Self-Presentation and Privacy Online

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In their book *Evil Online*, Dean Cocking and Jeroen van den Hoven argue that a collection of characteristics of the online world have created 'a moral fog' that corrupts people's moral compass.[1] One of those problematic characteristics, they argue, is the ability to self-present online largely on one's own terms. In the offline world, we have access to people's identities in a richness that partly lies beyond people's control. For instance, we may want to present a calm version of ourselves, but our biting our nails might betray our feelings of anxiety. That plurality of the self allows other people the opportunity to be better informed about who we are, and to partly construct and support our identity. Cocking and van den Hoven argue that, by acting in a way that does not openly acknowledge our anxiety, but that can attend to it by calming us down, others can promote our autonomy and privacy.

In this paper, I critically assess this stance and others like it. In section 1, I analyze the relationship between control over self-presentation and privacy and argue that, while they are both tightly connected, they are not one and the same thing. Distinguishing between control over self-presentation and privacy has important practical implications for the online world. In section 2, I investigate self-presentation online and argue that, while there might be an illusion that one can self-present on one's own terms online, that mirage often reveals itself as

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1. Dean Cocking and Jeroen van den Hoven, *Evil Online* (New York: Wiley, 2018).

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unrealistic because of external and internal constraints. I further argue that what is most noteworthy about self-presentation online, in contrast to self-presentation offline, is the pressure to be on display at all times. In section 3, I argue that to combat some of the negative trends we are witnessing online we need, on the one hand, to cultivate a culture of privacy, in contrast to a culture of exposure. On the other hand, we need to readjust how we understand self-presentation online. I argue that in some cases we should understand it in similar terms to how we understand advertisement or fiction. By changing our conventions online, we would be taking away some of people's control over self-presentation by not taking their online personae at face value.

I.   Self-Presentation and Privacy

Cocking and van den Hoven join a long tradition of philosophers and thinkers who have rightly pointed out that self-presentation is intimately related to privacy. How close that relationship is, however, is less clear, and how we conceptualize it has important implications for how we should shape social media in order to combat negative trends online. In what follows, I will assess the relationship between self-presentation and privacy and argue that, although connected, they are not one and the same.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, the sociologist Ervin Goffman described the many ways in which human beings put up certain performances for each other, depending on the audience and context. In public, we tend to put forth our best sides. We dress up nicely, try to behave politely, and do our best to look the way we want others to perceive us. We conceal from our intended audiences the 'dirty work': going to the bathroom, tidying up, and all the preparation that it takes to show ourselves in the best possible light. We show our strengths and hide our weaknesses.[2]

Because everyone has an interest in self-presentation, we help each other keep up appearances by dividing spaces and situations into front- and backstages and through norms of etiquette. In a restaurant, for instance, the front area are the tables, while the backstage, where waiters can relax their performance, is the kitchen. If we see someone making a mistake that could embarrass them, we make an effort to look away, smooth things over, or steer people's attention elsewhere. When we walk down the street, it is tactful to practice what

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2. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor, 1959).

Goffman calls 'civic inattention'—do not stare, follow people around, or photograph them, to name a few norms.[3]

Self-presentation is closely related to privacy. According to James Rachels, the value of privacy relies on the 'connection between our ability to control who has access to us and to information about us, and our ability to create and maintain different sorts of social relationships with different people'.[4] You are bound to behave differently with your students than with your spouse—and all parties are probably grateful for that. Privacy helps us keep different kinds of relationships. If we lived in a completely transparent society, with no front- and backstage, it would be harder to play different roles in different settings with different people.

More recently, Andrei Marmor has argued that 'the underlying interest protected by the right to privacy is the interest in having a reasonable measure of control over ways you present yourself to others'.[5] Rachels and Marmor agree that our interest in self-presentation underlies our right to privacy. Rachels, however, writes that self-presentation is 'one of the most important reasons why we value privacy',[6] suggesting that there might be other reasons as well. Marmor seems to think that self-presentation is the *only* interest underlying our right to privacy.

