

# Public Friends and Private Sharing: Understanding Shifting Privacies in Sharing Culture

**Zoetanya Sujon**

Regent's University London  
Inner Circle, Regent's Park  
London, NW1 4NS  
+44 020 3075 6180  
[sujonz@regents.ac.uk](mailto:sujonz@regents.ac.uk)

**Lisette Johnston**

City University  
Northampton Square, London  
EC1V 0HB  
+44 203 61 43438  
[lisette.johnston@bbc.co.uk](mailto:lisette.johnston@bbc.co.uk)

## ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to address the tension between privacy and sharing culture. Despite many claims that privacy is dead, research suggests that there is a shift from privacy as an individualized right based around control to something more social, more embedded, more public and more networked. Drawing from seven media diaries, interviews with those diarists and a survey (N=270) of London, UK residents aged 18-36, we aim for a better picture of privacy and sharing culture as lived experiences. Based on this evidence, we identify a number of themes. First, privacy matters. Although respondents identify sharing as embedded and networked, their experiences and understanding of privacy remains more traditional. For most, privacy is an individualized right focused on control. In addition, we find several themes emerging from the data – social privacy is more important than institutional privacy; younger respondents talk about “public friends” and “private sharing” to justify and explain their sharing practices; respondents also commonly talk about a ‘persona’ on social media profiles; and finally, respondents are increasingly depersonalizing what they share on social media. All of these themes point to ways that respondents exercise sharing strategies in part to protect their privacy, but also for managing the sharing expectations of their social media use and sharing culture more broadly.

## CCS CONCEPTS

- Human and societal aspects of security and privacy → Social aspects of security and privacy

## KEYWORDS

Privacy; sharing culture; social media; sharing diaries; survey.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

At first glance, privacy and sharing, particularly the kinds of public sharing associated with social media, are on opposite ends of the spectrum; demanding different and conflicting behaviours. Very few people would share information on social media they would like to keep private. This tension between privacy and wide-spread sharing practices and culture, complicates an already contested concept. Many have struggled to understand shifting notions of closeness and distance, suggesting that privacy no longer matters, or at the very least, has evolved as a concept and a practice. Social media have invited widespread permissiveness around constant sharing of personal information, acceptance of global surveillance and the apparent erosion of privacy. The meaning of privacy is being constantly rewritten through a variety of sharing practices. For example: status updates, photos, social media profiles, sharing, linking, hashtagging, commenting, data control, the rise of increasingly large mega-platforms, the emergence of mass surveillance, and the pervasive global power of sharing platforms.

However, evidence suggests that privacy does matter to most, although many express confusion over what privacy means today, how to protect it, and what privacy policies actually do. From a theoretical perspective, ideas of privacy appear to be shifting from control-based notions of privacy, defined by traditional theories of privacy as “the claim of individuals....to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others”, to definitions shaped by public intimacy and “networked privacy” [1] [2] [3].

This paper seeks to address the tension between privacy and sharing culture and add to the discussion of what shifting ideas of privacy mean in two ways. First, we review current literature and research arguing that we see a shift from privacy as an individualized right based around control, to something more social, more embedded, more public, and more networked. We then look at original empirical evidence to better understand privacy and sharing as lived experiences. In particular, we ask: What does privacy mean for 18-36 year-old London, UK residents, accustomed to sharing personal information across digital platforms? And how do people make decisions about private and public information?

In order to best answer these questions, we asked seven people to keep diaries of their sharing practices over a week, followed by an in-depth interview on key points related to sharing, social media and privacy. In order to link themes emerging from diarists more broadly, we developed a survey, using the same sampling criteria (18-36-year-old London residents, N=270). The qualitative

research identified some interesting themes: privacy particularly social privacy matters; that youthful practices around privacy protections include “private sharing” and identifying “public friends”; a public persona is used on social media profiles; and that shared content is often depersonalized. All of these themes are accompanied by a persistent emphasis on control-based notions of privacy, and notably dynamic strategies used to control primarily social privacy. Diarists and survey respondents identified all of these tendencies to balance shifting ideas of sharing on social media in their lived experiences of privacy. Each work together to create strategies for managing the tension between their privacy and the sharing expectations of their social media accounts.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: SHIFTING PRIVACIES AND SHARING CULTURES

Instantaneous photographs and newspaper enterprise have invaded the sacred precincts of private and domestic life; and numerous mechanical devices threaten to make good the prediction that “what is whispered in the closet shall be proclaimed from the house-tops” [4].

Warren and Brandeis’s classic article outlines privacy as a right, and sets out a theory of privacy based on “restricted access” or control of information. Notably, Warren and Brandeis published their seminal work in response to the “unacceptable intrusion of photography in the private sphere” as often enacted by story-hungry newspapers keen to publish increasingly personal details [5]. At the turn of the century, the institutionalization of photography pushed boundaries around what was private and what was public. Photography enabled relatively ordinary people to easily capture what had been previously been invisible or private, and make that information visible to mass newspaper audiences. Warren and Brandeis, like many of their peers, felt deep uneasiness around the changing boundaries between public and private. Similar to social media today, photographs in the late 1800s allowed private information to be almost effortlessly captured and easily shared to large audiences in public contexts. This suggests commonalities with shifting experiences and expectations of privacy in sharing culture today.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Warren and Brandeis define privacy as the right to be let alone, to be free from interference. Rights to privacy have been further enshrined in Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in Article 8 of the Human Rights Act, as well as many other treaties and conventions [6] [7]. Conceptualizing privacy as a set of rights individualizes privacy, making it “inherently personal” and often about controlling “interference” and access to the private realm [8]. Rosenzweig calls these “antique” theories of privacy because no user will ever be in “complete control” of their data [9].

