances there tended to be an understanding that disclosures
were kept private. Anne explained, “I think probably my first reaction to the question is, ‘Is that something I would tell a person?’ Now if this is a really dear treasured friend then that idea would probably not even come to mind. It would depend on the degree of friendship.”

**Deciding what to do.** Once they established that a particular piece of information that had been shared was private, participants had to decide what to do.

**Keeping it.** The most common response was to keep the information to themselves. People used a number of metaphors for this process. Putting it in the vault was one that was used numerous times, and it implied that the information was locked away and would never be shared further. “That’s as good as gold,” said Colin. In some cases this information was held because participants felt that they had an agreement to honor. For example, they were quite comfortable keeping work-related information private. In other cases, they did not share because they did not want to be seen as the kind of person that shares other people’s information. In many cases, they kept the information private simply because that is what they felt the other person wanted. They felt that the other person had chosen to share with them and so it was not their place to share the information further. A word that came up often in these comments was ‘respect,’ meaning the importance of respecting the other person’s wishes.

Other metaphors included D.P.’s, “I’ve probably learned recently that you file it. It’s there.” By this he meant that you keep it to yourself, but you also remember it in case it is needed in the relationship. He felt that at times it is important to ask the other person about this information because it shows that he cares and was listening. Expressions such as Arthur’s “zip my lips” imply that keeping the information private is a somewhat
effortful process. Instead, other participants chose to just throw the information away or forget about it: “Yeah, it’s gone, out the back somewhere. I’m not going to tell anybody. People know that. Most of the time if they do tell me something it’s in strictest privacy I’ll just forget about it. It doesn’t concern me” (Colin).

_Giving it away._ While the most common response was to keep others’ private information, there were some circumstances where participants chose to share it. I previously described situations where participants felt that they had to share something. In other cases, they shared simply because they felt that they were unable to keep things private. Participants who were not private themselves often admitted to having difficulty holding other people’s information. Bob felt that it was human nature to share things with other people and if one did not admit to occasionally sharing other people’s information then one was not being honest. Several people had someone that they confided things in that others had shared because they knew it would not go any further. Charlie explained:

> You have to decide within yourself whether you can broadcast this to John Q Public and company or if you should keep this information to yourself, if it’s just for you and your family. Information that, say, that you would share with a personal confidante.

Edward simply did not feel that he had ever received anything private: “Well, I don’t recall ever being told anything that could be regarded as being very private or something one shouldn’t talk about… Don’t tell me if you don’t want it to get around.” Several participants echoed this feeling that others should be responsible for protecting their own privacy. In these cases, they were not willing to take responsibility for keeping information private, especially when there were negative consequences to sharing.
Leaving it to them. Participants often felt that sharing something with them or others was the other person’s prerogative. As a result, they sometimes chose not to initiate private conversations. In these cases, they were happy to have the conversation with someone but did not want to invade their privacy by initiating it. Evelynne explained, “If it’s a sensitive subject you wait for them to bring it up.” I must have been implicitly using this approach in one of my earliest interviews with someone who did not consider himself private. I tried to learn what topics he might consider to be private, but I reached the end of the interview without doing more than merely touching on any of these issues. Upon reflection, I realized that we had not once discussed sex as a private topic, even though there was an implication that intimate issues should not be discussed. In this way I left the decision as to the depth of our conversation to my conversation partner, even though my task was to learn about what he considered private. It was for this reason that I devised the strategies for discussing sexual issues that I described previously. I was therefore able to let the participant provide details at a level where they were comfortable, without leaving out important issues.

Participants also did not want to make privacy-related decisions on the other person’s behalf. For example, Edith was reluctant to post photos of her son online and Midas was unwilling to share his friends’ pension details, even though he and his group of friends were all dealing with these same issues and might find it useful to know. This related to issues of control, in that they did not want to take control of someone else’s disclosure decisions and thus infringe on their autonomy.
**How they feel.** Receiving a disclosure from someone else was often not a neutral experience for participants. They had a number of responses, which varied in part by why they felt the other had shared and in part by the nature of the information.

**Feeling honored.** The most positive of the feelings that participants experienced was a sense of honor that the other person had chosen to share something with them. These participants interpreted the disclosure as an indication of the other person’s trust and respect in them. Iris explained, “I think that’s, what’s the word? It’s an honor that they talk to you in that way, I think. So why would you spread that around?” I had this feeling several times myself over the course of the interviews when participants indicated to me that they had shared something that they had not thought about in many years or that they had not felt they could share with other people. These sorts of disclosures left me feeling pleased that I was able to create the sort of environment where other people could feel comfortable and safe in sharing. As a result, I was able to relate to the experiences that participants had in regard to feeling honored. However, this feeling also posed a challenge for me because I sometimes felt reluctant to share people’s stories – I felt protective of them since they had been shared with me specifically.

**They shouldn’t tell me.** On the other hand, some disclosures made people feel irritated or uncomfortable. Often, this feeling occurred because the participant interpreted the information as too private to share, or felt that they were the wrong person to share with. When participants deemed the information private or felt that they would not have chosen to share this piece of information, they often seemed perplexed. In this situation it was difficult for them to understand why the person would have revealed such a thing. Mary explained, “I used to teach ceramics. People would tell you the most intimate
things. “Why are you telling me this?” In these cases, it seemed that the other person
broke a social norm for what should be held private. This feeling also occurred in cases
where people disclosed things that seemed to violate a trust. For example, Bob described
a situation where a friend’s partner shared intimate details about their relationship with
him. In this case, he felt that doing so was a violation of the friend’s trust and so he felt
uncomfortable on his own behalf and in anticipation of how his friend would feel.

Feeling burdened. Another type of disclosure that people did not want was one
that burdened them in some way. Just as they were wary of burdening others with their
information, they were also unhappy to receive something burdensome. Maria described
an extreme case of this:

I carried something for four years. Someone confided something in me,
something that personally I think I would have took to my grave. But they
confided in me, and they really, it really weighed heavily… Something
like that, that heavy, I really don’t want to know.
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

After conducting a survey of the existing literature on privacy I came to the conclusion that the research on privacy is a vast and fragmented field. When I started exploring privacy with my research participants, I realized the reason for my observations about the privacy literature; privacy itself is a diverse concept that has implications for many different aspects of people’s lives. People’s beliefs about privacy are shaped not only by their experiences and the events in the world around them, but also by their personality and their values. As a result, people have a sense of how private they are as people, but there are many other elements that must be accounted for in trying to understand and predict privacy behavior. Individual characteristics such as perceived privacy levels, personality, and values affect the types of relationships that people have with others. The types of relationships people have affect their need for privacy (or need for connection) and their methods for achieving privacy. The types of experiences people have had, the type of information they hold private, and the situations they find themselves in also affect what kinds of behavior they may engage in to protect their privacy. And all of these considerations affect the balance of risks and benefits that people believe will result from disclosing or keeping something private.

