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Article:
Moore, Alfred James (2018) Anonymity, Pseudonymity, and Deliberation: Why Not Everything Should be Connected. The Journal of Political Philosophy. pp. 169-192. ISSN: 1467-9760

https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12149

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Anonymity, Pseudonymity, and Deliberation: Why Not Everything Should Be Connected*

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Accepted for publication in The Journal of Political Philosophy, 7 November 2017

The discussion of anonymity and deliberation has repeatedly circled around two contradictory normative positions. One is that anonymity is valuable because it enables expression free from fear of repercussions. The other is that anonymity is destructive because it enables expression free from fear of repercussions. The same feature that enables a teenager from a repressive religious community to talk freely about his sexuality without fear of exposure also enables cruel and abusive responses that may inhibit such expressions.

This sort of trade-off has become especially salient in the context of online political talk of the sort found in news commenting spaces. In lieu of costly moderation, some online news sites are shifting towards requiring real-name identification of commenters in order to avoid the pitfalls of easy anonymity, increasingly outsourcing their commenting architecture to Facebook, whose spokespeople have argued that for safety's sake, 'anonymity on the internet has to go away'.[1] The hope is that real-name environments would limit abusive behaviour by binding users to discursive norms rooted in community. Would you talk like that in front of your mother? But real-name environments, in which people tend to know each other and

* This paper benefited from four great audiences at the Cambridge Workshop in Political Philosophy; the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University; the APSR annual conference 2016; and the ECPR general conference 2016. I would like to thank Richard Danbury, Rolf Fredheim, Archon Fung, Sean Gray, Andrew McKenzie-McHarg, Michael MacKenzie, John Naughton, Jón Ólafsson, David Vincent, Melissa Williams, Dominik Wyss, Ethan Zuckerman, and the anonymous reviewers at JPP for their insightful and constructive comments and suggestions. This research comes out of a project on online commenting supported by Leverhulme grant no. RP2012-CO17 and conducted with my colleagues Rolf Fredheim and John Naughton, to whom I owe special thanks.

[1] In the words of Randi Zuckerberg, marketing director of Facebook and sister of Mark Zuckerberg, Chairman and CEO (quoted in Chun 2015, p. 105). Facebook VP Elliot Schrage stated that 'Facebook has always been based on a real-name culture. We fundamentally believe this leads to greater accountability and a safer and more trusted environment for people who use the service' (quoted in Sengupta (2011)).

share a broad set of perspectives, values, and opinions, create their own problems of conformity and social pressure. This suggests a practically difficult but conceptually simple trade-off between the goods and dangers associated with anonymous and real-name architectures. If you want users to be able to express themselves without fear of retribution or pressures towards conformity, you have to accept that they may use that freedom to be cruel and abusive. And if you want to bind users to the norms of community, you have to accept the risk that users will censor themselves, seek to avoid conflict, and be subject to the pressures and expectations associated with their offline social identities.

What can political theory add to this discussion? In as much as anonymity involves the concealment of the identity of an actor, it can release the actor from inhibitions generated by the audience. But whether this is good or bad depends on the context, group norms, the audience, and so on, and must be determined empirically on a case-by-case basis. I therefore do not aim to make an argument about the value of anonymity in deliberation as such. Rather, I offer a conceptual analysis that separates out elements of identity and discusses their distinctive deliberative potentials. This preliminary conceptual work will, I hope, support and enrich the analysis of anonymity, pseudonymity, and deliberation in particular empirical contexts.

To the extent that anonymity has been considered at all in relation to deliberation, it has been framed in one of two main ways. The first is in relation to communicative accountability. J. S. Mill gives an emblematic version of this approach in his argument against secret voting, where identifiability is a means to demand justification for people's actions, and thereby privileges actions 'of which at least some decent account can be given'.[2] The second way is to frame anonymity in terms of protecting the private space necessary for the development of the self. This way of framing the problem focuses on the value of privacy to the constitution of the public sphere. If we understand the public sphere as 'a forum in which the private people, come together to form a public, … to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion',[3] then the existence of the public sphere entails the protection of the private sphere. The public sphere requires a distinct mode of public appearance. Public appearance is often modelled in terms of face-to-face communication, or

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[2]Mill 1977, p. 493.