Indeed, within the vast literature on privacy, most seem to agree that privacy has changed and needs new concepts to better reflect the world we live in. However, the agreement ends there as extended debates about what privacy is, how it has changed, and what people think of it now, dominate the literature. Many attribute these changes to the exponential growth of social media sites. In the UK, “99% of 16-24 year-olds use social media” and “more than three-quarters of active adult internet users” use Facebook [10], which leads many to suggest that “oversharing” is normalized and indeed

expected [11]. As boyd suggests, “privacy and publicity continue to get mashed up in new ways” [12].

In terms of changing definitions of privacy, communitarian and pluralistic views of privacy also focus on the complexity of privacy, suggesting that privacy provides social value through individual protections and for maintaining social control [13]. Solove argues that privacy is pluralistic and refers to a set of linked concepts resembling each other: “it is a plurality of different things” sharing “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing” [14] [15] [16].

Privacy International, a civil liberties group advocating for increased awareness, policy, and practice around privacy has a much clearer rights-based definition of privacy: “Privacy enables us to create barriers and manage boundaries to protect ourselves from unwarranted interference in our lives” [17]. The capacity for individuals to separate from the public world serves an important role in Western history. Personal privacy and protection from interference allows people to create a space to reflect, think, form opinions, and prepare for civic and social engagement [18]. This tradition positions privacy as a necessary freedom and a fundamental component of active citizenship [18]. In this sense, privacy is not merely about individual rights, and is instead “a societal or common value that must be upheld in order to protect ‘democratic substance’” [19] [20].

Building upon privacy as important, as social, and as pluralistic, Alice Marwick and danah boyd make a convincing case for “networked privacy” based on the understandings and habits of American teens on social media [21]. Using DNA as an example, boyd illustrates how genetic information contains personal data not only about individuals, but about entire families – mothers, fathers, sibling, grandparents, aunts, uncles, children, grandchildren, and those children yet to arrive. This example illustrates the networked nature of data and privacy. Although privacy is often thought of as an individual right, looking at genetic information as an example demonstrates how deeply social and connected personal information is in digital environments [22]. In the same way that genetic information is about familial groups and even cultures, personal information is also networked through social and internet based media.

One of the most helpful distinctions for understanding the changing nature of privacy is Raynes-Goldie’s distinction between “social privacy” (privacy from peers, family, employers and other people) and “institutional privacy” (privacy from algorithms, platforms, companies, governments and other institutions that collect personal information) [23] [24] [25].

Although teens tend to talk about privacy in terms of control, boyd argues that people “don’t see privacy as simply being the control of information” instead, it is about “controlling the social situation” [26]. Privacy becomes much more complex and teens must develop a “whole slew of skills” – technological, social, interpersonal – in order to achieve privacy [27]. In this sense, teens care deeply about their social privacy, rather than their institutional privacy. Marwick and boyd suggest a model of “networked privacy” as better suited to the mediated spaces and practices teens are engaged in online. Evidence of these techniques include coding content so the meaning will only be apparent to close friends, deleting content or deactivating content, subtweeting or engaging in targeted calling-out of peers without naming those peers, and other strategies.

## 2.1. Sharing Culture

Sharing is also a pervasive concept and practice, understood as “the defining concept of today’s age”, and as “the constitutive activity of social media. It is the umbrella name given to the myriad of activities we carry out online” [28]. The sharing economy refers to the rise of platforms enabling the “sharing” and selling of microwork, goods or services, like Uber, Airbnb, crowdsourcing or peer production and is estimated to circulate over \$3.5 billion [29].

In contrast to the sharing economy, sharing culture refers to a diverse range of actions and behaviours, including the widespread circulation of information, images and user-generated content to both known and unknown networks. Nicholas Johns argues that social media and social network sites began using “sharing” in 2005-2007 period and can include “communicative” or “distributive” kinds of sharing [30].

Many have critiqued the sharing economy as not really being about sharing, but that instead companies like Airbnb and Uber are profitmaking companies, capitalizing on and often exploiting workers through a sharing rhetoric [31]. These critiques are especially relevant in terms of the “free labour” used to create user-generated content on most social media sites, in exchange for the sale of users’ personal information and behavioural data are sold to the highest bidders [32].

These critiques of the sharing economy suggest that in contrast to many young people’s prioritization of social privacy, the work of corporations and for-profit third parties are of particular concern.

## 2.2. Studies on Youth, Social Media and Privacy

Many, including highly influential technology leaders like Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook’s founder and CEO) and Eric Schmidt (CEO of Alphabet/Google), have proclaimed that privacy is dead and people no longer care about their privacy or the privacy of others [33]. However, extensive studies in Europe, the UK, North America and elsewhere, suggest that the majority of youth think privacy is important and go to great lengths to monitor and protect their social privacy rather than institutional privacy [34] [35] [36] [37] [38] [39].

Within this research, teens and young people emphasize “control” over information as essential for privacy. For example, based on interviews and participant observation with 166 American teens, Marwick and boyd [40] argue that teens face complex social environments in social media and engage in sophisticated tactics and techniques to negotiate and protect their privacy (c.f., survey results from the EU [41]). This research creates an impressive body of evidence which clearly demonstrates that young people care about privacy and use many strategies to control, protect and monitor it. Some of these privacy controlling strategies include using aliases, deleting content or “cleaning” social media content [42]. Further examples include using “coded” content, subtweeting, deactivating accounts [43], the use of “privacy tools,” use of controlled groups, content filtering, and establishing rules around social media with family and friends [44]. “Access controls” and many “informal strategies” are also used, pointing to teens exercising quite a lot of control over their social media platforms [45], private profiles and limiting “friends” or connections to only those who are known offline [45].