I begin this discussion by focusing on the complexity of the topic because I believe that it helps to explain the reason for the difficulties that academics have encountered in trying to understand this issue and apply this knowledge to practical privacy problems. This complexity need not be a cause for despair, but it does serve as a caution in trying to simplify the issue into a single construct or scale. When I began my
Exploration of privacy early in my graduate career, I initially hoped to develop a privacy scale because I believed that existing scales were insufficient. However, I now better understand the extent to which privacy can only be understood in conjunction with knowledge of an individual’s personality and relational context. For these reasons, these research findings serve as a starting point for a fuller understanding of the psychology of privacy management, as situated within the current North American, primarily middle class context. That said, a number of interesting findings have come from this research. I will provide a high level summary of the substantive theory, discuss some of the overarching findings in the context of the existing literature and consider the adequacy of existing theories for explaining the depth and breadth of privacy. I will then turn to potential limitations in interpreting the findings of my research.

**Summary of the Substantive Theory**

The privacy management experiences that participants described reflected the way in which who they are, their relationships, their information, and their context impact the risks and benefits they perceive to disclosing or keeping their privacy, as well as the resulting behaviors. In my substantive theory of privacy, who people are in relation to privacy is not only about their approach to privacy but also their approach to social relationships. These two elements of their personality together shape their preference for how they treat their information and their social interactions. Their sense of confidence also impacts how they decide whether or not to share in general and what they share in particular situations. And lastly, their values affect both how they treat their own information and how they treat other people’s.
In any particular situation, the relationship that someone has with the person they are interacting with, as well as the relationships they have with other people who are present all impact the potential benefits to sharing or the possible risks. While I have considered other people present as elements of the context, context also encompasses the place itself and the method of communication (especially technologically-mediated communication). Just as the context affects what information is shared, so does the nature of the information itself. Decisions regarding functional information tend to be more straightforward. Normative information also leads to more straightforward decisions in the sense that this type of information is either acceptable to share in a particular situation or it is not. For emotional information these decisions are more difficult to assess because the risks and benefits tend to be more varied and, as the name suggests, emotionally charged.

While this management process implies a carefully considered decision, participants indicated that they do not always know how they manage their privacy and are often not even aware of managing it per se. Their privacy behaviors are situation, relationship, and information specific, but they also largely reflect who people are and how they approach privacy. Privacy behaviors involve proactive mechanisms, which I have called gatekeeping strategies, as well as the use of rules, and both direct and indirect methods. The methods that people choose depend on how they view privacy and the extent to which they are willing to make their privacy needs explicit. Similarly, the way people manage other people’s privacy is a reflection of their own approach, the impact of the other person’s disclosure, and their beliefs about the importance of allowing other people to make their own privacy decisions.
Discussion of Key Findings

I will now turn to a discussion of some of the important issues that I found in my research interviews, and the way in which my findings map to existing privacy and psychology research.

Privacy has many meanings. I began this project and also my interviews with participants by trying to learn something about what privacy means to people. I asked this question directly, but many other aspects of the interviews served to inform me about how participants viewed privacy. I was not seeking to gain a unified definition of privacy but rather wanted to understand the range of approaches and general scope of the topic. Understanding people’s perceptions of their own privacy levels, related concepts such as openness, control, trust, honesty, and security all serve to inform us about the topic. Also, the metaphors that people provided helped to elucidate their beliefs about the issue.

Metaphors of privacy as a mechanism for enabling selective access to the self and one’s information are consistent with the definitions in the literature on privacy as a boundary control process (see Altman, 1975; Petronio, 2002). These metaphors included privacy as a box, a wall, a fence, a cloak, and a cage.

The metaphor of privacy as an onion also described a selective sharing of information that was based on closeness. The onion metaphor is fairly consistent with Altman and Taylor’s (1973) use in their social penetration theory, though this theory focused on the process of moving from outer to inner layers of the onion, rather than viewing the layers as different types of relationships. The way my participants used the metaphor did not imply that people would necessarily move further into the onion with time. Instead, people may exist at different layers based on the type of relationship.
Acquaintances reside in the outer layer and only get limited information, friends get an intermediate amount of information, intimate friends and family members are very near the core, but the core itself may be saved for one’s self or only shared with a long-term partner.

Another aspect of privacy that was highlighted by a few participants was the relationship between privacy and curiosity. This linkage may also relate to a perception, though not one that many participants voiced as their own, that privacy is related to keeping secrets. Most participants did not believe that privacy is about secrecy, but some found that their wanting privacy brought out curiosity in others. Privacy as a black book or a twisted pretzel highlight the fact that keeping something private leads others to believe that there is something worth knowing. This fact may be explainable in part by a difference in the way the two conversation partners perceive the relationship. As Jourard (1971) points out, self-disclosure is about opening one’s self to another person and being in a relationship involves decreasing the sense of mystery and letting one’s self be known. In this way, choosing not to share with another person can be seen as resistance to the relationship. This may explain why some of my participants felt that others were pushing too hard to know aspects of them that they would rather keep to themselves. In that case, there may have been a disagreement about the closeness of the relationship, though it may also have been a difference in opinion about what is to be shared within the relationship. The difficulty is that in managing their own privacy and seeking their own ideal level of privacy at any given time, participants were also managing their level of engagement in their relationships with other people and thus managing the relationship.
There may also be a difference in approach between the two conversation partners, since some people reported that they kept their innermost core to themselves, whereas others wanted to share it with someone close. Privacy as the red smarties or privacy as a personal possession emphasizes the way privacy is used to keep the good things to one’s self, or keep them for privileged relationships. In this way, privacy is a positive mechanism for guarding the self not simply from intrusion but also for the enjoyment of one’s own inner experiences. These are things to be enjoyed or consumed and therefore show the importance of experiencing privacy, and not just the potential of having it. Privacy as water or as a life force also shows that privacy has an important and positive role in people’s lives. These metaphors show privacy as a basic necessity, which is consistent with views of privacy as a fundamental right. These metaphors seem to highlight the value of being able to obtain privacy as needed and being in control of one’s private information and experiences.