[3]Habermas 1989, p. 25–6.

small group contexts, in which each can be known to all. But it also requires norms and mechanisms of *impersonality* in public. Anonymity is one such mechanism. This mechanism is worth closer analysis because online communication has created and made more ubiquitous a set of possibilities for masking and revealing identities, in ways whose effects are not yet understood, and—I will suggest—need to be analysed within a richer framework than that of anonymous and real-name communication.

In this article, I analyse anonymity in terms of two dimensions of identity disclosure: durability and connectedness. Durability refers to the ease or difficulty with which identities can be acquired and changed. A durable identity need not be a real name, but it must be stable over time within a particular context. This dimension has come to the fore in the context of online communication. The concept of durability opens up a distinction between easy anonymity, in which actors are able to easily create new and multiple identities, and stable or durable pseudonyms. It is this stability, I shall argue, that grounds the possibility of a limited 'internal' communicative accountability. Connectedness refers to bridging and linking communication across different social contexts. This dimension can be illustrated by rules or norms of non-disclosure about who said what in a particular deliberative context, designed to block the connection of persons to statements, of which the Chatham House Rules are a well-known example. In the online context the use of real names opens the possibility of connectedness in the sense that your statements can potentially become known to your family, colleagues, friends, and other social groups with whom you are associated. Connectedness enables statements to be attributed to particular individuals and thereby travel with them into different social contexts. Connectedness is distinct from a third element, traceability, which involves the capacity of observers to covertly link statements to real persons, as the NSA might try to trace the users of an extremist chat room. While traceability by states or other powerful organisations marks out one sort of threat to the public sphere, in this paper I focus on the distinct threat that arises from social pressures made possible by overt connectedness.

Separating durability and connectedness makes visible two different aspects of communicative accountability. First, communicative accountability appears within a particular discursive context, where demands for justification can be made and met in a temporally extended discursive exchange. This sort of internal communicative accountability

requires at minimum that the participants are agents and that they are durable enough to be recognised as such in the course of the process. I will suggest that such durability is at least consistent with the generation of 'minimal deliberation',[4] understood as the exchange of arguments for or against something. The second sense of communicative accountability involves one's actions, which requires precisely connectedness to a particular identifiable agent who may be required to justify how she voted or undertook some other meaningful political action. This is a stronger sort of communicative accountability, and it bears most closely on justification of the exercise of empowerments in collective decision processes. By separating out these two aspects of communicative accountability we can develop a more subtle appreciation of the value of different architectures of disclosure to generating some of the goods of deliberation.[5]

How does my argument—that durable pseudonymity can support a form of communicative accountability within a discursive community—bear on the important issue of polarisation and online echo chambers? We might worry that groups of like-minded people would be less willing to hold one another communicatively accountable, and that to the extent that they do challenge each other, it may be in respect of values that are particular to the like-minded group in question rather than more general discursive norms. Participants might then become polarised as they share information from a limited and skewed information pool; acquire confidence through corroboration; and even adjust their views in the direction of what they perceive to be the general tendency of the group.[6] This is a serious concern, but it depends crucially on the question: what effect does identity disclosure have on the diversity of the group? And on this question there is no reason to suppose that identity disclosure is decisive either way. The web enables people to more easily find like-minded others regardless of identity disclosure policies, and we consequently see echo chamber and polarisation effects within networks such as Facebook, which have a strict real-name policy,

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[4]Landemore 2013.

[5]In framing the relation between anonymity and deliberation I do not consider other important—and closely related—ways in which anonymity influences the behaviour of political actors and the structure of the public sphere, such as through non-disclosure of campaign contributions (Ayers 2000). I also do not consider in any detail the possible value of anonymity within collective decision processes, such as voting within juries (see Elster 2013, pp. 98–139).

