Digitally Disembodied: Social Surveillance and

the Rise of Crowdsourced Morality

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Abstract

This paper examines the socio-cultural shifts in practices of public expression and privacy with the rise of social media. By examining the histories of public and private, both as terms and as practices, I clarify how privacy remains a flexible concept complicated by newer practices of socialization found in social media. Proffering a world of interconnection through a never-ending stream of information, both personally supplied and digitally acquired, I argue that social media now change the way we communicate with one another by increasing our access to others and also saturating our lives with information to the point that it overlaps, transgresses, and ultimately challenges the nebulous, yet "spatially" demarcated, boundaries we, as a society, have long held between public and private life. Referencing three contemporary case studies, I juxtapose historic practices of public expression and publicity to argue that social media and mobile technologies disrupt the contextual integrity of information by stripping expressions of context, thereby disembodying the source, only to jeopardize individual autonomy as an individual becomes the subject of social surveillance online and/or as her information becomes the subject of continuous monitoring, aggregation and analysis, and potential dissemination and publication without her knowledge or consent. As individuals easily share information across contexts and spaces, I also contend that new dilemmas in reputation and identity management ultimately emerge when personal information is shared beyond its immediate or original context and as personal expressions are monitored, constrained, subdued, and ultimately quelled by the same media founded on promoting expression.

Keywords: impression management, identity, privacy, social media, *ADD ONE MORE*

Introduction

Web 2.0 platforms continue to change the ways people connect to one another, how individuals engage in impression management, and how privacy is practiced and understood. Sites like Facebook, twitter, reddit, and tumblr, among others, encourage individual expression by allowing users various opportunities to connect with others, create and share content, and interact through ongoing communication in status updates, tweets, self-posts, and comments. Yet, as these platforms offer a world of interconnection through a perpetual stream of content that is personally supplied and collectively created, they also saturate our lives with information to the point that it overlaps, transgresses, and ultimately challenges the nebulous, yet "spatially" demarcated, boundaries we, as a society, have long held between public and private expression.[1] Consequently, users not only contribute to the accretion of shared personal information that fuel Web 2.0, but they also inadvertently collapse private life into public life when they enact hyper-vigilant practices of impression management and participatory surveillance to present a coherent public image across offline and online contexts, practices which are particularly apparent in social media (Baym, 2010; boyd, 2008; Nissenbaum, 2010; see also Goffman, 1959, 1966; Monahan, 2011).

Arguably the most popular subset of Web 2.0 platforms, social media present users with a primary terminal through which they communicate with others: a personal profile. Although seemingly simple, a user's profile actually operates as a complicated nexus of contested impression management, particularly as a user carefully manages her identity through privacy settings, her selective expressions to others, and the various content others may share about her. As an intermediary space and an extension of the self projected on the screen, the profile allows

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[1] For the remainder of the paper I will use public and private as nouns, unless I define them in a particular context.

the user to freely and creatively express herself to a collection of intimate others, but it also becomes a site of potential 'accidents' where her personal, backstage performances can become, paradoxically, massively public. When these 'accidents' occur, the individual's presence and actions, embodied in the various visual and textual media that compose the profile, lose the context and character germane to the realm in which they were originally performed and shared. As the content enters the public realm, it becomes subject to heightened scrutiny as countless unknown others judge the individual and her actions and then circulate the content to others for comment. In extreme instances, the content circulates widely, garnering a mob of countless unknown others that enlist "crowdsourced morality" to publically bully, shame, discipline and punish the individual for her actions.

To investigate the problem of "crowdsourced morality," I first draw on the dramaturgical metaphors for impression management and public life from Erving Goffman (1959) and Richard Sennett (1977) to consider how public expression has changed as social media have complicated otherwise 'fixed' boundaries in public and private. As I juxtapose historic practices of public and private expression to online interactions, I show that social media promote surveillance through increased accessibility, potential replication, and indefinite storage of content that ultimately fuel "crowdsourced morality." Focusing on three notable and relatively recent case studies where social media amplified a collapse of private into public, I argue that "crowdsourced morality" challenges the authentic and/or intimate image of self that one maintains online by increasingly disembodying the individual to instill a decidedly public and, often, gendered moral order over backstage performances. As a result, individuals not only learn to self-censor, which leads to decreased public expression, but they also learn to monitor their online presence as a matter of public record and to discipline others into doing the same. I

conclude by drawing attention to an increased need to create contexts for privacy in networked publics.