There are a few points which emerge from some of this research which stand out. Leslie Regan Shade and Tamara Shepherd

conducted 14 focus groups with Canadian undergraduate students, finding that students are cynical about effectively protecting their privacy. Instead, many felt “they were protected by obscurity” as they were only one set of data points among billions [46]. Hasselbalch et al. conducted 11 focus groups, totaling 68 respondents with young people, finding that respondents were well versed in social privacy, but were not so articulate about institutional privacy [47]. Hasselbalch et al. note that this may be due to respondents feeling that terms and conditions were unavoidable and that young people had “no choice” but to accept them. Thus, while researchers do agree that most young people say privacy is important to them, there are significant barriers to how this impacts their behaviour.

In relation to these barriers, Stutzman et al. argue that many take for granted or are simply unaware of the institutional structures supporting social media platforms [48]. Based on an analysis of “profile data from a longitudinal panel of 5,076 Facebook users” in the U.S., Stutzman and his colleagues found significant changes in users’ sharing behaviours [48]. Over time, users sought greater privacy by using more privacy controls and also by sharing less with strangers. However, Stutzman et al. did observe that users shared more with known or “connected profiles” [48]. Contingently, Stutzman et al. noted a rise in “unintended audiences” and “silent listeners”. These included “Facebook, third parties, apps, and advertisers”, which were further obscured by constantly changing privacy policies and opaque terms and conditions. This research suggests that although Facebook users were actively protecting social privacy, institutional privacy is much more complicated, further embedded in social media infrastructures and is less valued by respondents, perhaps in part because it is less visible and is harder to monitor.

Evidence suggests that young people are more informed about privacy than their adult counterparts. We can see from this review of scholarly work that contrary to popular thinking and media reports, young people believe privacy matters, and that they actively engage sophisticated techniques to protect their social privacy, rather more frequently than they do for institutional privacy. This phenomenon of compromising privacy concerns for convenience is often referred to as the “privacy paradox” [49] [50]. Still, control oriented ideas of privacy - where privacy is understood as restricting access and controlling content - still dominate how people understand and articulate privacy as demonstrated in the research reported here.

## 3. METHODS

In order to get a fuller understanding of how people understand and negotiate privacy in sharing culture and upon ethical approval from peers and the institutional review board at Regent’s University London, we asked seven London (UK) residents between the ages of 18-37 to keep daily media diaries over a one-week period. In their diaries, respondents were asked to track the social media they used and the things they shared on the social media platforms important to them. We asked them to define what privacy meant to them and to note anything interesting or surprising about their sharing behaviour on a daily basis. On the seventh day, we asked them to review their diary and reflect on their sharing behaviour and any observations they had about what they had done over the last week. This method, inspired by Couldry et al.’s 2007 work on public connection, was designed to better understand not only what people think about privacy but how it fits with their sharing behaviours [51]. The goal of this method was to get an in-depth view of the

relationship between sharing and privacy as a lived practice and also to identify themes and to inform the survey design.

We interviewed each of the diarists after reviewing their diaries and looking at notable behaviours and any identifiable patterns. Our respondents included four females and three males, aged 18-37 (female, 18; female, 22; male, 24; female, 25; male, 27; female, 36; male, 37).

**Table 1. Age and gender of sharing diarists**

Age range	Females	Males
18-19	Diarist 6 (18)	--
20-29	Diarist 1 (22), Diarist 3 (25)	Diarist 5 (27), Diarist 7 (24)
30-37	Diarist 2 (36)	Diarist 4 (37)
Total	4	3

Based on some of the themes we saw emerging in the diaries and the follow-up interviews, we designed a ten-minute survey focusing on people's attitudes and behaviours around social media, sharing, and privacy. We decided on a survey methodology in order to explore, in an indicative way, the prevalence of themes emerging from the qualitative work [52]. The survey was piloted by quantitative specialists, colleagues and a small class of undergraduates. Following on from the diarists, the survey sample criteria included social media using 18-36 year-old London residents. In order to target this sample, we used snowball sampling and advertised the survey on social media including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter. The survey was also promoted across various Facebook groups and through the University of London's student union. Two incentives in the form of Amazon and Pizza Express vouchers were offered.

At the time of writing this paper, 404 people had responded, 63 of whom did not meet the sample criteria and 71 of whom did not complete every survey question, leaving 270 eligible survey entrants. Taking into account the 63 respondents who were excluded from completing the survey, the completion rate is 79.1%. It is important to note that this is not a representative survey as the sample was not randomly selected. Further, it is impossible to determine the number of people who saw ads, emails and social media posts in order to determine the response rate. Given the range of techniques used to target our sample, it is safe to assume that the response rate is significantly under 25%.

In addition, there are several possible biases resulting from our methodological choices. First, respondents may have chosen to complete the survey because they were interested in privacy or social media and results may reflect this bias. As is widely known with surveys, those with strong feelings about a topic are more likely to complete a survey than those who do not. Although many attempts were made to reach a wide range of 18-36 year-olds, across sectors and platforms, the use of snowball sampling means respondents may also be more likely to come from academic or journalistic related fields, reflecting the researchers' links and connections.

Despite these biases, this survey can provide some insight into how some emerging, social media using London-based adults understand privacy in sharing culture.