Since we need a reasonably predictable environment regarding the flow of information to successfully control our self-presentation, a violation of the right to privacy, then, for Marmor, 'consists in the manipulation of the environment in ways that unjustifiably diminish one's ability to control how one presents oneself to others'.[7]

Cocking and van den Hoven do not give an explicit account of the relationship between self-presentation and privacy. They do, however, emphasize the close connection between the two, and give some examples that can serve as the basis for further analysis. They imagine a situation in which one is out with a friend of theirs and she encounters her ex, who is with his new lover:

> The presentation of less chosen aspects of our selves often also provide the object for the expression of certain relational aspects of respect for one another's privacy. For the purpose of respecting the legitimate claim of people to keep some of their thoughts and feelings to themselves, and to have some choice and control over the 'self' they present to us

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3. Erving Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places* (New York: Free Press, 1963), pp. 24 and 84.
4. James Rachels, 'Why Privacy Is Important', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 4, no. 4 (1975), p. 326.
5. Andrei Marmor, 'What Is the Right to Privacy?', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 43, no. 1 (2015), p. 22.
6. Marmor, 'What Is the Right', p. 329.
7. Marmor, 'What Is the Right', p. 25.

for public engagement or scrutiny, we can—and often should—choose not to address what their conflicting, less chosen and controlled, self-presentations might tell us. My friend's ex-partner, for instance, may no longer presume to engage in the private concerns of my friend, and so her anxiety and discomfort [when they] encounter, while recognized, need not be addressed and subjected to his unwelcome attention. This is one way then, in which relational aspects of our respect for the privacy of others can be shown.[8]

Cocking and van den Hoven consider other similar examples to the same effect. If we have a work colleague who, we can see, is bitter and unhappy (even if he does not 'give' us this information, he 'gives it off'), 'we may respect his privacy and autonomy by not remarking on this misery and ill-will publicly and explicitly'.[9]

Given these remarks and examples, it seems like Cocking and van den Hoven are equating control over self-presentation and privacy, much like Marmor. As long as we support and do not interfere with people's self-presentation, we are respecting their privacy.

My own view is closer to Rachels than to Cocking and van den Hoven or Marmor. The ability to self-present is one of the elements why we value privacy, but it does not amount to privacy, and thinking it does will mislead us into misguided practical implications.

To see how control over self-presentation and privacy are not one and the same thing, it is helpful to analyze them in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. In some cases, one can have control over self-presentation and no privacy, which shows that privacy is not necessary for control over self-presentation. If you have a good relationship with your spouse, you may be able to perform different roles in their presence, therefore having control over self-presentation, but no privacy (with respect to your spouse). Your spouse, then, may know what you look like first thing in the morning. They might have seen you at your very worst. But that does not impede your ability to act like a professional in front of them (e.g., giving a public talk or bumping into your boss and playing the role you play at work). That your partner knows how you are in very different roles and contexts—in the morning, at your worst, with your boss, and, say at a party—makes you have less privacy with respect to them than you do with respect to other people, but it does not necessarily impede your self-presentation. Privacy, then, is not always necessary for control over self-presentation.

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8. Cocking and van den Hoven, *Evil Online*, pp. 63–64.
9. Cocking and van den Hoven, p. 71.

A critic might want to argue that your control over your self-presentation is jeopardized in front of your spouse. Your spouse, after all, could interrupt your performance to describe to others what you look like in the morning. It is not clear that such a violation of the right to privacy would interfere with your self-presentation. Suppose you are giving an important talk in front of an audience of strangers at an international conference. If you suddenly learned that you forgot to close the curtains of your room at the hotel where you are all staying, and all of those people had seen you as you woke up and got ready for the talk, you might feel so mortified that it might impede your capacity to perform. In that case, a loss of privacy interferes with the capacity to self-present as a slick professional. But if it is your spouse who tries to tell them that you do not always look this slick, or tries to show them a picture of a dishevelled version of you, they would be embarrassing themselves by flouting social norms of decorum. In that case, it seems that your partner's self-presentation is compromised, not so much yours. If your self-presentation is affected, it is as a result of your partner acting in an embarrassing way (that is, their being your partner might reflect badly on you).[10]

Part of why we care about self-presentation is because it says something about our competence and values. If someone does not show up dressed appropriately to an important work meeting, either they do not care enough about the meeting or they are incapable of keeping up their self-presentation, which introduces doubts about their competence as a professional and their self-control.

This insight is relevant to the relationship between privacy and self-presentation. If a performance such as a talk is ruined because of a failure of self-presentation, people are more likely to negatively judge and embarrass the presenter. If the talk goes badly because the presenter woke up too late and did not have time to clean up, then that will reflect badly on them. But if the performance is interrupted because of someone else trying to undermine the presenter, the shame may be on them. That will not be true in every case, of course—sometimes people succeed in undermining one another. One counterexample is enough, however, to show that privacy is not necessary for control over self-presentation.