[6]See Sunstein (2009) on the theory of group polarisation, and Sunstein (2017) for his most recent discussion of these concerns as applied to the Internet and social media.

as well as on discussion platforms such as 4chan, which exemplify radical anonymity. Furthermore, there is evidence from experiments and observational studies that more stringent identification policies on online forums tend to reduce participation,[7] and this in turn could result in less diversity, simply on the grounds that a group of a thousand people is likely to be less diverse than a group of ten thousand. However, while the degree of diversity and the willingness to engage with those who are not like-minded are the key factors in producing echo chamber effects, it is an open—and empirical—question how far these qualities are influenced by the mode of identification of the participants. Indeed, one aim of this paper is to differentiate our conception of anonymity in order to elaborate the terms within which we might ask these questions.

I. Disaggregating Anonymity

Writing under an assumed name or no name at all has long been practised in domains ranging from literature to philosophy[8] to political argument; indeed, the set of essays published under the pseudonym 'Publius' count among the most notable contributions to American political thought and underpinned public debate on the ratification of the United States Constitution. Among the many reasons for writing under a pseudonym, one has a special deliberative pedigree: the idea that arguments should stand or fall on their own merits rather than the social position of their authors. Christoph Martin Wieland, publisher of a late eighteenth-century magazine devoted to the ideals of the Enlightenment, thus defended anonymity in terms of discursive equality: 'The most nameless son of this earth has the same right to speak as the president of the academy, if he has something clever to say.'[9] Given this background, it is perhaps surprising that mainstream theories of the public sphere have tended to pay little attention to anonymity, and even less to pseudonymity. For example, anonymity features in

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[7]See, for instance, Rowe (2015) and a survey of empirical research by Davies and Chandler (2012).

[8]Kierkegaard (2009, pp. 528, 529) wrote several of his early works under pseudonyms. He declared of these pseudonymous works that 'there is not a single word by myself … My wish, my prayer, therefore, is that if it should occur to anyone to want to quote a particular remark from the [pseudonymous] books, he will do me the favour of citing the name of the respective pseudonymous author.'

[9]Wieland 1773, p. 14. I thank Andrew McKenzie-McHarg for bringing this to my attention, and I use his translation.

Habermas's account of the public sphere, but it is largely in the context of the anonymous relations among strangers that constitute market mechanisms,[10] and later through his reframing of popular sovereignty in terms of 'subjectless and anonymous' flows of communication channeled by democratic procedures.[11] This is not anonymity in the sense of a concealed source, but rather no single source at all. When it comes to his model of communicative interaction Habermas builds up from an account of face to face conversation, and face to face communication under conditions of anonymity or pseudonymity would be of no real interest in constructing a general account of communicative interaction. It thus hardly needs to be said of Habermas's discourse theory that the agents who make and meet demands for communicative justification at the level of discourse proper are *identifiable* agents.

In face-to-face contexts anonymity is a more marginal phenomenon. One might think of the casual conversation among strangers on a delayed train or at a football match. But although people in such situations may not exchange names, they have a rich set of personal characteristics and contextual cues through which they can locate each other, and in any case interactions in this context tend to be evanescent and superficial. When it comes to more sustained discussion, we might consider spaces in which participants are known to one another but rules of non-disclosure prevent statements from being attributed to particular speakers (as in Chatham House Rules). But while statements in such a case are effectively anonymous from the point of view of the audience, we are not really dealing with face-to-face anonymity. Pseudonymity is yet more marginal.[12] A rare example of face-to-face pseudonymity is described by Wolfgang Leonhard (1957) in his recollections of the Comintern School he attended in Russia in the early 1940s.[13] At his induction, the secretary described the school rules, and gave special emphasis to the last: 'You are not permitted to give your real name to anyone, or to mention any facts whatever about your previous life. I should like to impress on you that conformity to this rule is absolutely imperative. No one,

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[10]Habermas 1989, p. 79.

[11]Habermas 1997, p. 58–9.

[12]The device of people communicating while they pretend to be someone else has often found a place in literary and dramatic contexts, such as in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*. But their use in these contexts merely underscores the implausibility of face-to-face pseudonymous communication in most everyday contexts.

[13]I thank Jón Ólafsson for bringing this to my attention.

not even though you may perhaps have known them in the past, is allowed to know your real name.'[14] He then recounts meeting a boy he had known from before, who spoke animatedly to him until he remembered the rule, at which point they gave their pseudonyms.