## 4. FINDINGS

The diaries and follow-up interviews revealed rich relationships with social media that were deeply integrated into respondents'

daily lives. All diarists used social media to communicate with the people who were important to them, and many also used social media to promote themselves or their work. Some used social media to re-live shared childhood memories and to connect with others by sharing interest-specific videos, chats and images. Like the evidence outlined in the literature review, control-based ideas of privacy are dominant and social privacy is much more important to respondents than institutional privacy. This was demonstrated by very low mentions of government, concerns about companies or third party surveillance. Nonetheless, data from all three methods revealed that privacy matters. Privacy matters in terms of protecting the self and terms of control and in terms of rights, among many other iterations. All respondents had much to say about privacy. Indeed, most diarists learned from their sharing diaries and included comments about the importance of thinking about privacy in their final reflections.

In terms of sharing, themes emerged from the sharing diaries and were supported in the follow-up interviews, and the surveys. In addition to the importance of privacy to most, three themes emerged. The first of these includes the idea of "public friends" and what diarists referred to as "private sharing" – points that appear to be addressed primarily by people 24 or younger – suggesting these are strategies to manage privacy within the sharing cultures of social media. These terms articulate the relationship between two important although often oppositional features of social media – privacy and sharing. The second theme included a very conscious presentation of a public self, a "persona" or "most-interesting self" – a characteristic that is arguably distinct from Goffman's presentation of self, in that it is generalized and not related to roles or unique situations. The third theme has to do with the depersonalization of content. Many diarists and survey respondents use examples and make claims that what they share is not personal in terms of relationship details, information about connections to others, or even specific thoughts and ideas. This marks a common strategy distinct from those identified in the literature reviewed above. It is also notable that in addition to limiting personal details, respondents were very aware of the people in their networks, often reflecting on what kinds of content would be interesting or relevant for their networks and, often tailoring what they chose to share on social media with these audiences in mind.

All of these themes work together and each reflects common features identified by our respondents in their diaries, interviews and survey responses. It was clear that respondents embraced sharing culture, writing rich and detailed diaries with many reflections on how much they enjoyed the process of thinking about sharing, privacy, and their relationships to and with social media. Survey respondents also had much to say about privacy, about why it is (or is not) important and about their behaviour and attitudes towards social media.

### 4.1 Privacy Matters

Similar to findings reported in the literature above, many of the diarists identified control of personal information as central to their understanding of privacy. Others told us that privacy meant being "internet-free! What a weird world that would be..." (25 year-old female); or that "privacy doesn't really exist" (27 year-old male); or that privacy is "being able to express yourself freely and without fear" (22 year-old female).

One survey respondent highlighted how important privacy was to him, when he stated: "Privacy builds an individual. Privacy plays a

major role in differentiating your individuality from the society” (respondent 24, aged 20-24).

All diarists talked about privacy as important to them, although this did not always sit well with respondents’ views of sharing. For example, diarist 6, an 18 year-old female repeatedly communicated the importance of privacy to her social media use and sharing behaviours. Yet, despite this emphasis, diarist 6 wrote in her diary that:

Maybe people shouldn’t be so private as it’s sort of a put off. As humans we want to learn from each and get to know one another and how else would we know anything about people’s interests if sharing on social media wasn’t a thing. I think without it, we’d be way less connected and as a result, we would be unhappy.

In the follow-up interview, diarist 6 explained this further when she said, “Sharing is about human connection and privacy can limit that.” For this diarist, privacy is important but is also framed as in opposition to “human connection”.

Survey respondents also said privacy mattered to them. When asked to rate how important privacy was to them, 88.5% of survey respondents said privacy was important or very important to them (N=270). However, when asked what privacy meant to them, survey respondents identified different themes. Although only 12% (N=33) used the word control when asked what privacy meant to them, many talked about privacy in terms of actions or ideas relating to control. For example, survey respondents most frequently used terms to infer some kind access controls, such as: “not revealing”, “limiting”, “allowing”, “restricting”, “deciding”, and “not being watched”. In addition, control of personal information and over personal profiles was the key privacy issue for 24% of survey respondents.

Perhaps more strikingly, 24% of respondents understood privacy as a “right”, while 5% understood privacy as being about safety, and 1.5% defined privacy in relation to freedom or being free. Other frequently used terms refer to privacy as a process, such as being “able”, or having the “ability”, “choosing”, or as something that can be possessed as an “individual”. Visibility was also important, with many survey respondents referring to being seen or being watched. A fifth (20%) spoke about privacy as relational, referring to privacy in terms of other people – both known and unknown.

In contrast to popular opinion as expressed by Mark Zuckerberg or Eric Schmidt, only 3% felt that privacy no longer existed in today’s society [53]. For example, diarist 5 observed in their sharing diary, “if you have a computer, you have no real privacy” (27 year-old male), pointing to very real complexities around privacy and digital media.

It was also clear that the primary concern for diarists and survey respondents was social privacy rather than institutional privacy, which was secondary. Only 5% of respondents talked about government or states as a threat to privacy, 4% mentioned companies or corporations and only 1.5% mentioned surveillance of any kind. In a post-Snowden era, the absence of these mentions is quite surprising, further supporting research on young people and privacy which points to the importance of social rather than institutional privacy [54] [55] [56] [57].