There are other examples, however. Imagine you become interesting to an intelligence agency. Spies begin to follow you around, they put microphones in your house and listen to your conversations, record your online activity, and so on. It might be the case that they are spying on you in order to get to someone else—say, unbeknownst to you, your cousin, with whom you live, is a suspected

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10. On 'dramaturgical discipline' and self-control, see Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self*, chapter 6.

criminal. The spies do not interfere with your self-presentation in the slightest, and they have no plans to disseminate your private information, as they are after your cousin, not you. But that you have lost privacy by being heavily spied on seems clear.[11]

So much for privacy not being necessary for control over self-presentation. On the other side of the coin, control over self-presentation is not necessary for privacy. We can imagine someone being forced to dress in a certain way (e.g., formal attire for work), thereby affecting their control over self-presentation without this action having any effect on their privacy.[12]

Privacy is not sufficient for control over self-presentation either. Suppose you want to self-present as a slick professional to someone you think is watching you at a work party. And imagine that you fail to self-present yourself as a slick professional because you are too tired, or anxious, or drunk to pull it off. That failure of self-presentation can have negative effects on your self-esteem, for instance, but it need not correlate with a loss of privacy. Perhaps your intended audience did not even notice your presence and therefore your failure to self-present—maybe they were distracted, or too drunk, or blind. Your privacy is therefore intact with respect to your intended audience, since they did not see you, but you still failed to self-present like the slick professional you wanted to appear like.

Similarly, control over self-presentation is not sufficient for privacy. When you talk about intimate matters with a friend, you are (voluntarily) losing privacy while retaining control over your self-presentation.

In short, privacy often supports control over self-presentation, but it is neither necessary nor sufficient for successful self-presentation. Likewise, control over self-presentation often supports privacy, but is neither necessary nor sufficient for privacy. The distinction matters—especially in the digital age. If we do not recognize that privacy interests go beyond self-presentation interests, we will be led to think that surveillance capitalism—the constant data collection and analysis carried out by corporate and governmental institutions for the purposes of social control and profit—does not impact our privacy, because it often does not have a direct impact on our capacity to self-present.

As I argue elsewhere, privacy is the quality of having one's personal information and 'sensorial space' unaccessed. You have privacy with respect to a certain person to the extent that that person does not know anything personal about

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11. Someone like Marmor, however, would be forced to argue that having an intelligence agency spy on someone is not a matter of privacy. Such a stance may be consistent with his theory, but it is completely at odds with common-sense understandings of privacy.

12. Björn Lundgren, 'A Dilemma for Privacy as Control', *Journal of Ethics*, 24 (2020), pp. 165–75.

you, and to the extent they cannot see, hear, or touch you in contexts in which people do not commonly want to be the object of others' attention.[13]

Let us go back to Cocking and van den Hoven's offline privacy examples. When, in a social setting, you catch a glimpse of someone's involuntary and revealing gestures that betray some feeling they wish to hide, and you act with discretion, thereby supporting the person's self-presentation and autonomy, you save their blushes, but you are not protecting their privacy. Therefore, when a friend encounters her ex and his new lover, and appears so anxious that everyone present notices her negative emotions, to not remark on her nervousness is an act of kindness, but her privacy with respect to her emotions is lost once everyone has noticed her nervousness. Of course, you could make her lose even more privacy by talking to others about this event, but merely refraining from talking about her anxiety to her does not make her regain the privacy she lost with respect to you, her ex, and her ex's lover.

What is happening in those situations is very well described by Elizabeth Strout in her novel *My Name Is Lucy Barton*:

> I suspect I said nothing because I was doing what I have done most of my life, which is to cover for the mistakes of others when they don't know they have embarrassed themselves. I do this, I think, because it could be me a great deal of the time. I know faintly, even now, that I have embarrassed myself. [. . .] But still—I do it for others, even as I sense that others do it for me.[14]

Distinguishing between self-presentation and privacy is particularly important to develop a good understanding of the social and moral pitfalls of the online world.

II.   Self-Presentation Online

There is broad agreement about the benefits of having some degree of control over one's self-presentation. First, that kind of control allows us to cultivate different kinds of relationships.[15] Second, having harmonious social lives would

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13. Carissa Véliz, 'On Privacy' (dissertation, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Oxford, 2017).

14. See Elizabeth Strout, *My Name Is Lucy Barton* (New York: Penguin, 2016), pp. 111–12. In this case, Lucy is talking about people who do not know they have embarrassed themselves, but that does not make a difference for our purposes.