> It was a peculiar thing—hardly had he mentioned his new Party name than he underwent a complete transformation. He answered my questions cautiously and hesitatingly. … In a few seconds Jan had changed from an enthusiastic member of the *Komsomol* into a Party official, exercising complete control over himself and choosing his words with scrupulous care.[15]

This example highlights not only the difficulty of maintaining pseudonymity in face-to-face contexts, but also—and importantly for my argument in this paper—the way in which modes of identification can contribute to the creation of a community with a distinctive discursive character.

Online communication has given new salience to the potentials and problems of anonymity and pseudonymity. Different online designs can offer different degrees of identifiability, in spaces ranging from small specialist chat rooms to the deeply anonymous 4chan to comment sections of newspapers and news blogs. While I set out in this article to raise some general questions about anonymity and communicative accountability, the examples foremost in my mind are those associated with online political talk, as exemplified in commenting on news websites. In the context of thinking about deliberative democracy, online commenting has particular salience because it involves online talk about matters of common or public concern rather than specific interests of the sort that might be found on a blog about cooking. Commenting is also relevant to the concerns of deliberative democrats because it exemplifies one major novelty of what Yochai Benkler calls the 'networked public sphere':[16] that it opens up the possibility of two-way communication as opposed to the one-

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[14]Leonhard 1957, pp. 171-2.

[15]Ibid, p. 173.

[16]Benkler 2006, p. 212.

way mass media models of the public sphere.[17] As Benkler argues, even when we simply read an article, the fact that we have the potential to respond through online comments transforms us from 'passive readers and listeners to potential speakers and participants in a conversation'.[18] Benkler treats this feature as a sort of transfiguration of citizenship, a qualitative shift

> in the experience of being a potential speaker, as opposed to simply a listener and a voter. … The way we listen to what we hear changes because of this; as does, perhaps most fundamentally, the way we observe and process daily events in our lives. We no longer need to take these as merely private observations, but as potential subjects for public communication.[19]

This broad shift in the capacity for public communication about matters of common concern draws attention to the particular architectures or online institutional designs within which such discussion might take place.[20] There are many different ways in which such online institutional designs can promote, shape, and constrain public communication. But one important design feature, and the one on which I will concentrate in this paper, is the degree of identity disclosure.

By combining aspects of both written and spoken discourse—in particular, the possibility of the rapid exchange and evanescence of speech, but the relative permanence of written discourse—online spaces enable the use of degrees and modes of identity disclosure that are not easily available offline. Sociologist Gary Marx distinguishes seven elements of personal identification: legal name; locatability; traceable pseudonymity or pseudo-anonymity; untraceable pseudonymity; pattern knowledge; social categorisation (e.g., 38-

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[17]Online commenting allows readers to debate issues with each other and thus represents a platform for a 'culture-debating' rather than merely 'culture-consuming' public. And to the extent that the 'online debates of web users … crystallise around the focal points of the quality press, for example, national newspapers and political magazines' (Habermas 2006, p. 423, n3), we can treat them as sites of political communication.

[18]Benkler 2006, p. 213.

[19]Ibid.

[20]See Farrell and Schwartzberg (2008) on the value of applying insights from electoral law and constitutional design to online collective decision procedures.

year-old mother of two); and symbols of eligibility, such as passwords, tattoos, or other codes.[21] Ruesch and Marker describe a range of forms of identifiability of online commenters, distinguishing registered and unregistered; pseudonymous or real-name; verified or unverified; hidden or visible; and linked or not linked to other personal data.[22] Online news platforms present a huge range of different forms of disclosure of user identity. However, for the purposes of addressing the question of the connection between anonymity and deliberation, we can disaggregate anonymity into three dimensions: traceability, durability, and connectedness.