Historicizing the Public/Private Duality

Where public historically shaped understandings of political life, communal interaction, and class, private historically shaped understandings of personal life, friends, family, and the home. While both public and private developed alongside each other in society over time, I begin here this section by considering public and private separately to contextualize the dichotomous binary we often articulate. As I chart a truncated history of the terms, I ultimately argue against the binary as I expose the duality between public and private, particularly as it pertains to informational and technological contexts. I conclude by relating the duality of public and private to practices of impression management, both historical and contemporary.

A History of Public

While history proves that public and private primarily functioned as spatial oppositions, the foundations for public and private as informational contexts guided by social interaction were also apparent in their original sense. In particular, public comes from the classical Latin *pūblicus*, which is a blend of *poplicus*, as in "of the people," and *pūbes*, as in "adult men" ("Public"). As the combination of terms indicates, the classical understanding of public was localized to landowning men who, by status and gender, represented society. However, this understanding of public omits the more spatial and political undertones of the term, which are most apparent in two corollary terms that contextualize public in historic practice: *forum* and *res publica*.

In Latin, *forum* comes by way of *foras*, which meant "outdoors," and *fores*, which meant "(outside) door" ("Forum"). Thus, *forum* in classical Latin meant, "what is out of doors," a classification that clarified that everything that existed outside the doors of an enclosure

surrounding a home was, essentially, a public space. Understood this way, *forum* constituted the spatial associations of "the public place of the city" where people interacted with one another ("Forum"). Moreover, in a practical sense, a forum was also a very real physical space in ancient Rome where men assembled to discuss "judicial and other business"("Forum"). Therefore, *forum* highlights the rudimentary spatial association we attribute to public today, particularly as a "space where one is easily observed" and a place of "political engagement" ("Public").

Similarly, *res publica* contextualizes the sociopolitical associations we attribute to public in our common usage today. In Latin, *res publica* meant "common good," and it was understood as an idea and an action that the polity engaged in as citizens (Sennett, 1977). As an ideational extension of *pūblicus*, *res publica* refined and expanded public life to include the political and collective obligation each citizen had in maintaining society and social order. In redefining the vested interests of an individual within the interwoven interests of all found in the community, then, *res publica* became an idea that each citizen enacted as part of their ritualistic practice of engaging in the commons with others of the society (Sennett, 1977). Thus, *res publica* resembles our contemporary understanding of "republic," again highlighting the sociopolitical connections we see in republic as "a collection of elected representatives engaged in civic duty" for a group or a society ("Republic"), but it also constitutes the interiority and exteriority of public, not as a matter of space, but rather as "a collection of individuals of a similar nationality, background, or other collective identity" ("Public"). In ancient Roman society, this interior was embodied in its classically rooted sense of "adult men" who owned land and represented society. As the dominant class, this group constituted the collective identity of the public, particularly as they shared common ethnic and racial backgrounds, social affiliations, beliefs, and values. Those of differing ethnic and racial backgrounds were cast as the exterior, which

meant that they were not represented as a part of the public (see Sennett, 1977). Moreover, since

the dominant class determined the social and political order of society, it also claimed public life

as its realm. As a result, *res publica* ultimately shaped the discursive formation of public and its

interiority as one of elite or high class.

In particular, this discursive formation of public persisted throughout much of history,

most notably in monarchical societies that relied on it to create and maintain social order.

Ordained their heighted status by a "Higher Authority," monarchs and nobles supported this

discursive formation because it granted them power, which they wielded and managed in

designating title and class, shaping social interaction across class, granting land, and

determining the affairs of public life and the populace by extension (Sennett, 1977).[2] By

codifying these practices in law, monarchs not only secured their power, they also instilled a

sense of identity and place for themselves and others. This "sense of place" was most apparent

in laws about clothing and laws about socialization in specific spaces.