## 4.2 “Private Sharing” and “Public Friends”

Diarists also wrote and commented on their thought processes around sharing, revealing extensive consideration not only of what they were posting, but also about who they were posting to; tailoring content to what they thought would be interesting or valuable to their potential audience or audiences. Diarist 6, the youngest in our sample, spoke about “private sharing” which referred to sharing content through Facebook messenger or direct messages on Instagram. For example, diarist 6 explains that:

When I do tend to share stuff it’s privately as I don’t feel comfortable sharing to the ‘public friends’ as I don’t actually know all of them, plus I don’t know how they feel about certain things.

For this respondent, using public social media for private communication was a strategy for protecting herself from “public friends” who she was not comfortable sharing information with. For her, private sharing is a real-time activity enjoyed with friends which helps carve out a safe space separate from the “public” world and public friendships on social media.

Diarist 1, a 22 year-old female illustrates this further when she wrote: “I wouldn’t want all my followers to know I was bored,” or to know how she was feeling, which is why she Snapchatted a selfie captioned “Mood – Bored” to friends privately, rather than using the public “My Story” feature. Like diarist 6, the 18 year-old, both diarists justify their private sharing habits in terms of privacy and what it is they do not want public friends to know about them. Diarist 1 also makes repeated reference to Snapchat because it “feels more ‘real’ and less staged” than television or other social media and is also “more personal.” This point was also supported by survey respondents, particularly regarding Snapchat as demonstrated in this comment: “Snapchat is more like private conversations through photos and I would feel uncomfortable if these were made public” (respondent 257, aged 20-24).

This identifies two points which do not appear in the literature. First, our respondents’ see social privacy as composed of two kinds of friends – public friends and private friends. The use of this term points to a reframing friendship categories and perhaps also of different forms of friendship. The idea of “public friends” includes a wide category of personal and impersonal connections and relationships which have clear implications for social and institutional privacy. Second, respondents also discuss “private sharing”, which is a kind of behaviour unreported in the literature. Although private sharing appears to occur primarily through messaging and Snapchat – neither of which are new uses of media – it does suggest a particular framing of the connection between privacy and sharing culture. For these respondents, explanations of this kind of sharing are accompanied by attempts to justify and explain not only protection of personal details but the use of social media to make connections with “private” or close friends.

In contrast, two diarists who were both facing major transitions from one life stage to another, reflected on their sharing practices as perhaps less considered than they should be. The first, diarist 7, a 24 year-old male just starting the search for a “serious” job, observed “now that I am trying to become more professional, I am re-evaluating what it is that I will share. I think I will probably go back to being private.” The second, a 36 year-old female just entering parenthood, reflected:

I don't give privacy as much consideration as I should, particularly when it comes to sharing photos of my son...I am now considering changing my privacy settings across social media (diarist 2).

These respondents highlight the importance of life stage for understanding the role of privacy and privacy managing strategies in sharing culture. While these examples provide small insights into the lived experiences of privacy, it seems there is a tension between youthful and emerging adult practices. For younger users, "private sharing" marks distinctions between "public friends" and close friends, whereas emerging adults are just beginning to question sharing practices in terms of adult roles, privacy, and transitional lived experience. Certainly, this raises a question for further research in terms of privacy, life stage, sharing culture and social media.

Private sharing is one of many themes diarists identified and is used in tandem with other strategies as discussed further in Section 4.3 and 4.4. Diarists and respondents referred to many examples of sharing their "best selves" and also sharing "depersonalized" content about celebrities, public events, news or other less personal information.

### 4.3 Persona, Promotion and Your Most-Interesting Self

Although there has been a great deal of work on performativity and presentation of self [58] [59] [60] [61], respondents in this research spoke about these issues in terms of specific terms and specific strategies – persona, one's "most interesting self" and self-promotion.

Diarists described how they selected what content to share because it helped them "show my persona" (diarist 6, 18 year-old female). This same diarist commented elsewhere that she "allowed a picture to be tagged of me by my mum on Facebook as it's something I wanted my friends to see." In an interview, diarist 5 said:

I think people share only what they want people to see them as, almost like an enhanced or edited version of themselves without all the messy bits. It feels like they are having to reaffirm who they are... or who they want to be (27-year-old male).

This theme also came out very strongly during the survey pilot with 24 undergraduates, where respondents spoke enthusiastically about how social media encouraged them to present their "most interesting self." Half of the survey respondents said they "sometimes" or "always" present a public side of their self on social media. Those that selected "other" or "I don't know" said that they presented "less of themselves, but not a different self," or they had different accounts for different communities which meant they did monitor how they publicly presented themselves.

Along this same line, diarist 5 said he noted every comment, like, or share he got from content he posted on Facebook, YouTube, or Instagram, and described these interactions as being "like a little pat on the back, like a little affirmation that what you're doing is good." For him, it was important to share content related to his work as a creative professional rather than any private information. Although he did not talk about presenting his "best self," he repeatedly referred to the value of social media for promoting his creative activities. Another diarist reflected his concern about presenting the "wrong" kind of self. Therefore, his social media persona was

informed by "not wanting to come off as annoying at all, so I post nothing political. I try to keep social media just as a fun thing to do" (diarist 7, 24 year-old male).