The difference between these metaphors can be likened to the difference between views of privacy as the ability to control one’s information and privacy as information control – in one case it is about the feeling that one is able to control the information and in the other it is about the actual ability to control it. This distinction may help to explain how control is important to privacy. In some cases it is the feeling that matters and in others it is the outcome of attempting to control the information that is important. For example, I described how functional information is only useful if it is kept private. In this case the realization of the potential for information control matters very much. Controlling one’s banking information and choosing where it is disclosed is how one ensures that identity theft cannot take place. However in relationships, much of the way
privacy is managed is based on the signals that people give one another; the feeling that their information will be safe, that they will not be judged, and that there is a benefit to disclosing are all important feelings, regardless of what happens with the information.

This issue of feelings of privacy in the context of relationships may well relate to one of the other metaphors that a participant provided – that privacy is a myth or an illusion. In the interpersonal realm, privacy is about maintaining a set of expectations and behaving in ways that are consistent with those expectations. This idea is highlighted by the metaphors of privacy as one’s house or car, where the rules of entering and engagement are known. Strangers do not walk into one’s house, just as they do not (or should not) drive into one’s lane. As such, privacy is as much about individual needs as it is about living by a shared set of rules and assumptions.

**Privacy is personality.** As I described in the findings section, speaking with people about their privacy is essentially a process of learning who they are, the various pressures they face, and the extent to which they bow to those pressures. For what it is worth, people do have a sense of their own level of privacy. They tend to believe that they are either private or not private, despite the various caveats to those descriptions. However, as researchers have noted, what people say about their privacy does not map very clearly to what they do (Norberg, Horne, & Horne, 2007). What they say about privacy may be what they believe, but how they behave in relation to their private information may be a different matter. There are several characteristics that seemed to influence people’s approach to privacy. While I did not use any standard personality measures, people believed that their level of openness played a part in the way they approached privacy, and there were some similarities to the psychological construct
extraversion. Also, some of what I have termed values may also be elements of personality. For example, valuing choice or control may relate to need for control. I will therefore discuss findings on openness and choice, which were my participants’ terms, in the context of extraversion and need for control.

**Openness and extraversion.** Participants described their level of openness, meaning the extent to which they were open to socializing and communicating with other people. This term indicates a receptiveness to others and is closely linked with the value of being open and showing others that they are open. This characteristic was something that people perceived as valued in our society and something that they valued in other people, though to varying degrees. They also used the term outgoing in a similar way, though with the implication of a more active pursuit of social interactions with others. These two terms have some similarities to the psychological construct extraversion. While some participants used this term, they tended to use it to mean that they were motivated to interact with and enjoyed being with other people. In the psychology literature, the definition of extraversion is somewhat varied, but is believed to encompass warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity, excitement seeking, and positive emotions (Costa & McCrae, 1992). This is certainly a complex idea and so it is not surprising that participants’ use of the term did not capture the construct in its entirety.

The most similar element to participants’ use of the term “open” was warmth, meaning showing interpersonal warmth. Participants generally felt that it was good to show this sort of receptiveness to other people. They also enjoyed the resulting connections they made with others. Of course the degree to which this was important varied from person to person, but being open to connections with other people was
generally believed to be a positive thing. The research on extraversion supports this idea, showing a correlation between sociability and positive affect (deNeve & Cooper, 1998).

Outgoingness, which was the other social concept that people felt related to privacy, captures some of the energetic aspects of the extraversion construct. To be gregarious involves being social with others. Activity and excitement seeking also imply a level of proactive effort regarding social interactions. Those who used the word extraversion seemed to be using it in this way, meaning that they actively sought out social interactions. While participants generally saw privacy and openness as motivations that are not incompatible with one another, they did feel that they sometimes needed to make tradeoffs with their privacy in order to maintain relationships or make social connections. As a result, those who are highly motivated by social interactions may be more reluctant to make privacy decisions that impact their ability to connect with other people.

Interestingly, this is the relationship I saw between need for popularity and disclosure in my previous research on Facebook (Christofides et al., 2009). Those who were highly motivated by successful social interactions were more likely to share their information on Facebook, though popularity did not have any impact on privacy protection behavior (use of Facebook’s privacy settings). It is somewhat more difficult to separate disclosure behavior from privacy behavior in face-to-face interactions, but together these findings provide support for the idea that approach to social interactions and approach to privacy are two separate drivers. While there is not extensive research on the links between privacy and personality, it seems that extraversion has some
relationship to privacy in that at the extreme, privacy can limit social connections. For extraverts, this may be an unacceptable tradeoff.

Choice and need for control. Consistent with existing privacy theory (Altman, 1975; Margulis, 1977; Westin, 1967), I found that having a choice as to what one does or does not share was generally important to participants and several of the consequences of loss of privacy centered on losses of autonomy both in the present and in terms of decisions for the future. I used the word choice (which is a value in my theory) to indicate a lesser need for control because some participants objected to the idea of needing control. People differed in the extent to which this mattered to them and some felt that being able to control one’s information and time was important, whereas others only wanted some choice in what was shared. This may seem to be a matter of semantics, though the literature on control does differentiate these factors to some degree. According to Leotti, Iyengar and Ochsner (2010), having a choice enables people to express preferences and exert their self, which in turn leads to a perception of control. In this way, choice is the action that people take that leads to a sense of control. Feeling a sense of control has been shown to be important for both psychological and physical health, and the authors argue that the need for control has a biological basis.

According to the literature, having a sense of control is different than exerting control, which is seen as an interpersonal display of power (Inesi, Botti, Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2011). This may be the reason that many participants were reluctant to endorse a need for control over their privacy. They may have been interpreting this as an interpersonal show of control, rather than a feeling of choice and sense of control over their lives. Indeed, participants did not generally associate privacy with power in their
own lives, except in the negative sense that others may gain power over them if they share certain information. Inesi and colleagues (2011) found that interpersonal power and personal control are to some degree substitutable, such that lower feelings of choice are associated with a greater desire for power and greater power with lower need for choice. This interrelationship may indicate that my participants generally felt that they had reasonable levels of control over their lives since they did not feel a need for power. However, it should be noted that indicating a desire for interpersonal power is probably not a socially desirable need to convey. It may also feel somewhat contradictory to describe one’s needs for privacy as well as a desire to exert control over others, since exerting power over others may inhibit their ability to obtain privacy or make their own choices about their privacy.