Although peculiar by today's standards, class distinctions were historically evident in

one's designated clothing. Sumptuary laws in London and Paris from the 13th Century up to the

mid 18th Century specifically regulated the type of clothing a person could wear based on his or

her class and/or trade (Sennett, 1977). For example, monarchs and nobles dressed in finer,

ornate garb to distinguish status and to draw attention to their presence out in public. A

carpenter, on the other hand, was forbidden from wearing the finer clothing of a lord, as this

was a violation of station and social norms (Goffman, 1959; see also Giddens, 1986). Instead, a

carpenter and others of lower classes and trades wore simpler apparel, which were often

regulated by their respective guilds. This visual demarcation in clothing ultimately served three

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[2] To remain laconic and cogent, I only highlight only the most relevant examples monarchies used to maintain class distinctions. The two I highlight relate most closely with my discussion of technology in the next section. For a more elaborate explanation, please see Sennett's *The Fall of Public Man*.

purposes. First, it regulated class as a visual array one could easily discern in public and in interaction, which allowed a person to keep to his or her class and find safety and communality in mutual affiliation. Second, it guided social interaction across class by allowing both parties to visually encode and decode the proper social etiquette necessary for address and communicative interactions. In particular, it standardized social protocols for formal address, which ultimately eased tensions across class and provided a semblance of genuine interaction (Sennett, 1977; see also Giddens, 1986). Finally, it lessened social mobility, which worked to temper dissention by relegating individuals to their respective classes and/or trades. Therefore, by regulating the clothing a person could wear, monarchs and nobles enacted a decidedly visual interplay of encoding and decoding that found its support in law and social identity, which ultimately ensured their control of the social order.

Similarly, the historical limitations of social space further supported monarchical control. Limiting the confines of "the public sphere" to the royal court, most monarchies actively excluded specific classes from participating in the affairs of state (Habermas, 1991). As a result, monarchies further affirmed their power by strategically refining public life, in its *res publica* root, as physically real space that only the elite occupied. In this way, monarchies ensured that the interior of public remained in the hands of the elite. Yet, since the elite and the people they represented in court shared a similar national background and other collective attributes, the spatial division of "the public sphere" also recast the exterior of public as the vast expanse of the city (Sennett, 1977). Therefore, the streets, parks, shops and pubs of the city operated as spaces where an individual performed his identity and reinforced class as he socialized with strangers and unknown others (Goffman, 1959). In this way, individuals not only interacted with one another, or at least a semblance of interaction across class, but they also performed and collectively shared in public identity as a people.

However, the discursive formation of public that supported the elite interior and its claims to public life eventually dissolved in the late 17th Century. While French society during the 17th Century visibly maintained social order in its division in "le public" between "la cour et la ville," or the court and the city (Sennett, 1977), the rise of Louis XIV and the French Revolution slowly fissured these divisions in space (Fraser, 1992; Habermas, 1991; Livingstone, 2005). In particular, "la cour," which constituted the spatial and ideological interior of public, expanded under Louis XIV's rise to power as he allowed nobles *and* the rising mercantile class to participate in the court. Recognizing the growing economic power the mercantile class acquired in market trade and the effects this new development had on the State, Louis XIV granted this new rising class a more prominent voice in the court. This move not only tempered the elite, whom Louis XIV distrusted, but it also inadvertently redefined public life around the growing economic forces in "la ville" that eventually fragmented the highly classed spatial interior of public life (Habermas, 1991: Sennett, 1977).

Naturally, urban life also shifted to meet the changes. In particular, guilds, a staple of the city, began to disappear as social class became increasingly fluid due to the rise of the market economy (Habermas, 1991: Sennett, 1977). Afforded new liberties due to newfound wealth, individuals of the late 17th and early 18th centuries explored the fluidity of class by dressing in the clothing of different classes. Thus, individuals experimented with their identities through clothing, not to jump class, but rather, to be recognized as distinct individuals out in the city (Sennett, 1977). As a result, sumptuary laws governing dress slowly fell out of fashion, which ultimately allowed individuals more power and control over their social identities as they adorned their bodies to be recognized by specific others and to affiliate themselves with specific groups.