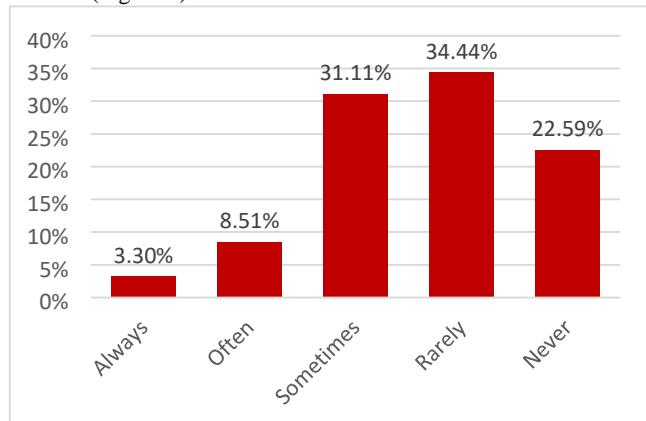
Survey respondents also noted a tendency in themselves and in others to put their best selves forward: "Well, we all try to look more attractive, more interesting, more... happy than we actually are don't we?" (respondent 189, aged 20-24). In this sense, we can see that what people share is important to them. For many respondents, there is a clear sense that shared content is both publicly consumed and publicly judged.

### 4.4 Sharing Strategies: Depersonalizing Content

Although all diarists spoke about connecting with people who were important to them, the majority of the content they tracked in their sharing diaries had to do with work, school, celebrities, interest related events, or other kinds of content which was not particular to their personal thoughts, feelings or relationships. Most diaries contained few references to personal interactions or relationships. For example, despite a rich and detailed diary, diarist 5 made only one mention of his personal romantic relationships in his diary and only as a contextual piece of information, rather than one containing any relationship specific details or information. Similarly, diarist 3 wrote about sharing an article on "single shaming in the 20s" (25-year-old female). This diarist explained through high-pitched giggles and obvious embarrassment that: "I realized after sharing this, that basically I had broadcast my relationship status to all of my Facebook friends". For this respondent, this article contained personal information about her relationship status which she had not intended to share or "broadcast" and sharing it to her networks was a mistake she regretted.

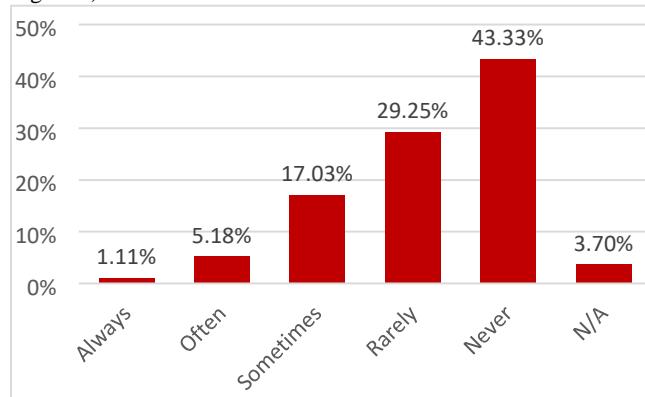
In this sense, it seems that diarists shared less personal information about the people in their lives, about their emotional states or about the details of their private thoughts, suggesting respondents were depersonalizing sharing content.

This point also came out very clearly in the survey. For example, one respondent wrote: "I do not share things that I feel are personal" (respondent 192, 30-34). In addition, over half (57.03%) of the survey respondents said that they never or rarely shared personal thoughts or feelings on social media, whereas 31.11% said they sometimes did and the minority (11.81%) said they did so always or often (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Survey results by percentage indicating how often respondents shared personal thoughts on social media (N=270).**

There is further evidence for the depersonalization of content as respondents were much less likely to share information about their romantic relationships. As such, the numbers reflected in the above question are even more pronounced when respondents were asked how often they shared information about their romantic relationships. Here, 43.33% say they never share details about their romantic relationships, and 29.25% say they only do so rarely (see Figure 3).



**Figure 2. Survey results by percentage indicating how often respondents shared details of their romantic relationships on social media (N=270).**

Based on this, it may be unsurprising, that 66.43% rarely or never share details about friendships, family or romantic relationships. In 2010, Iliana Gershon reported that for many young people, a romantic relationship was not considered legitimate until it had been publicly declared on Facebook – hence the idea that a relationship was “real” once the people in it had changed their relationship status so it would be “Facebook official” [62]. It would appear that social media users have come a long way from this practice to one where only 1.11% of survey respondents “always” declare their relationship status on social media.

Indeed, this theme also extended to how survey respondents understood the role of institutional privacy. For those survey respondents who did mention institutional privacy, one observed that they could not see how private or personal information was at stake at all. Instead, as expressed by one survey respondent:

Governments, corporations or any other bodies could easily breach my privacy illegally and without my knowledge, but I don't feel strongly enough of that possibility to take any precautions against it happening. Why would anyone bother to check what I'm searching, writing, saying?

On one hand, this points to some confusion about what kind of post-Snowden institutional surveillance or privacy invasions are commonplace. On the other, it also points to a very specific idea of “private” or “personal” information being distinct and separate from cookies, clicks, browsing behaviours, or other online data.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper examines the tensions between privacy and sharing culture for London UK residents aged 18-36. The body of research on privacy suggests that ideas of privacy are changing; privacy is less about control and more about embedded, relational

and networked experiences. Certainly, “sharing” is constitutive of social media [63] [64] and is deeply integrated in our respondents’ lives. This research supports existing studies on young people and privacy, particularly that privacy matters, and that social privacy is more highly valued than institutional privacy. Although respondents understood sharing as relational, public-facing and networked, this did not translate to their definitions or descriptions of privacy. Privacy-as-control dominated respondents’ privacy metaphors and their models, informing how respondents understood their sharing practice through “control of” and “access to” their social information. However, in terms of the literature, this work supports many of the empirical studies but it does not support ideas of “networked privacy” as informing respondents’ ideas or experiences of privacy. Although networked privacy provides well-founded insights into the changing nature of privacy as a concept, our respondents did not talk about their experience of sharing or of privacy in terms of networks. In this sense, networked privacy does not support the lived experiences of those reported in this small, primarily qualitative and London-based study.