**Trust is fundamentally important.** I found trust to be a fundamental issue that permeated the entire disclosure decision process. Trust is a key factor in determining whether or not people share something with another person, and high trust can override high privacy. That said, trust is something that has to be earned or proven and so it is not given lightly. Certain professions do come with trust built in to the role and the legal or ethical code, but for some people those assurances are not enough. For them, the individual also has to prove themselves trustworthy. In this case someone’s general propensity to be trusting (or untrusting) may make the trust barrier that an individual has to overcome that much greater. For others though, the role is enough, and they can feel comfortable disclosing in those circumstances. This finding is consistent with the literature on trust and self-disclosure, which finds that individuals who are low on interpersonal trust are less likely to disclose (Steel, 1991). In close relationships, trust has
been shown to be important for predicting how the other person will behave (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985), which may be important in determining one’s own behavior.

Trust may also impact the decision to make privacy needs explicit or not. For someone who is very trusting or trusts their conversation partner, they may not need to indicate that a particular disclosure is private. They may simply assume that the other person will keep that information. However, this assumption of privacy based on trust may or may not translate to their management of other people’s information. Would they trust that the other person would let them know if something is to be kept in confidence? Or would they assume that the other person must trust them very much in order to share such a thing? This example illustrates the importance of distinguishing between generalized trust and the trust that is specific to an interaction. In the literature, trust has been measured in a number of different ways, with some research defining trust as a general expectancy, termed global trust (Rotter, 1971), and others interested in trust in a specific interaction such as a romantic partner (Simpson, 1990) and in groups, such as a company (Morgan & Hunt, 1994)

In my previous research I found that general trust inversely predicts privacy protection behavior online (Christofides, et al., 2009, 2012), but does not predict disclosure behavior. However, much of the literature on disclosure online, especially in the context of online transactions focuses on interaction-specific trust and ways of increasing feelings of trust, for example, by providing clearer privacy policies or third-party security seals (Palmer, Bailey, & Faraj, 2006). This type of research tends to show a relationship between disclosure and increased feelings of trust in a specific interaction (e.g. Metzger, 2004). Similarly, other’s disclosures also increase feelings of trust
(Henderson & Gilding, 2004). The effect of trust on one’s disclosures and others’ disclosures on trust is important for interpersonal relationships, relationships with professionals, online communication, interactions with companies, with government and any number of other applications. Indeed, trust is vitally important to relationships and has been shown to be a key factor in engagement with others and the experience of loneliness for both children and adults (Rotenberg et al., 2010).

As I have noted in relation to other aspects of privacy, operationalization is extremely important for understanding concepts that identify more than one construct. Couch and Jones (1997) also recognized this issue in relation to trust and therefore measure trust in general, trust in family and friend relationships, and trust in one’s relationship partner. Rotter (1971) saw general or global trust as essential to building relationships because it leads to feelings of control and a sense of being able to know what to expect from relationship partners. General trust may work similarly for privacy in that it may predict someone’s approach to privacy or stated beliefs. In this way my previous findings that general trust predicts use of privacy settings may not be inconsistent with the current findings that relational trust is important in any specific disclosure decision. General trust may affect one’s privacy orientation, but trust that is specific to a relationship (including the other person’s disclosures, which can be used to assess trust in them) may affect disclosure in that context.

**Rules are not for relationships.** People generally felt that rules are restrictive and therefore not relevant to the more fluid interactions that they have in their relationships. I found this comment interesting since Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory (Petronio, 2002) describes itself as a rule-based privacy
management system. CPM is perhaps the most widely used privacy theory currently and it has been applied to many different contexts, from disclosure of infertility (Bute & Vik, 2010), to disclosure of HIV status (Miller & Rubin, 2007), to communication within stepfamilies (Afifi, 2003), to sharing information with online retailers (Metzger, 2007). Why is it then, that people do not feel their experiences with privacy are consistent with rule-based management?

There are several possible answers to this question. One is that people are simply not very good judges of their own behavior. This explanation is consistent with research showing that future behavior is not consistent with personal predictions, especially when people do not have extreme or unusual intentions (Osberg & Shrauger, 1986). This lack of self-predictive accuracy is explained in part by the fact that people overestimate the importance of their current intentions (Kohler & Poon, 2006). However, it is also possible that people only use rules to manage their privacy in certain circumstances or with more critical information. This explanation is consistent with the way my participants described their experiences, in that they described what could be considered rules for managing their more sensitive information. For example, Johanna explained that when someone tells her something that must be kept quiet, she tells herself that she can never speak of it again to anyone. In doing so, she has created a rule around a specific piece of information. This is what Petronio would describe as a thick boundary, or one that is not permeable and therefore does not let information out. Perhaps then, rules are more appropriate for managing thick boundaries. This may be consistent with CPM since it has typically been applied to specific disclosure situations, and often ones that involve highly sensitive information. Indeed, Petronio’s key examples are of people’s decisions to
disclose or keep private their medical mistakes (in the case of health professionals), one’s experience of childhood sexual abuse, and positive HIV/AIDS status (2002).

It is also possible that rules do not seem relevant to people because they always serve as the exception. I encountered a number of situations where participants described their approach, followed by a “but”. In other cases, people stated their approach quite definitely, for example, “I am not a private person”, but further discussion revealed that there were a number of caveats, such as discussing their sex life or financial status. As a result, it is possible that people generally do not have rules around their privacy, but there are certain things that they never talk about. In this way, they may have rules that make the management of their most private information different from their management of everyday information. Normative information is a likely example of this because it often fell into a category that people described as not private, but never discussed, or simply, “in poor taste”. They saw this information as different from other matters that they may choose to disclose or not. However, this is one of the problems with knowing where the topic of privacy begins and ends, because some issues are believed to be separate from privacy, and yet have an important relationship to privacy. People may define them as outside of the domain of privacy, but it is difficult to know to what extent this is true.