Traceability refers to the extent to which your contributions can be traced to your real identity. Traceability is distinct from disclosure of identity to fellow commenters. You can make comments under a pseudonym and yet it is often possible (with some effort) for advertisers or security services to trace your real identity. Whether an online identity is verified or unverified, for instance, bears on the dimension of traceability. Many commentators are concerned about online anonymity in the dimension of traceability, and seek mechanisms by which online users can remain 'unreachable' or 'untraceable' by advertisers or public agencies. Zarsky, for instance, talks of anonymity in the context of 'the right to read, write, speak, and distribute content without exposing the identity of the relevant individual'.[23] The analogy here is with the use of cash rather than a credit card; cash is untraceable, whereas a credit card leaves a record of your purchases. Nissenbaum, similarly, argues that anonymity online, in the sense of 'conducting one's affairs, communicating, or engaging in transactions … without one's name being known',[24] is undermined by technologies that have made it possible to track or piece together the real identities of citizens online even when they are withholding their names or using pseudonyms. She frames the value of anonymity in terms of being 'unreachable'.[25] Froomkin is also centrally concerned

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[21]Marx 1999.

[22]Ruesch and Märker 2012.

[23]Zarsky 2004, p. 1025.

[24]Nissenbaum 1999, p. 141.

[25]Nissenbaum 1999, p. 143.

with traceability, and distinguishes between traceable and untraceable anonymity.[26] Traceability is clearly important to deliberation. Traceability by governmental and private actors has the potential to chill or constrain online communication, in so far as it creates the risk of exposure and retaliation for speech that offends powerful actors. While there are good reasons to resist traceability, there are also good reasons to want users to be traceable, such as identifying those who make threats or engage in hate speech and abuse.[27] Depending on the sort of examples we have in mind, we might emphasise one or other of these reasons, but in either case, the issues run slightly to the side of my concerns about online deliberation. Traceability, then, presents an important threat to the public sphere, but in this article I focus on the distinct threat posed by connectedness, which turns on the pressures of social conformity enabled by identifiability with respect to other participants in online communication. I am interested in the functions and effects of anonymity and pseudonymity with respect to other participants in online communication.

Durability refers to the ease or difficulty with which online identities can be acquired and changed. Where new pseudonyms are easy to create, online identities are disposable; if you acquire a reputation for abusive or untrustworthy behaviour you can just create a new pseudonym and start again. Cheap pseudonyms create 'opportunities to misbehave without paying reputational consequences'.[28] Where hurdles such as registration and verification are introduced, it remains possible to create new identities, but it becomes a little harder and more time-consuming. Users are more likely to stick with a particular name. This opens them to the reputational consequences of their behaviour. This dimension is particularly important for the possibility of holding commentators accountable for claims they make, enabling challenges in terms of consistency, and exposing uncivil or abusive commenters to sanctions. Such communicative accountability need not require a real-world identity, but it does, at a minimum, require durability or persistence of identity within a particular discursive platform or event.

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[26]Froomkin 1995.

[27]This is the primary focus of Levmore and Nussbaum (2010) in their collection of essays on the 'offensive internet'.

[28]Resnick and Friedman 2001, p. 173.

The third dimension has to do with connectedness or bridging across different platforms and contexts. A user might want to comment on a sports forum but not have their comments linked to their professional networks. They might not want their comments on political issues to be visible on their social networks. They might prefer their contributions to different conversations to be like islands, so to speak, and for their various different domains of interest to be kept separate. Connectedness or bridging also involves reputation, but it is a global rather than local reputation. The durability or stickiness of an online identity is a necessary condition for building a local reputation, but it need not be connected to the wider reputation, a cross-referenced, cross-platform (including real-life) reputation, of the sort you would want if you were renting out your apartment to someone you didn't know (as in Airbnb).

This scheme highlights that there are two overlapping ways of framing the common distinction between anonymity and real-name communication. One is to emphasise connectedness, the way speech can be linked up across different discursive contexts and ultimately to your real-world identity and action. This draws attention to the difference between anonymity and pseudonymity on the one hand, and real-name communication on the other, and suggests that the key issue is the connection between your words and real-world actions. The other is to focus on the distinction between durable and non-durable identities. The key issue here is communicative accountability in the context of the forum itself.