Ultimately, as monarchical societies reorganized, socially and politically, around the rising mercantile class and the shifts brought about by the market economy, the understanding of public changed to resemble its contemporary form. In particular, citizens of mid 18th Century Paris and London understood public to mean "a region of social life located apart from the realm of family and close friends," but, unlike the previous conception of public, which was socially stratified, they now understood the term to encompass a realm that included a relatively wide diversity of acquaintances and strangers formerly obscured or restricted from public life (Sennett, 1977, p. 17). Therefore, while public became a term of discomfort for the elite who previously championed the former divisions it maintained in society, the term now permitted individuals the possibility of social mobility in a world where the order of public life occurred out in the city as an individual crafted himself and connected with others. Indeed, while obvious class distinctions continued on into the 19th Century (Giddens, 1986; Sennett, 1977), the spatial and performative shifts in public brought about by the mercantile class ultimately shaded public as we understand it today: the observable space outside the home where one interacts with others in his community, and the wide expanse through which a society communicates message to one another ("Public").

A History of Private

Private, like public, comes from classical Latin. Etymologically, "private" is derived from the *prīvātus*, which meant, "withdrawn from public life" ("Private"). In this way, the term operated in direct opposition to public; however, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term also operated as both an adjective and a noun that entailed more than an opposition to public life. As an adjective, private indicated a condition, as in "restricted for the use of particular person or persons" and also "peculiar to oneself, special, [and] individual"; and also a state of being, as in "a private person, not holding public office," and also "belonging as

private property" ("Private"). As a noun, private denoted an individual "who holds no public

office," who was "a private person," as in "an individual" who kept to herself ("Private"). Here,

both forms of the term highlight a spatial connotation, first, physically, as in one's property

outside of public space, but also being either outside of public purview or withdrawn from

public life; and, second, interpersonally and psychologically, as within the proximal company of

particular individuals, but also within the space of one's mind. Thus, in its classical conception,

the term originally communicated a relatively flexible array of conditions and qualities, each in

relative opposition to public.

However, as private developed over time, it began to take on largely personal

connotations that were not entirely spatial. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, private

became associated with "close" and "intimate" in the 8th Century, marking its early transition

toward a particular person, event, or with regard to particular information ("Private"). During

this time, the term guided interactions between close individuals who felt they could share

personal, and therefore, private information with one another that would stay within the

intimate context in which it was shared. As these close associations continued into the 12th

Century, private expanded its associations becoming synonymous with the adjective

"confidential," again, as a condition of person, event, or with regard to particular information;

and also the nouns "confidant" and "close friend," which denoted the way that privacy became

contextually bound to particular individuals and the information they shared ("Privacy"; see

also Nissenbaum, 2010). Therefore, as privacy expanded beyond space, it became a quality

germane to dyadic interactions and also small groups of trusted individuals, such as close-knit

communities.

In particular, an obsolete interpretation of the term "private" developed during the late

14th Century around religious groups, which not only clarified the intimate communal

associations of private, but also finessed the term's more common exclusionary aspect of

segmenting information and practices from others. This obsolete definition defined private as a

condition of a religious order and of an individual "living according to distinct religious rules;

set apart by distinct beliefs, religious practices" ("Privacy"). Specifically, as an individual

followed the precepts of the religious order, and as he communed with others who held the

same beliefs and practices, he and the others together formed mutual associations of affinity

that brought them together as a community that was essentially private as it was exclusionary

to outsiders who did not know about or share the distinct beliefs and practices of the order. In

this context, then, private not only constituted the intimate connotations it had developed from

the 8th Century, which were inclusive of those from an in-group, but it also included the

exclusionary dimension of the term witnessed in disassociation from others, either by space,

grouping, or informational context.