15. Rachels, 'Why Privacy Is Important'.

be impossible if we could know everything about everyone at all times, and if we acted in accordance with how we feel at every moment.[16] Some degree of concealment, reticence, and nonacknowledgement is necessary to avoid unnecessary conflict in the public sphere.[17] Such limits protect both the individual, from undue judgement from other people, and the public sphere, which ends up being much less toxic if it only gets exposed to the more polished aspects of individuals, as opposed to the unadulterated versions.

It is also clear that there can be such a thing as too much control over self-presentation. No one who is not a doctor, for instance, should be able to self-present as a doctor, among other reasons, because it could be dangerous to prospective patients. If self-presentation comes too much under the complete control of individuals, people could concoct fantastical identities, potentially leading to 'manipulation, dishonesty', and a 'lack of authenticity'.[18]

One of the elements that Cocking and van den Hoven identify as leading to evil behavior online is the ability for people to self-present on their own terms. In the offline world, they note, our presentation of the self is often rich with undertones and aspects of expression that are not fully under our control. For instance, we may want to present a calm version of ourselves, but our biting our nails might betray our feelings of anxiety. Such richness of experience in face-to-face interactions allow us to 'form impressions' that 'guide our interactions' with other people.[19] Online, they argue, one can construct a whole identity largely detached from the influence of others 'and the realities of non-virtual worlds that might disrupt the identity constructed on one's own terms'.[20] Hence the famous meme about anonymity online, 'On the internet, nobody knows you're a dog', first published in the *New Yorker* by Peter Steiner in 1993.

If we were to equate self-presentation with privacy, that would lead us to conclude that one problem with social media is that people have too much privacy online, since they have too much control over their self-presentation. Andrei Marmor has recently taken that stance.[21] On that account, the solution is to further erode privacy online, requiring even more data from people. In opposition to this view, I will argue that the Internet would be a better place if people had, on the one hand, more privacy and, on the other, less control over their self-presentation.

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16. Cocking and van den Hoven, *Evil Online*, pp. 65–66.

17. Thomas Nagel, 'Concealment and Exposure', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 27, no. 1 (1998), 3–30.

18. Marmor, 'What Is the Right', p. 7.

19. Cocking and van den Hoven, *Evil Online*, p. 62.

20. Cocking and van den Hoven, pp. 74–75.

21. Andrei Marmor, 'Privacy in Social Media', in *Oxford Handbook of Digital Ethics*, edited by Carissa Véliz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

Before I make that argument, it is worth assessing to what extent people have more control over their self-presentation online than in the offline world, and to what extent that leads to undesirable consequences. As Cocking and van den Hoven admit, there are certain reality checks that can be provided online regarding the people we interact with, and often the online and offline worlds provide reality checks on one another.[22]

There are at least three reasons for why people might not be able to self-present completely on their own terms online. First, it seems that most people with profiles online connect to their offline relationships online, such that, if I were to purport to be a physician online, people who know me offline could call me on it. Second, people who have online profiles are incredibly exposed to input from others. In many ways, we are more exposed to each other online than offline. Offline we are usually exposed to a relatively small community, with many people either caring about us or caring about their own standing in the community—both of those concerns acting as a deterrent for evil behavior. Online we are potentially exposed to millions of strangers the world over who probably have little concern about us and do not think that their behavior will affect their standing in their communities. If people online were not so exposed to others, 'doxxing'—searching and publishing private information of someone online— would not have a name or be a problem. Third, to maintain a positive image online, one has to exercise self-control, much like in the offline world, and it is common to have slips. Involuntary facial expressions can be compared to invol- untary signals online: reading or responding to a message too quickly might sig- nal a lack of self-restraint, posting at all hours of the night might betray anxiety or insomnia, and posting things you come to regret might give away too much of how you think and feel at one particular moment. In some ways, it is easier to post something stupid online than to say something stupid offline: you can quickly type something and click 'send' without the immediate feedback that can act as a deterrence in face-to-face interactions, when we read each other's reactions to what we are saying (i.e. when you see people around you looking horrified when you speak, you know it is time to shut up).

Cocking and van den Hoven argue that we lose some of the richness and pluralism of the offline self when online. Their observation could be understood as meaning that we get to know people better offline than online, but it is not always true that self-presentation offline allows us to get a better (i.e., more com- plete) impression of people. Many times, one gets to know people's darkest sides online. After working with one's colleagues for years, and experiencing them as generally kind and rational people, it can be shocking to see how they behave

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22. Cocking and van den Hoven, *Evil Online*, pp. 77–78.

online. People who seem perfectly composed offline can show aggressive and even bullying behavior online that one would have never thought was possible.