II. The Deliberative Value of Anonymity

A. Anonymity and Accountability

There are two main lines of argument about the dangers and the benefits of online anonymity, which I will discuss in the next two sections, and they both focus on the dimension of connectedness rather than durability. Those who warn of the dangers of anonymity have emphasised the way in which it enables people to evade accountability for what they say and do. J. S. Mill developed this line of argument in his discussion of secret ballots. Here Mill was motivated by concerns about popular unaccountability, that is, about people exercising a

share of public power without a requirement to justify their actions. Mill's primary argument against the secret ballot was that it would lead voters to understand their role not as a public trust issuing from a share of power of collective decision, but rather as a private possession: 'The interpretation which he [the ordinary citizen] is almost sure to put upon secret voting is that he is not bound to give his vote with any reference to those who are not allowed to know how he gives it; but may bestow it simply as he feels inclined.'[29] Mill admitted the possibility of bribery or threat from employers, landlords, or customers, but thought that the more important danger at that time was that voters would evade the need to be 'answerable to the public' for their actions.[30] The value of publicity is to 'compel deliberation, and force every one to determine, before he acts, what he shall say if called to account for his actions'.[31] By 'deliberation' here, Mill seems to have meant deliberation in the sense of internal reflection,[32] but the mechanism he invokes for prompting such deliberation is the anticipation of having to account for one's actions to others: 'Even the bare fact of having to give an account of their conduct, is a powerful inducement to adhere to conduct of which at least some decent account can be given.'[33] Mill did not seek to close the gap between public and private opinions. He did not frame the value of public answerability in terms of enforcing consistency between public and private views. Citizens may well remain aware of the gap between their particular interests and their publicly defensible judgement of the public good, but, Mill thought, the mechanism of publicity would motivate them to favour the latter.[34] The anticipation of a demand for communicative accountability for an action to those affected by it would 'force every one to determine, before he acts, what he shall say if called to account

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[29]Mill 1977, p. 489.

[30]Ibid., p. 493. See Buchstein (2015) for an excellent discussion of Mill's argument for public voting in its historical context.

[31]Mill 1977, p. 493.

[32]See Goodin (2003) on the value of 'deliberation within'.

[33]Mill 1977, p. 493.

[34]Sunstein (1995) makes precisely this point against Kuran's (1997) argument in *Private Truths, Public Lies*: 'sometimes the public preferences are authentic in the sense that they correspond to what people think, on reflection, to be best'.

for his actions'.[35] Mill's argument turns on the demand for consistency between one's public justifications and one's actions.

Many contemporary critics of online anonymity share this framing of anonymity as a means to evade accountability for one's actions. The cloak of anonymity enables people to engage in harassment, threats, bullying, defamation, lying, reputational damage, misogyny, and provision of false information, and protects them from legal sanctions. The main questions from this point of view concern the proper balance of claims to freedom of speech against rights to privacy, and the most appropriate means to enforce accountability. Martha Nussbaum, for instance, regards anonymity as a mask for misogynistic abuse and the objectification of women. She focuses on the case of two Yale law students who were anonymously attacked by their classmates on a law school message-board called AutoAdmit, and who in June 2007 filed a suit against one of the site's administrators and several of the anonymous commenters. Nussbaum's central argument concerns the motivation behind online misogyny, but she regards the Internet in general and anonymity in particular as supporting factors in the exacerbation of misogyny, since 'the ability of the bloggers to create a new world in which they exercise power and the women are humiliated depends on their ability to insulate their Internet selves from responsibility in the real world, while ensuring real-world consequences for the woman'.[36] Similar problems can be seen with racial abuse. Black and minority ethnic students at Colgate University found themselves being racially abused by their classmates on YikYak, a local anonymous chat platform, with precisely the subjective damage that Nussbaum highlights in the case of the AutoAdmit abuse, as students were effectively stalked by their classmates.[37]

Saul Levmore takes a similarly dim view of online anonymity, describing the Internet as 'the natural and well-evolved successor to the bathroom wall'[38] and asking why it should be regulated with a lighter touch than television, newspapers, or radio. Where entry costs are low and participation is anonymous, online discourse will tend to be 'offensive and noisy',

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[35]Mill 1977, p. 493.

[36]Nussbaum 2010, p. 85.

[37]Stone and Kincaid 2014.

[38]Levmore 2010, p. 54.