As this particular interpretation of private faded into the early 15th century, it fueled

transformations of private that developed out in the mid 15th century. Beyond expanding

private as an inclusive condition of particular groups and individuals, this interpretation gave

rise to the common expression "privy to" and also the term "privacy." A common expression in

Middle English in the mid 15th Century, "privy to" verbally signaled when specific information

"belonged to one's own private circle" ("Privy"). In this way, the condition of being privy to

particular information was entirely a matter of one's affiliations and the quality of his

relationship with specific others. Therefore, the various practices of private borne out of the mid

15th Century recast private by extending it beyond its classical spatial associations to include the

wider array of context governed by the condition of one's associations and the quality one's

relationships (see Petronio, 2002). For example, during the 15th Century, an individual might

choose to disclose private information outside of the home when he communicated with others

of his service or guild. Given the mutual context of their shared interactions and depending on

the quality of their relationship, a valet and a footman, for example, might discuss personal

affairs with one another that they would not discuss with others of another baron's property

since they were not privy to the affairs of the estate they worked. Furthermore, since these

servants shared a mutual social context, these conversations could occur within the service

quarters of the property or they could occur out in public, depending on how comfortable the

servants felt discussing information with one another in the settings that they interacted.

Concurrently, in highly stratified societies of the 15th Century, an individual of a lower

social class was not necessarily privy to the affairs or practices of a higher social class; instead

he was largely relegated to his station in society. For example, even though a valet served his

lord, he would not be allowed to partake in the various social gatherings—whether mundane or

extravagant—his lord was party to unless the lord extended him an invitation, which was an

altogether rare occurrence. Additionally, the differences between high and low class also

afforded those of higher status the unrestrained opportunity to inquire about the affairs of those

socially beneath them; yet, an individual from a lower class would be found "out of turn" if he

inquired about the affairs of someone from a higher class (Sennett, 1977). Therefore, members of

lower social strata had far less social leverage they could employ against their stately

counterparts, at least until the early 18th Century when the rise of the mercantile class

reorganized society and practices of public and private expression (see Habermas, 1991;

Sennett, 1977).

In addition to the expression "privy to," "privacy," also emerged as a common term in

the mid 15th Century. As an extension of private, privacy marked "a condition of being alone,

undisturbed, or free from public attention, as a matter of choice or right" ("Privacy"), and its

interpretation has remained relatively stable up to modern times. Like private, privacy operated

as an oppositional term to public, which had expanded beyond its initial associations with "outside (the home)" and "common good" during the first half of the 14th Century to encompass the condition of being "generally known" and the quality of being "open to general observation or view; carried out without concealment" ("Public"). Molded by its spatial and communal foundations, public progressively included an awareness of others as they communed with the vast and interactive audience outside the home, not as mere citizens, but rather as individuals collectively performing identity within the confines of their roles and social classes (Fraser, 1992; Habermas, 1991; Livingstone, 2005; Sennett, 1977). Carefully managing their verbal and nonverbal expressions in the purview of the vast and interactive audience outside the home, individuals collectively performed their identities with others to maintain their personal public images (Goffman, 1959, 1966; see also Giddens, 1986), which not only promoted a semblance of sociability across social classes (Sennett, 1977), it also reaffirmed public and private as mutually constitutive processes of shared communicative performances. In particular, an individual performed public image—his "frontstage" performances—through his social class and role as a valet, for example, in his physical appearance and clothing, and in how he conducted himself in his deliberate and unconscious communication with others (Goffman, 1959, 1966). Specifically, his physical appearance and clothing would be neat and appropriate to his class; he would appear well dressed, but perhaps not in the most recent fashion (see Sennett, 1977). In his deliberate communication with others, he would speak properly and avoid slang. He might also deliberately avoid shameful individuals of lower classes, such as prostitutes and beggars, whose association might mar his public image. Unconsciously, he might even avoid particular places where a proper gentleman would not be seen, such as underground clubs or back alleys where unsavory individuals might reside. Yet, in all of these public performances of his identity, he also performed private as he consciously

guarded information about himself that he deemed relative to specific place, familiar

affiliations, or to his self. Thus, he relied on privacy—or the spaces where he enacted his

"backstage" performances—in the home, with close friends and family, or in his own personal

solitude to protect him from the excruciating gaze of the public (Goffman, 1959; 1966; Sennett,

1977). Therefore, where public entailed an awareness of others, private ultimately encompassed

a return to one's self, either in solitude or with close, intimate others, to protect and maintain

one's nature, which was classically rooted in the home.