Despite the obvious limitations of this small, regionally focused research, our respondents thought carefully about how and what they shared and what privacy meant to them. Based on these rich accounts, it seems there are three central themes. First, our respondents spoke of “public friends” and “private sharing,” pointing to the emergence of practices helping them navigate the complexities of social media, where sharing can be a threat to privacy but also the foundation for “human connection” (diarist 6). Notably, this practice was not widely reflected in those respondents who were 25+, pointing to the possibility that this is an emerging and youthful practice. Respondents also repeatedly spoke of sharing content to better reflect their “persona”, their “most interesting self”, or to promote public-facing aspects of their lives such as their work or professional presence. Again, this supports existing work on the use of social media for “presentation of self” and for performativity, but also points to a particular language that respondents use to make sense of their own sharing behaviours and the sharing behaviours of others. Finally, when asked about what they shared on social media, most diarists and survey respondents emphasized that they did not share personal information about their thoughts, feelings, relationships, romances and connections. The depersonalization of shared content is significant, pointing to a privacy management strategy that has not been documented in previous research.

Additionally, this paper also raises questions for further research. For example, are the sharing practices we see the same or different for those at different life stages? What results would we see if the same research was done with those in the 37+ demographic?

In closing, in the context of small-scale, primarily qualitative research, this paper offers several contributions to the literature and existing research on privacy and social media, namely, privacy matters in different ways for different people. The respondents reported here are also exercising specific practices to navigate social media. Indeed, these respondents point to distinct patterns in their lived experiences which enable better navigation of the interstices between privacy, sharing culture and social media.

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## A. APPENDICES

### A.1 SHARING DIARY

The sharing diary is meant to keep a record of the things you share and also provide a space for you to broadly reflect on your experience of sharing on social media.

Sharing is a broad practice and can include content you find or make. Focus on what is relevant or interesting to you. You may want to consider content that is shared with you, as well as your own sharing practices. Bear in mind how your view of privacy relates to anything you share on social media.

If you are unsure where to begin, these questions might help you begin your diary:

1. Explain or outline what you shared on your social media, include links or pictures if appropriate. If there is too much to include, focus on just one or two of the things you shared.
2. Explain why you shared these things?
3. What kinds of things did other people share? Focus on one or two examples and explain your observations and reactions.
4. Did you tag anyone or come across any tagging? If so, explain the tag and your observations and reactions.
5. Was there anything you did not want to share? If so, please tell us why.

There are no word limits so be as brief or as detailed as you would like.

**Please be specific about social media platforms and content where appropriate. Pictures, links, images, screenshots and other visual content is encouraged.**

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**Day 1 Date:**

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**Day 2:**

**Date:**

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**Day 3 Date:**

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**Day 4 Date:**

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**Day 5 Date:**

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**Day 6 Date:**

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**Day 7 Date:**

Instead of tracking your sharing on social media, please reflect and review the diary process so far. What have you thought of the sharing diary? Have you made any observations about your sharing behaviour? Please include any thoughts or reactions you have had that are interesting to you.

Please also consider what you said privacy means to you in the survey. Reflect on what privacy means to you now and how your understanding of privacy influences what you share and the kinds of sharing you come across in your daily social media use.

## A.2 GENERAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR DIARISTS

1. Did you learn or observe anything about you, your friends or social media during your diary?
2. Why do you use the social media you use?
3. How has your use of social media changed over time?
4. Has your idea of privacy changed over time?
  - How?
  - Why?
5. Do you think there is good and bad ways to be private?
  - Any examples?
6. What does privacy mean to you now?
  - Socially
  - Institutionally (e.g. with companies, government or social media platforms)
7. Is there anything you don't or won't share?
8. Do you have a social media persona?
9. Do you target content to specific groups?
  - Why?
10. How and why do you share to different groups? (Friends, family, work or interest communities)
11. Do you think your social media use is public? Explain
  - Who or what is the public to you?
12. Do you have rules around sharing, tagging or commenting? Please explain what they are and why you have them
13. What kind of privacy settings do you have?
  - Why?
  - Are your settings the same across platforms? 14. Any interesting stories or experiences around sharing you'd like to tell us?

## A.3 SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR 18-36 YEAR OLD LONDON (UK) RESIDENTS

All answers are anonymous and confidential. The survey will take 5-10 minutes to complete. The survey will ask you some basic demographic questions, ask what you think about privacy and explore a few questions about your social media use.

The aim of this project is to understand what privacy means today for 18-36 year old Greater London residents. You will be asked some basic demographic questions, about what you think of privacy and a few questions about your social media use. Your participation will provide an anonymous contribution to understandings of what privacy means today.

The survey should take 10 minutes to complete. No potential risks or discomforts are identified with this process. All responses are confidential. This study has been approved by the Regent's University London ethics review board.

By proceeding with the survey, you are indicating that you understand and agree to participate in this research. If you have any questions or would like to see the outcomes of this research, please contact one of the researchers at: sujonz@regents.ac.uk or johnstonl@regents.ac.uk

1. By clicking here, I understand and agree to answer all the questions in the survey.
2. Would you like to enter to win a £50 Amazon credit or £30 Pizza Express gift certificate? If you say yes, your email or contact details will only be used to contact you if you win - they will not be shared with anyone or saved after the survey closes. You must complete the survey to be eligible.