All in all, it does not seem so easy to construct a perfect identity online on one's own terms. But, as Cocking and van den Hoven rightly qualify their claim a couple of times, such a possibility can *seem* achievable, even if such a feeling is all too often illusory.[23] If you build your online identity on lies, and happen to gain notoriety while doing it, chances are it will all come crumbling down sooner or later. You can have the perfect identity online until someone interferes with it, and then it can be incredibly difficult to regain your reputation—what you are shamed for can appear in the first page of an online search for all to see for a longer time than might be reasonable.

Another element of self-presentation online that might be reason for concern is the possibility that people might be anonymous online and use that anonymity for the purposes of wrongdoing. First, anonymity online is more often than not illusory: if someone wants to unveil someone else's identity, they will. The documentary *Don't F**ck with Cats* tells the story of an anonymous user who uploads a video of him killing two kittens and gets tracked down by online users. Furthermore, it is not certain that anonymity is significantly contributing to negative trends online. As mentioned before, perfectly civil academics in the offline world seem willing to act in very questionable ways on Facebook and Twitter using their real names. Further evidence can be found in a study that looked at more than 500,000 comments from around 1600 online petitions on a German platform and found that nonanonymous individuals were more aggressive than anonymous ones.[24] We can all think of notorious politicians who behave abominably online despite not being anonymous.

What I find most remarkable about how the Internet has changed self-presentation is the expectation to share more than would have been normal in a pre-Internet world. For those of us who grew up offline: could you imagine taking photographs to school of what you ate the day before to show it to your friends? Probably not. Social media has blurred the distinction between front- and backstage in many ways that are beyond the scope of this paper. But one of those ways is that we are now expected to perform on stage much more of the time. We not only work an eight-hour shift, like we used to, but now we are expected to respond to email when we get home. Your boss might ask you to promote material with your social media account. For teenagers, this pressure can be even worse. Home is no longer where social interaction ends. If they want to be popular at school, they not only have to look good during school hours but

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23. Cocking and van den Hoven, pp. 60 and 75.
24. Katja Rost, Lea Stahel, and Bruno S. Frey, 'Digital Social Norm Enforcement: Online Firestorms in Social Media', *PLoS One*, 11, no. 6 (2016), doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0155923.

out of school they have to show everyone how great their life is. They have to be available to answer the messages in their friends' group chat. Teenagers worry about posting pictures with friends every weekend, lest they might be thought to have no friends or no social lives. Social media pushes us to be always on display.

III. Cultivating a Culture of Privacy and Rethinking Self-Presentation Online

Cocking and van den Hoven note that '[t]he online revolution has removed, minimized, or altered much of the influence of others, and of many of the conventions, laws, and settings of our traditional worlds'.[25] Etiquette conventions about how much and what to share in public are some of the norms that have changed the most in the digital age.

People are encouraged to overshare online and engage every minute of every day because it is profitable for social media companies. The more time online, the more ads we see, the more clicks we make, the more data gets collected about us, the more ads can get sold. Part of what we need is better regulation of the data economy and, in particular, of the advertisement industry.[26] But that challenge is too broad to tackle here. Instead, I focus on cultural changes.

It might be tempting to think that if too much control over self-presentation online is a problem, because people engage in deception and other kinds of wrongdoing, then the way to solve that problem is to diminish people's privacy. In China, for instance, people registering with a new mobile phone service are obligated to provide both an ID and a face scan. We could do the same for social media users. This kind of approach is mistaken. Such measures would expose netizens even more to possible abuse and further violations of their right to privacy.

What has brought about many of the negative trends online is a lack of privacy and an excess of engagement and disinhibition—not too much privacy. We need to change the current culture of exposure online. Encouraging reticence online is a good place to start. Just like we teach our children not to talk about just anything with just anyone, there is no reason to post every thought and feeling—particularly ones that can be harmful to others, or ones that could make one particularly vulnerable to others.

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25. Cocking and van den Hoven, Evil Online, p. 72.
26. Carissa Véliz, *Privacy Is Power*, Bantam Press, 2020.

A culture of exposure shoves people into inauthenticity. By being required by their peers to self-present all day, netizens become images or brands of themselves. People are always imperfect. If we demand perfection from them, we are inadvertently turning them into con artists. And the responsibility is not only on the person who tries to live up to that unrealistic standard of a perfect person who is broadcasting their life all day long online. Part of the responsibility for that distortion of truth lies on social media platforms, and on the users who follow such people, both to admire them while the legend lives on and to condemn them when the perfect image inevitably cracks.