The Duality of Public/Private

As terms and practices, public and private ultimately rely on and constitutively shape

one another. Constituting the array of spheres of life, the terms mutually define specific spaces,

possessions, conditions, and interactions from opposing sides of a relatively stabilized

spectrum. However, as history proves, the terms often invoke a strict binary that overlooks the

complex performances one enacts as part of daily life. For example, in the spatially-inflected

legal sense, once an individual leaves her home and exits her property, she is out in public,

regardless of whether she interacts with others or not. Conversely, when an individual is within

her home or on her property, her actions and possessions are classified as private—not within

the purview of outsiders (see U.S. Const. amend. IV and V). However, this binary operates on

an assumption that nothing intervenes between these spaces to upset the spatial demarcations

in the law (Nissenbaum, 1997); it assumes that these spaces are bracketed from each other as

distinctly separate areas of interaction.

Yet, newer technologies, particularly visual technologies, complicate this historical

spatial binary codified in law.

this strict binary ignores the overlap between spaces brought about by a variety of

newer technologies that have become part of everyday life. In particular, it ignores technologies

like the snap camera or the x-ray that historically made personal and private facts public. For

example, the snap camera was pioneered as a technology of entertainment and memory, but it

became a technology of surveillance and sensationalism when various individuals, particularly

journalists, used it expose otherwise personal affairs of notable public figures (Warren &

Brandeis, 1890/2010; see also Solove, 2007). As journalists used the snap camera to document

otherwise personal without witness testimony or direct word of mouth from the source, the

ulterior uses of the snap camera promoted the photograph as evidence *and* testimony as

sensational journalists characterized the visual image as a totalizing depiction of a person or an

event for public consumption (Solove, 2007).

Similarly, the advent of the x-ray challenged commonplace notions of public and private

by drawing focus to the private space of the body. In the process of illuminating the skeletal

structure of one's body, the ghostly contrast of black and white also exposed an individual's

internal organs and genitals. As a result, the x-ray ultimately stripped the skin away, making it

"…just another wrapping, something to be removed to reach what was more valid beneath it"

(Kevles, 2007, p. 28). Therefore, as both the snap camera and the x-ray historically prove, the

various uses of technology often challenge conceptions of public and private by collapsing

space and time in favor of an increasingly visual and almost omnipresent sense of one another.

At the same time, however, we also socially and physically maintain boundaries that we have

legally codified, socially normed, or personally demarcated to free ourselves of the pressing

demands of an entirely public life (see Sennett, 1977). Ultimately, although our various uses of

technology often intervene in daily life and upset the boundaries we maintain between public

and private, our usage of technology does not completely dissolve private. Rather, as the

examples I have discussed and will continue to discuss show, the practices and values of public

and private a flexible and, with the advent of newer technologies, increasingly in flux. Thus,

public and private are neither mutually exclusive nor are they necessarily diametrically opposed; instead, they operate in mutual relation to one another, each marking the counters of the other much like a dialectic.

Ultimately, then, public and private operate beyond the binary articulated in our outdated laws and founding documents. Where the Founding Fathers of the United States saw a strict division between public and private in a physical space, which they codified as a binary within the law, they never imagined the ways that technology and individual practice would alter and obfuscate their conceptions of the terms. Thus, the advent of newer technologies and the changes enabled by ulterior uses of each by individuals, such as public reportage of otherwise private information in a visual form through the snap camera (Solove, 2007), or the visual display of a person's innards and genitals through the x-ray (Kevles, 1997), for example, initially caught them off guard, similar to the various ways social media challenge commonplace understandings of public and private and as users negotiate the technology in everyday life.