**Privacy is more than not disclosing.** While it is hardly a new idea that privacy and disclosure are related, and that not disclosing is one method of maintaining privacy, my research provides additional detail as to how people go about maintaining their privacy. While they may choose to underplay these behaviors or attribute them to an adherence to social norms, people have a number of both explicit and indirect ways of managing their privacy. Some involve avoiding privacy violations in the first place, as is
the case with gatekeeping strategies, whereas others serve to restore privacy that has been or is in danger of being lost.

One of the things that people reported doing was minimizing an issue in order to refrain from revealing that something had an emotional impact. This may actually be what they are doing when they state that certain issues are not privacy issues. It could be that participants were downplaying the importance of these issues in relation to privacy because doing so revealed something about their feelings on those issues. For example, saying that talking about sex is in poor taste may be felt to reveal less about one’s self than saying that it violates one’s privacy. This reluctance to identify issues as private is an interesting and important limitation to my research in that it implies that some knowledge about privacy may be difficult to obtain because doing so involves the relaxing of privacy boundaries.

My solution to the issue of violating privacy by asking about it was to use euphemisms or to report what other people had described as private in order to normalize it and thus make it easier to talk about. However, I would also suggest that other methods of gathering data might be useful. It would be interesting to explore online methods of data collection in order to overcome this issue. In that context, participants may be more willing to describe sensitive issues in relation to their privacy because they are not faced with another person that they need to assess. Research shows that people do sometimes disclose more using computer-assisted means than in face-to-face settings. For example, research conducted using a computer to read the interview questions rather than a person found that people disclosed more stigmatized behavior, though they disclosed less regarding their psychological distress (Newman et al., 2002). Online research methods
may be helpful, though participants’ perspective that technology makes them more aware of privacy issues should serve as an important caution in assuming that more detailed information could be gathered online.

**Functional information is different.** Another fundamental finding is that people seem to distinguish between different types of private information. The main differentiation was between functional information and the other types of potentially private information (emotional and normative information). While there was some overlap between emotional and normative information, functional information was different because the reasons for keeping it private were purely functional. Participants treated information like their credit card number, name, and address as private because there were tangible risks to disclosing them. For example, their name and address were generally not considered private, except in situations where revealing them might open up the possibility for their privacy to be intruded upon. In these situations the risk/benefit analysis was perhaps easier to perform because the potential risks and potential benefits were clearer. For this reason, people reported that they used rules for managing their functional information (my term, not theirs) but not for managing other types of information. Rules might include never giving out one’s credit card over the phone or never sharing identification numbers such as one’s SIN by email.

However, in certain situations, the risks may not be as clear as one thinks. For example, the risks of sharing information online are changing continually such that new risks occur all the time (note the recent trend towards US employers asking employees for their Facebook login information when assessing their job candidacy). Also, while it may be reasonable to expect people to take some personal responsibility for guarding
their information, this is difficult to do when one cannot evaluate the true risks to sharing, as is the case if one is not sufficiently familiar with the ways in which information can be used. Another issue is that while risks may be identifiable, the likelihood of them occurring may be unclear (Moore & Gullone, 1996).

Another important consideration here is that in these situations, there are other ways of sharing one’s functional information. These methods might be more time-intensive or less convenient, but generally the goals can still be achieved through another means. The ability to share in a different way may not be possible for emotional information because the moment for a particular disclosure may pass and never return again (for example, when someone asks for one’s opinion about something), or the decision may be whether or not to share a particular piece of information at all, and the context may be a secondary consideration. In addition, while functional information may be different, the contexts for disclosing functional versus normative information are becoming increasingly blurred. Many online means of disclosure require functional information to use them (for example, at least in theory, using Facebook requires one’s real name). Mixing functional and emotional information may pose a new risk in information sharing in terms of the potential for privacy to be breached and the resulting consequences.

**Risks/benefits are constantly evaluated.** I have briefly touched on some of the ways that people take risks and benefits into account in their disclosure decisions. There are numerous risks and benefits to disclosing or to keeping one’s information private and people were able to articulate many of them quite clearly. However, risks were often inextricable from issues of who to share with because so many risks are relational in
nature. In deciding whether or not to share with someone, the balance of risks and benefits depends on the nature of the relationship. Does the relationship matter to them? Will disclosing advance or harm the relationship? How will the other person respond and how might the information affect them? Are they likely to tell anyone else?

With this list of considerations in mind, it is clear why disclosing to a professional is easier, especially if the professional is in a position to help. Concerns about harming the relationship are no longer relevant, as are concerns that the information may be shared beyond the relationship. As a result, the only consideration is the extent to which sharing may advance the goals of the interaction. Similarly, with online purchases, the risk/benefit analysis is much simplified. Again, concerns with harming the relationship are not relevant. The only considerations are whether sharing has a useful purpose and to what extent the retailer can be trusted to keep the information safely and resist sharing it with other parties. This may explain why some of the research on disclosures online focuses only on the risk/benefit analysis. In the consumer context, the analysis process may be simpler than in the context of a relationship. However, as I mentioned previously, this depends on the assumption that risks and their likelihood of occurring are knowable. The idea that risks are knowable is a contested idea, especially in the online context, where people do not necessarily know how their information will be used and may not understand the true risks of sharing.

In some cases the risks of sharing are simply a loss of the benefits of keeping something to one’s self. There was a sense that holding one’s private moments was not only an important experience, but it also helped people to maintain some aspect of themselves. In this way, privacy served as a means of maintaining the self and the risk of
sharing something was that somehow they might lose this intimate part of themselves. In this sense, risks may not arise from anything external but may reflect a loss of something internal. Evaluating these types of risks may be difficult, especially for people who have not thought extensively about their feelings about privacy. In that case they may not realize the benefits to keeping some aspect of the self private until it is too late.

**Context affects everything.** This research shows that a number of aspects of the communication context affect privacy. While in my theory I separated context from the person that one is communicating with and from the information that one is sharing, all of these things can also be thought of as context in the sense that they qualify the personality aspect of privacy. When I asked people whether they were private or not, their response almost always involved a certain set of conditions. A typical response was to say that they were or were not private, but that it depended on a number of factors, or to ask something along the lines of, ‘In what context?’ In this sense, context is extremely important and helps to explain why researchers have such difficulty pinpointing the impact of privacy orientation or privacy concerns on privacy behavior.

