



Home Alone?

Exploring the geographies of digitally-mediated
privacy practices at home during the COVID-19
pandemic

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Revisiting life in lockdown



Working from home



Telehealth



Remote education

Home as private space

*'Everyone has the right to respect
for his private and family life, his
home and his correspondence'*
(European Convention on Human
Rights)



Technology as invading
home privacy:
wiretapping, stalkerware,
smart home surveillance

RQ1: How is the adoption of remote {work/education/services}
reconfiguring our relationships with private spaces at home?

RQ2: How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted people's privacy
protective practices?

Towards theory-informed privacy and security research

- ❖ There is a gap between rich conceptualisations of privacy and the application of theories
- ❖ Security and privacy research doesn't correctly apply theories from sociology and psychology (Weickert et al, 2023)

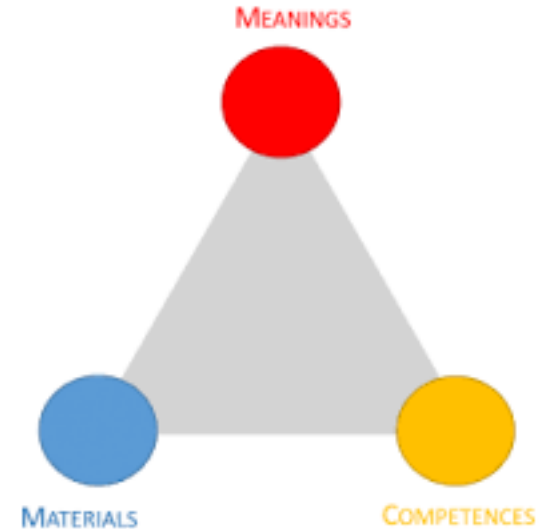
Behaviourist paradigm	Social Practice theory
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on individuals• Cognition as a unit of analysis• Observability and measurement of visible behaviours• Rational communication leading to rise in awareness <p>(Skinner, 2011)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on communities, their skills and materials at hand• Practice as a unit of analysis• Research asks about social meanings behind practices• Acknowledgement of irrationality <p>(Dourish and Anderson, 2009; Shove et al., 2012)</p>

A brief overview of recent privacy theories

- Privacy as a **pluralistic** concept: many competing definitions in operation (Solove, 2008)
- Privacy is **adaptive**: once an intrusion becomes part of the common fabric of our daily lives, we become less concerned about it (Francis and Francis, 2017)
- Privacy is **collective**: key to social interactions; essential to functioning of democracy (boyd, 2012)
- Privacy is **contextual**: impossible to develop a one-size-fits-all approach; what's worth of protection depends on the relationship, culture, history etc. (Nissenbaum, 2009)
- Privacy is **spatial**: the private-public distinction is not a reflection of a 'natural order', rather, it is an expression of power; privacy as one's freedom to shape their identity in a given context, e.g. work or school (Koops and Galic, 2017)

Research approach: Social Practice Theory

- Definition: a structured, routinised arrangement of what people do in a given context
- SPT triangle: materials (including things, technologies and tangible physical entities), competences (including skill, know-how and techniques) and meanings (including symbolic meanings, ideas and aspirations)
- Moving beyond behaviours, perceptions, opinions, attitudes
- SPT decentres technology and users and brings their actions, materials and meanings to the fore



Methodology

- 18 qualitative interviews with internet lay-users over Feb-March 2021
- Questions about current internet usage, disclosure practices, protecting privacy, weighing up privacy and other concerns
- Thematic analysis using SPT triangle as a framework as well as inductive coding

The Blurring of the Work-Life Divide

- Video calling: concerns about the potential for surveillance, disclosure errors and misuse by third-parties.
- Slack: lack of clarity who has the access to multiple communication channels. Concerns over hidden channels (HR? bosses? Employees?)
- Organisations assigned a new default informational infrastructure in haste, they missed out on an opportunity to re-establish the ground rules of workplace communication and work-life boundaries.
- Participants had limited opportunity to negotiate privacy in remote workplace



Technology Exaptation

- Repurposing of personal devices for work
- Accidental disclosure of personal information (e.g. using personal zoom ID in a professional context)
- Increased availability and visibility of workers to respond to queries
- What should be the stance to BYOD?



Privacy stigma

- Participants did not feel comfortable voicing their concerns to their employers or educators;
- Pandemic as an emergency and the need to sustain livelihoods took priority over privacy debates
- The need to revisit workplace privacy, surveillance and work-life boundaries



Recommendations

1. Privacy-preserving mechanisms in workplace/education ICT, should enable protection of employees and students physical environments, personal identities and relationships outside of work/education.
2. Workplaces ought to introduce policies establishing boundaries of communication at work, setting expectations regarding appropriate response time and scheduling of meetings.
3. Policymakers ought to monitor remote working trends and the associated tracking technologies, so that the provision for workers' rights reflects the adoption of digital technologies.

Conclusions

- Lockdowns have highlighted a conflict between the need to maintain a flourishing life and the need to protect public health.
- While participants took effort to learn and negotiate new IT tools, they had limited agency over their privacy and experienced privacy stigma.
- In the absence of social script or employer's guidance, the events of accidental or inappropriate disclosure led to embarrassment and pose a significant barrier to professional fulfilment.



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Thanks for your attention!



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