No

Yes, please provide your email or contact details

3. What is your age category?

17 or under  
18-19  
20-24  
25-29  
30-34  
35-36  
37+

4. Where do you live?

Central London (travel zones 1-2) London (travel zones 3-6)  
Greater London (travel zones 7-8)  
Outer Greater London (areas within the M25)  
Outside of the Greater London area (areas outside the M25)

5. What is your gender?

Female  
Male  
Transgender  
Prefer not to say  
Other (please specify)

6. Select the category that best describes your ethnic group.

White (English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British) Mixed or multiple (White and Black African or Caribbean or Asian or other multiple ethnicities)  
Asian/British Asian (Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi/Chinese or any other Asian background) Black/African/Caribbean/Black British Arab (Middle Eastern/North African)  
Prefer not to say  
Other (please specify)

7. What is the highest level of education for you and your family? Please rate: 1. No qualification | 2. GCSEs or equivalent | 3. A Level or equivalent | 4. Some higher education | 5. Degree or equivalent | 6. Post-graduate degree or equivalent | 7. Other qualification(s) | 8. Don't know | 9. Prefer not to say | 10. N/A

For you  
For your mother or primary caregiver  
For your father or secondary caregiver

8. What is your current employment status?

Student  
Intern  
Unemployed  
Self-employed  
Part-time employment  
Full-time employment  
Freelancing or contract work

Other (please specify)

### B. Privacy

In this section, we ask you specific questions about your privacy related attitudes and behaviours.

9. What is privacy? Please explain how you see privacy and what you think it means today.

10. Privacy is most related to which of the following? Please select one.

Control

Freedom

Individual choice

Personal or private information

Safety

Visibility / invisibility

All of the above

Don't know

Other (please specify)

11. How important is privacy is to you?

Very unimportant

Unimportant

Neither unimportant or important

Important

Very important

Not applicable or don't know

12. How likely you are to read the privacy policies for the social media sites you use?

Very likely

Likely

Neither likely or unlikely

Unlikely

Very unlikely

Not applicable or don't know

13. Do you use your real name on your social media profiles?

Always

Mostly

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

Not applicable or don't know

14. How have you set your privacy settings for the following accounts?

Please rate: 1. Public | 2. Friends / Your Networks / Unlisted | 3. Private | 4. I don't know | 5. I don't use this platform

Facebook

Instagram

Twitter

YouTube

15. Do you share personal information on social media? Personal information refers to any details about you as a person which could be used to identify you or express who you are. Please rate:

1. Always | 2. Often | 3. Sometimes | 4. Rarely | 5. Never | 6. N/A or Don't know

Photos or videos of yourself

Photos or videos of others

Photos or videos of you with others

Personal thoughts or feelings

Location details

Names of others (friends, colleagues, work-mates etc.)

Details of your romantic relationships

Birthdates (day, month, year)

Birthdates (day, month but not the year)

Your telephone number or email

Other people's telephone numbers or emails

Details about your friendships or family relationships

Political thoughts or perspectives

16. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Please rate: 1. Agree strongly | 2. Agree a little | 3. Neither agree nor disagree | 4. Disagree a little | 5. Disagree strongly | 6. Not applicable or don't know

I am concerned about what others might think about things I share  
Privacy concerns are over rated

Most people I know care about their privacy settings on social media  
I am concerned about what employers or authorities might find or see about me on social media

I try not to post anything political or controversial because it might attract negative attention

I am happy to trade privacy for connecting with others or for promoting my work and/or interests

I don't care that all social media platforms collect personal information

It is important to keep personal information private

I have been caught in a lie on social media

I follow personal rules about what I should and should not post on social media

17. How concerned are you about who specifically might see or access your personal information? Please rate on a scale of 1-5. 1. Very unconcerned | 2. Unconcerned | 3. Neutral | 4. Concerned | 5. Very concerned | 6. Don't know

Advertisers and private companies

People I don't know seeing, sharing, saving or tagging my content or profile

People I know seeing, sharing, saving or tagging my profile or content

Political and religious extremists

Government and intelligence organizations

Police

Social media platforms

Facebook, Instagram or WhatsApp

Trolls or online abusers

People I don't yet know like future employers

18. Why is privacy important or unimportant to you?

### C. Social media use

In this last section, we ask you a few questions about your social media attitudes and behaviours.

19. How often do you use social media on an average day?

Never

About once a day

2-3 times a day

4-6 times a day

7-10 times per day  
11 or more times per day

20. How much do you know about social media generally?

Much less than average  
Less than average  
About average  
More than average  
Much more than average  
Don't know

21. Why do you use social media? Select the best answer.

To connect with others  
To find out what others are doing  
For news or information  
For entertainment  
To share things I see, hear, read or think  
To promote my work, interests or profile

I love to post many different things all the time, probably at least once a day  
Other (please specify)

23. Do you present a public side of yourself on social media that is different from how you are in person?

Yes, always  
Maybe sometimes  
No, never I don't know  
Other (please specify)

24. Briefly explain your response to the above question.

25. Thank-you for completing our survey. Can we contact you with further questions related to this research?

No  
Yes, thank-you for agreeing to be contacted for further questions. Please provide your email below. Your email will only be used to contact you for this research and will not be shared with anyone or saved beyond this study.

To share things I am doing or have created, performed or completed  
All of the above  
I don't know  
Other (please specify)

22. What kind of social media user are you? Select the best answer.

I very rarely post, tag people or comment  
I like to comment on other people's content or posts but will rarely post my own  
I tend to re-share or comment on content I think is interesting  
MORE than I share my own content  
I tend to re-share or comment on content I think is interesting AND I share my own content  
I post original content like my pictures, videos or writings several times a week