The importance of context for predicting behavior may also explain the poor link between privacy orientation and behavior. According to the theory of reasoned action and planned behavior, attitude towards a particular behavior, subjective norms of the situation, and perceived behavioral control all predict intention to perform a specific behavior, which in turn predicts the behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980). A meta-analysis of research using these theories indicates that these factors show reasonable predictive power for behavioral intention but are less effective at predicting actual behavior (see Sutton, 1998 for a review) and one possible reason is that researchers
often ask about general intentions rather than specific intentions for a particular action. In the context of privacy, this would be akin to asking about privacy orientation without specifying any of the qualifying factors. As my participants pointed out, such a question is impossible to answer because how one feels about privacy depends so heavily on contextual factors.

In this project, I set out to determine how people currently manage privacy, and one context that I was particularly interested in is the communication environment, which is strongly impacted by technology. Participants reported that technology makes privacy concerns more salient. This is not surprising since people reported using different methods for managing their privacy offline and online. In addition, the perception of choice or control is an important factor in privacy protection offline, but online, the perception of control is not sufficient to protect one’s privacy. Approaching privacy as one might in offline relationships does not translate well to new media where sharing information is effectively relinquishing control. As a result, the situational aspects of privacy are extremely important, both for understanding privacy management and for applications of this knowledge to privacy protection practices.

**Evaluating the Theory**

In any type of research project it is important to evaluate the extent to which one can rely on the findings, as well as the value of the contribution that they make. In quantitative research one speaks of reliability and validity, but in qualitative research, there has been some debate about the best terms to use for assessing the work (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Corbin and Strauss (1990) use the word *quality*, meaning quality of the research process, and Lincoln and Guba (1985) use the word *credibility* or
trustworthiness, in a similar way, as does Daly (2007). Daly also writes of integrity in the research, which takes into account issues of ethics in the way the research is conducted and presented, as well as accountability to participants and to the broader community for the research findings. In addition to issues of credibility, Charmaz (2006) also considers the resonance of the research.

In this document I have made efforts to present the processes I followed as I designed, conducted, and analyzed the research so that my attention to these issues is clear. The practice of memoing also serves to make the researcher’s process more transparent and I have included some of the content of my memos in the methods and findings sections. These memos describe my thoughts as well as some of the challenges I faced in trying to explore issues of privacy with participants and present this information without violating their privacy. These are a few of the ways that I sought to show integrity and credibility in the collection and presentation of the data. I am also accountable for the research in the sense that it is important that what I present sensitively and accurately portrays the participants’ experiences. While I did not share my final document with participants as part of the research process, I did discuss my emerging findings with them as the research progressed to determine the extent to which the findings resonated with them. In writing about these data, I considered not only their confidentiality but also the respectful portrayal of their ideas and experiences.

Two other factors that Charmaz (2006) considers are usefulness and originality. Usefulness is an important criterion, especially for someone pursuing a degree in an applied discipline. Originality speaks to not only the unique contribution of the work but also the creativity in approaching the problem and devising a solution. The study of
privacy and disclosure management is an important issue and I believe that I have described the impact it has in a number of important applications. While actually applying my work to these fields is beyond the scope of this project, it is important to demonstrate that my substantive theory has practical merits. I believe that my theory helps to explain some of the apparent paradoxes in the privacy literature that exist because of the way the various privacy considerations are managed in different contexts. My theory also fills in some of the gaps in our understanding of how individual differences affect one’s approach to privacy. These contributions build on existing research and theory but also provide their own unique contribution in that they explain the way elements of personality, relationships, information, context, and the perceived risks and benefits of disclosing or guarding privacy impact behavior.

I would also like to note two elements of my research that were not addressed in the findings section, but that the reader may have expected to see addressed. Based on the literature, I anticipated that there may be some differences in the way men and women and adults of different ages manage their privacy and as a result, I was careful to sample from these groups equally. However, these differences were largely absent, and I will now turn to a discussion of my findings related to these sampling decisions as well as possible explanations for not finding anticipated differences.

**Lack of differences between men and women.** I was somewhat surprised to find that my sample showed no noticeable differences in this regard, as the reader may have noted by the lack of mention of gender in my findings. While a few of my participants expected that there would be differences in privacy management between men and women, I did not see any evidence of these differences. I did not find that men and
women in my sample showed differences in their personalities or the way in which their relationships or circumstances impact their behavior. I attribute this finding largely to the personal nature of privacy and the fact that any one person’s management approach is such a complex process.

However, it is also important to consider whether any aspects of my research methods may have obscured differences between men and women. For example, is there something about the particular men and women I spoke with that is responsible for this null finding? In selecting my sample, I took care to ensure that the people I spoke with were of varied background and age. That said, my assessment of what I know of the SES of the participants leads me to believe that they were slightly more educated than the average North American and perhaps also of slightly better financial means. There may be some links between SES and privacy, in the sense that those with higher SES are better able to obtain privacy should they desire it. However, it is unclear whether SES would impact men and women differently, which may pose a limitation to this study.

It is also possible that the questions I asked were not designed to reveal differences between men and women. While the literature sensitized me to the potential for gender differences, I did not specifically ask participants whether they thought gender had an impact because I felt that this would simply provide another opinion on the topic. Instead, I allowed for the possibility that participants might experience differences in their management of privacy that would be conveyed through their stories and experiences. As a result, my methodology was not designed to capture this issue directly. If there are in fact differences between men and women, they are not present to such a degree that they overrode individual differences in privacy management. Perhaps the use
of a different methodology would pick out these more subtle differences, though nothing I learned from participants lead me to believe that men and women use different processes for managing their privacy. This finding is not necessarily inconsistent with research on gender differences in privacy since the literature shows varied and somewhat inconclusive evidence (Dindia & Allen, 1992).

**Age.** The literature also lead me to believe that there may be some differences in the way people of different ages manage their privacy. However, in my sample, there were people who were private and people who were open in all of the age ranges. It also did not seem that the process that people followed for managing their privacy varied with age. While I did not find that participants of different ages followed different processes, I do believe that people of different ages inhabit somewhat different communication contexts. While most participants used computers, the few that did not were all 48 or older, though privacy was not the only reason they did not use computers (other reasons were essentially centered on not seeing a use for them, which perhaps can be explained in part by not having extensive exposure to them). In North America, few people can avoid using computers since they are now part of school curricula and used at least to some degree in most jobs. As a result, in the future and to some extent now, the privacy issues that people experience are unlikely to be solvable by choosing not to use computers without significant personal costs.