Therefore, as individuals use technology and as their patterns of interaction change in how they understand and use technology in everyday life, the spatial demarcations so rooted in the law become problematic. In particular, as individuals are encouraged to express themselves and share information with one another across time and space through the available technology, the spatial demarcations of public and private found in law fall short because they outline a binary opposition that is at odds with a world where public and private are no longer strictly tied to space, but are, instead, tied to a context that is rooted in information as it is shared with others.

Impression Management

Case Studies

Lindsey Stone never imagined that a casual visit to the Arlington National Cemetery would forever change her life. Strolling through the immaculate grounds with a co-worker, she happened upon a circular iron placard placed before the Tomb of the Unknown Solider. The embossed letters of the placard read, "SILENCE AND RESPECT": a clear enjoinder to remain quiet around the sentinel that guards the Tomb and also to respect the fallen that the site posthumously honors. In a moment of jest, Stone asked her co-worker to snap what she thought would be a humorous photo. Crouching beside the placard, Stone posed, pretending to scream while also flipping off the placard.

She later uploaded the photo to her Facebook profile, thinking her friends would find the whole scene amusing. Yet, much to her surprise, the majority of the comments were unsupportive of her shenanigans. In an attempt to assuage the negative reactions, Stone replied to her friends:

> Whoa whoa whoa... wait. This is just us, being the douchebags that we are, challenging
>
> authority in general. Much like the pic posted the night before, of me smoking right next
>
> to a no smoking sign. OBVIOUSLY we meant NO disrespect to people that serve or have
>
> served our country [author's original emphasis] (Stone quoted in Zimmerman, 2012a).

But the damage was already done. For although her reply seemed to pacify the uproar amongst her friends, she could not control the distribution of the image, which managed to circulate beyond her profile and her friends to an individual with enough time to act on the indignation.

Quelled, but not forgotten, the uproar continued beyond Stone's profile and without her knowledge. A month after the picture was originally posted, a page called "Fire Lindsey Stone"

was created and, within hours, thousands of "likes"—Facebook's seemingly innocuous blue

button and a quintessential act of agreement with the author—populated the page. Started by a

former armed forces service member, the page encouraged the agreeing masses to "let [Stone's]

employer know what a waste of oxygen this disrespectful person [was]," and it quickly

spawned an online petition that gained over 3,000 signatures urging Living Independently

Forever, Inc. (LIFE), Stone's employer, to fire her (Zimmerman, 2012a; 2012b).

Under mounting pressure from these "cyber activists," LIFE responded within a half

day of the page's creation (Zimmerman, 2012a). LIFE issued a statement that clarified that the

organization had only recently become aware of the image, which had since been deleted, and

that both Stone and her co-worker who took the photo had been placed on unpaid leave

pending an internal investigation. During this time, Lindsey Stone "deleted all of her Facebook

posts save for a few friend requests" and waited for the verdict (Zimmerman, 2012a). Four days

later, LIFE delivered: Stone and her co-worker were fired, and, in an ironic twist of personal

expression online, Stone completely deactivated her Facebook profile and denied all media

requests to speak with her (Zimmerman, 2012b).

Regardless of whether Lindsey Stone's photo was taken in poor taste and posted

without careful thought in a public medium or taken as a jocular mock of authority and later

posted solely for the consideration of her close friends, the incident just described illustrates a

growing problem with our communication through Web 2.0 platforms and within its

subdomains of social networking sites, wikis, and blogs. Proffering a world of interconnection

through a never-ending stream of information, both personally supplied and digitally acquired,

Web 2.0 now changes the way we communicate with one another by saturating our lives with

information to the point that it overlaps, transgresses, and ultimately challenges the nebulous,

yet "spatially" demarcated, boundaries we, as a society, have long held between public and

private expression. In this way, Stone's incident not only speaks to the potential damage

wrought by any one expression spiraling out of control, but, as an increasingly common

occurrence, also speaks to a deeper problem with how our expressions and actions are

monitored, constrained, subdued, and ultimately quelled by the same media founded on

promoting expression.