When a new technology gets popularized, it often takes some time for people to adjust to it and to create adequate social norms around it. I suspect this process is still in its infancy with respect to our digital lives.

When we show a film about Superman to children, we immediately explain to them that films are fiction—real people cannot fly. Otherwise we risk them thinking they might be able to fly. In the same way, part of the social mistake in judging 'influencers' as authentic people is to not appreciate that they are nothing but advertisements. Accusing an influencer of being inauthentic is like accusing an actor of pretending to be another person. That is exactly what we are paying them to do (if not with money, with our attention). The idea of a fake influencer is an oxymoron.

Thomas Nagel points out that certain practices that are somewhat generous with the truth are not deceptive when the convention is known by all. What counts as a deception, therefore, partly depends on our audience, on whether they are willing to take what we say and do at face value: 'A visitor to a society whose conventions he does not understand may be deceived if he takes people's performance at face value—the friendliness of the Americans, the self-abnegation of the Japanese, the equanimity of the English'.[27] What I am arguing is that we need to change our social conventions on many platforms online. Too many of us too much of the time seem to be acting like clueless tourists online.

By not taking at face value what people post online—by not judging influencers as authentic people but as advertisements or brands—we take away their control to self-present on their own terms. That power is taken away because we no longer take their posts to be a self-presentation at all. Especially in the case of influencers, we ought to understand their performance much as an actor's performance. Paradoxically, that inattention to the person as a person would take some of the pressure away from flesh-and-blood people to try to pretend what they are not.

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27. Nagel, 'Concealment and Exposure', p. 11.

Of course, what I am proposing would not work well for every platform and type of profile online. Academics on academic social media are an exception, for instance. In that case, professional reality checks already ensure that people cannot self-present on their own terms—people cannot get away with claiming a publication that is not theirs, for instance. The case of politicians on official accounts on Twitter is trickier and too complex to address in this paper.

There is also the concern that treating too much content online as fiction might lead to a disinterest in truth. One possibility to try to simplify the online landscape, and for people to more easily distinguish what ought to be taken at face value from what ought to be taken as advertisement or fiction, is to have different platforms for different purposes. Part of why the online world can be so confusing is because very different kinds of content can be found on the same platform. Just like we have a platform for academic philosophers, we could have a platform only for politicians, and a platform for influencers and similar performers.[28] Alternatively, we could tag branded content and influencers as such.

Of course, not all problems online would go away if people had more privacy and less control over their self-presentation. But giving people more privacy and less control over their self-presentation would likely help diminish online harassment because it would protect potential victims. It would also minimize unrealistic expectations about people. Elsewhere I have argued that using stable pseudonyms in much of our online life would be a good idea.[29] Pseudonyms provide privacy but also take away some control over self-presentation, as pseudonyms are not tied to our offline identities—they are taken to be fictional characters. Pseudonyms can also be a good tool to regulate without censoring speech, as they allow for nuanced penalties (such as losing one's pseudonym).

IV. Conclusion

In this paper I have argued against views that equate privacy with control over self-presentation. I have further argued that what is most notable about self-presentation online is the pressure to be on display at all times and places. As antidotes to some of the negative trends we can see on social media, I suggest cultivating a culture of privacy by discouraging self-exposure, and rethinking

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28. This suggestion encounters the following problem: platforms tend to fund themselves through advertising, which in turn suggests that we either need to find alternative funding schemes for platforms online or we need to heavily legislate the rules of advertisement online to cause less confusion about what kind of content we are being exposed to.

29. Carissa Véliz, 'Online Masquerade: Redesigning the Internet for Free Speech through the Use of Pseudonyms', *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 36, no. 4 (2019), pp. 643–58.

how we understand self-presentation online. I argue that, in some cases, such as that of influencers, we should take their performances to be only that—performances, like the performances of actors. By not interpreting all online personae as self-presentations, we take away some of the power for people to self-present on their own terms. Suggestions to decrease people's control over self-presentation include having different platforms for different purposes (separating the pursuit of truth, such as in academic platforms, from other kinds of pursuits), tagging fictional identities like that of influencers as such, and using pseudonyms in at least some of our online interactions. Many of the worst trends online can be partly attributed to the losses of privacy we have undergone online. The last thing we need is to have even less privacy. On the contrary, rejecting our current culture of exposure can be the first step to regaining much of what we have lost by going online.