All of the youngest age group (18-27) used social media, even though they varied in degree of privacy and Lloyd described himself as very private. Those in the oldest age group (78+) also varied considerably in their degree of privacy, but none of them used social media. These findings lead me to feel that perhaps the choices that people feel they
have in protecting their privacy are different. Younger people may not be able to opt-out of communication technology such as social media without significant personal costs. For older people, there may be fewer costs to choosing not to use technology. While it is not clear from this study how these issues impact privacy, the technology-related privacy mechanisms that people employ may well differ with age. The other types of privacy mechanisms did not seem to differ in the sense that people of all ages used gatekeeping strategies, rules, and both indirect and direct methods of maintaining their privacy.

Another issue that I feel should be considered is the extent to which people of different ages differ in what is considered private. Functional information is unlikely to differ since I have defined it based on its purpose and the consequences of disclosing it, though it is possible that the benefits that one perceives from sharing this information might differ by age. Emotional information is very personal and so I would expect it to differ with personality rather than with age. However, I would expect that the specifics of what types of details constitute normative information and which are considered emotional would differ. Some participants did feel that the types of things that can be talked about have changed (for example, Ann described how feminine hygiene products are now advertised on television where they never would have been when she was younger). These are all issues for further study, but I believe this research identifies some valuable insights that might guide that research.

**Conclusions and Future Research**

This dissertation aimed to explore the management of privacy in the current context using qualitative methods, and specifically, grounded theory methodology, in order to develop a theory of privacy that is rooted in data from our North American
environment. This substantive theory provides an explanation of how people use the information about their relationships and environment to make decisions about what to share. While there was a general sense in the literature that people’s personality impacts their approach to privacy, this study helps to explain how sociability and privacy, as well as confidence and values, work together to impact how people approach privacy, how they evaluate the risks and benefits of any particular privacy management decision, and what behaviors they have at their disposal to protect their privacy. It also helps to explain why people treat different types of information in particular ways, by distinguishing functional, emotional, and normative information. While people’s personality affects how they view any particular piece of information, the way they treat it can also be explained based on the nature of the information and resulting consequences of sharing it. In turn, their personality also affects how they weigh the relative risks and benefits.

This research also highlights the importance of further investigation on issues of privacy. I set aside any detailed exploration of how people develop their approach to privacy management, though this topic would be a valuable one for further exploration. Understanding how people learn to manage their privacy may help us to better understand how they navigate new contexts. With the rate at which technology is changing and increasing the possible ways of communicating, this type of knowledge is likely to be important. That said, this research explains how people manage different types of relationships in relation to privacy and any privacy or disclosure decision involves an assessment of the relationship. In addition, while I have distinguished functional, emotional, and normative information, technologically mediated communication increasingly merges these categories. While one is only likely to share
functional information with a retailer, people often share all types of information when they are communicating with other people online. Mixing functional information with emotional or normative information poses new privacy risks, as is clear from accounts of the possibilities for permanently damaging reputation online (Solove, 2007).

Another issue for future research is the way in which being exposed to new communication methods impact privacy management. If people learn about privacy based on their experiences with privacy and the experiences of others around them, the decrease in available privacy is likely to impact their future behavior. In addition, the impact of being exposed to communication technology at younger ages may have an impact on the development of privacy management approaches. A more detailed examination of the way in which privacy differs across age groups is likely to inform this question. My research provides some clues as to what these differences might be, though further research is needed not only to explore these issues, but also to learn about the new ones that are continually emerging.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Privacy Model (adapted from Christofides, 2009)
Appendix B. Recruitment Script

I am a PhD student at the University of Guelph and am conducting a research project about people’s perspectives on privacy and the way they manage privacy in their lives. I am looking for people to take part in one-on-one interviews where they talk about their ideas about privacy and their experiences with it. Regardless of whether you consider yourself very private, very open, or have not really thought about these issues, I’d love to hear about your experiences. The interview should take between 30 minutes to an hour and you will receive $25 to thank you for your time.

If you would like to hear more about the study or would like to participate, please contact me:

Emily Christofides

Email: echristo@uoguelph.ca
Phone: 519-824-4120, ext. 58754
Cell: 519-362-0673

This research project has been reviewed and received clearance from the University of Guelph’s research ethics board (REB# 10JN009). If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

Research Ethics Officer     Sandra Auld
University of Guelph        Telephone: (519) 824-4120, ext. 56606
437 University Centre      E-mail: sauld@uoguelph.ca
Guelph, ON N1G 2W1           Fax: (519) 821-5236
Appendix C. Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Discovering the New Privacy: What Does Privacy Mean in an Age of Digital Connectedness?

We (Emily Christofides and Serge Desmarais) are researchers in the Department of Psychology at the University of Guelph. This research project is part of the requirements for completing my (Emily Christofides’) PhD dissertation. If you have any questions or concerns about the research during the course of the interview please ask me. If you have questions in the future or would like a copy of the findings, please contact myself or my advisor:

Emily Christofides (echristo@uoguelph.ca), University of Guelph, x58754

Dr. Serge Desmarais (s.desmarais@exec.uoguelph.ca), University of Guelph, x53880.

Purpose of the Study

During this interview we will discuss your ideas about privacy and the experiences you have had with it. The goal is to increase our understanding of privacy and help develop theories for how people manage their privacy.

Procedures

If you do agree to participate in this interview your participation is purely voluntary. I will ask you a series of questions and you can provide as much or as little detail as you feel comfortable with. You may refuse to answer any question you do not wish to answer, and you may end the interview at any time. Depending on how long we talk, the interview should take between 30 minutes to an hour. To thank you for your
time, you will receive $25 at the conclusion of the interview. This amount is in no way
affected by the answers you give or the length of time we talk – it is simply a small token
of appreciation for your time.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. These audio
recordings will not be shared outside the research team and will only be used to
transcribe the data. The recordings and transcripts will be locked and/or password
protected and will be kept for a period of 5 years, after which time they will be destroyed.
This is done in order to comply with the requirements of the research ethics board, and
for the potential to publish the findings from this research.

Confidentiality

All of your responses will remain strictly confidential. I may use some individual
quotes in preparing my final report, but all of these quotes will remain anonymous and
any individually identifying information will be altered such that there would be no way
of linking your comments to you. I will ask you to choose a name to use and will refer to
you this way in my notes and in discussing what I have learned. No individual will ever
be identified. Any publication of these results will also maintain confidentiality and no
individually identifying information will be shared.

Potential Benefits

Privacy is a topic that is of increasing importance to our society, and yet many
people have not thought explicitly about their beliefs or the way they manage their
privacy. Participating in these interviews will give you a chance to do this. In addition,
what is learned from these interviews will help to inform the privacy community, which
may in turn affect privacy practices and regulations.
Potential Risks and Discomforts

While no negative consequences are anticipated, it is possible that you may feel uncomfortable as a result of discussing your perspective on privacy, especially if you are a very private person. Please be assured that your information will be kept in strictest confidence and that you can choose not to answer any of the questions or end the interview at any time.

Rights as a Research Participant

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

Research Ethics Officer       Sandra Auld
University of Guelph          Telephone: (519) 824-4120, ext. 56606
437 University Centre         E-mail: sauld@uoguelph.ca
Guelph, ON N1G 2W1            Fax: (519) 821-5236
Informed Consent

I, ________________________________(your name) hereby give my consent to participate in the research study “Discovering the New Privacy: What Does Privacy Mean in an Age of Digital Connectedness” being conducted by researchers from the University of Guelph.

The nature and purpose of the procedures in this research project have been provided in writing and completely explained to me as described above. I understand, and I agree to participate in the research project on this basis.

I further understand that I may withdraw at any time.

__________________________ Date_________
Signature of the participant

__________________________ Date_________
Signature of the witness
Appendix D: Acknowledgment of Incentive

Discovering the new privacy: What does privacy mean in an age of technological-connectedness?

Please include your name and address and sign in the field below to acknowledge that you have received $25 in appreciation of your participation in an interview for this research project.

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Appendix E. Sample Interview Questions

1. What does the word privacy mean to you?
   a. Is privacy something that you think about very much?
   b. Would you say that privacy considerations guide your day-to-day activities or behaviour? [If yes, please explain]
   c. When are you more likely to be aware of privacy issues? [With certain person or certain situations?]

2. If I asked you to finish the sentence “Privacy is like…” how would you finish it?
   a. Can you compare it to something that helps us understand it?
   b. Do you use or can you think of any metaphors for thinking about privacy?

Now that we’ve talked about definitions of privacy and how you think about it, I’m interested in learning more about how people actually “do” privacy. Different people will have different ideas about what privacy is, or how important privacy is to them, and what kinds of things they’d like to keep private.

3. Can you tell me how you manage your own privacy? [For example, do you have any personal rules or other ways of deciding what to share when?]
   a. If yes… Have you ever broken your rules? If so, why do you think that was?
   b. How do you decide whether something is private or not? [The person, the context, the situation, the information, any other factors?]

4. To what extent do you consider yourself to be a private person?
a. Does your ability to obtain privacy have any impact on how you think about yourself or who you are?

b. Do you think it has any impact on how other people see you?

5. Some people have different aspects of themselves that they present to different people in their lives, in other words, not everyone sees the same “Sarah” or “Bob.” Other people don’t really do that, the person they present to the outside world is similar, no matter who they’re interacting with. Where would you say you fall on this continuum?

a. Can you talk me though an example from your own life to help me understand?

b. What factors influence the extent to which you are the same/different with different people?

6. How does privacy factor in to your relationships with other people?

a. Do you ever feel obligated to share things with others?

b. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt that your privacy was violated? [Please explain what happened]

7. When a friend tells you something, how do you know whether or not they consider it to be private?

a. Do they have to communicate anything to you in order to let you know that something is private?

b. What kind of responsibility or power goes along with this information?

8. Have you ever shared something about yourself and then later regretted it?

a. If so, what happened?
9. Technology is a newer context for sharing information with other people. In terms of privacy, do you think that communicating online is different from face to face interactions, such as catching up over coffee?

   a. When you share information online do you communicate in the same way as offline or are there different rules for what you would and wouldn’t share? [How are they different from other contexts?]

   b. What aspects of the online environment make it different from a privacy perspective?

10. When you first heard about this study on privacy, what kinds of things did you think we'd be talking about?

11. Is there anything specific that you thought we would be addressing, but that didn't come up during our interview?
Appendix F: Additional Interview Questions

Questions that were added during the course of the interviews:

1. What types of things do you consider private?
   a. Do you feel that personal information [eg. Name, address, phone number, email] is different from things like feelings, opinions, experiences etc?
   b. What factors make these things different or similar?

2. If someone asked you a question where you felt ‘that’s private’, what sort of thing would that be?

3. What other words or concepts do you equate with privacy?

4. If you felt that someone had asked something you didn’t want to answer, would you use the words ‘that’s private’?
   a. Why or why not?
   b. What would you do or say if you didn’t feel like answering something?

5. Do you feel that being private and being outgoing are related to each other or are they two separate concepts?

6. What factors do you consider when deciding whether or not to share something with someone?
Appendix G: Confidentiality Agreement

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Discovering the New Privacy: What Does Privacy Mean in an Age of Digital Connectedness?

Your role in this research study involves the transcription of audio recordings of interviews with participants for the study titled “Discovering the New Privacy: What Does Privacy Mean in an Age of Digital Connectedness?” When participants agreed to take part in this study, the confidentiality of their names and personal information were guaranteed. If you agree to transcribe the audio recordings you also agree to do the following:

1. Not to share or allow others to listen to or read the audio recordings, transcriptions, or any other materials associated with this study. The audio recordings must not be shared outside the research team and can only be used to transcribe the data.
2. To keep the audio recordings and transcriptions under lock and key and/or in a password protected document or computer until such time as they are returned to the researchers.
3. To refer to the research participant by their selected name, rather than their real name.
4. To maintain the confidentiality of the research participants and not discuss or share their data with anyone outside the research team.

I, ___________________________ (your name) hereby agree to maintain the confidentiality of all data and materials associated with the research study “Discovering the New Privacy: What Does Privacy Mean in an Age of Digital Connectedness” being conducted by researchers Emily Christofides and Dr. Serge Desmarais at the University of Guelph.

Signature of the transcriptionist_________________________ Date_________

Signature of the witness_________________________ Date_________