'juvenile and destructive'.[39] Anonymity 'allows communication without retribution'.[40] He recommends a combination of moderation (recommending 'notice-and-takedown' policies) and the introduction of identifiability (or traceability, in my terms) as ways to reduce the abuse and the noise and 'provide more useful communications',[41] and concludes with a prediction:

> I anticipate that more Internet entrepreneurs will limit participation or require identification. … 'Respectable' sites will require identification (non-anonymity) and this will severely limit sites where people comment on a professor or classmate's anatomy or alleged promiscuity. There will be some loss of opportunities to flatter, criticize, and convey information. But inasmuch as this information would have been lost in the midst of much noise, most of us will not and should not mourn the loss.[42]

Levmore's prediction has been borne out in so far as an increasing number of online news providers have opted to either close their comments sections or introduce some means of identifying their users.

These criticisms of online anonymity highlight an important point. Cruel and abusive behaviour not only inflicts harms on particular individuals; it also degrades discourse. And the criticisms point to two kinds of remedy. Levmore rightly advocates moderation practices as one measure for tackling such behaviour, but moderation policies work—and are crucial to discussion quality[43]—whether or not participants' real identities are visible to each other. And both Nussbaum and Levmore emphasise the need for traceability in order to retrospectively punish those who violate the law, which would plausibly have a (desirable) chilling effect on threatening and abusive speech. This solution is framed in terms of removing anonymity, yet there is a difference between users being traceable by public authorities for the purposes of

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[39]Ibid. 2010, p. 50.

[40]Levmore 1996, p. 2192-3.

[41]Levmore 2010, p. 66.

[42]Ibid., p. 67.

[43]Grimmelmann 2015.

retrospective punishment, and users being overtly identifiable to one another on the platform itself. Thus, an intermediary platform could hold the user's identity, reserving the possibility of revealing it to the relevant authorities, but masking that identity from other users. The question of how to deal with the very real problem of cruel and abusive online behaviour is separable from the question of deliberative effects of variation in identifiability to other participants.

B. Anonymity and Privacy

In a contrasting line of thought, anonymity is framed not as a threat but as a means to the protection of privacy. Helen Nissenbaum develops this intuition with respect to the challenges of maintaining control over the conditions of one's exposure in the networked public sphere. The danger Nissenbaum finds in the Internet is the loss of everyday anonymity, and the pervasive pressure towards either public connectedness or traceability by commercial or state surveillance. Quoting Ferdinand Schoeman, she emphasises that norms of information disclosure vary across different contexts: 'People have, and it is important that they maintain, different relationships with different people. Information appropriate in the context of one relationship may not be appropriate in another.'[44] What is important, she argues, is not privacy as such, but rather 'contextual integrity'. Contemporary discussions of privacy in philosophy and law have focused on the protection of intimate or sensitive information. But what Nissenbaum calls 'contextual integrity' can be violated without the information necessarily being sensitive or intimate. Consider 'the indignation that may follow as simple a gesture as a stranger asking a person his or her name in a public square. By contrast, even if information is quite personal or intimate, people generally do not sense their privacy has been violated when the information requested is judged relevant to, or appropriate for, a particular setting or relationship.'[45] What is jarring, she suggests, is not a breach of intimacy per se, but loss of control over the use of the information beyond its appropriate context. It is on this basis that she argues against those who claim that once

[44]Schoeman 1984, p. 408 (from Nissenbaum 1998, p. 584).

[45]Nissenbaum 1998, p. 584.

outside the intimate or sensitive realm, 'no norms of privacy apply'; information is regarded as 'detachable from its context' and 'up for grabs'.[46] Even when the information is not sensitive or intimate, inappropriate demanding or sharing of such information will arouse indignation, will violate the norm of contextual integrity. She calls this the problem of 'privacy in public'.[47] However, while she reframes a right to privacy in terms of a right to contextual integrity, Nissenbaum's focus remains on protection from public intrusion, and in the notion of 'privacy in public', retains the broad framing of the problem of anonymity in terms of the goods of privacy. The problem of losing anonymity in the sense of becoming identifiable is part of the problem of traceability, and Nissenbaum's central concern is that in the online context it is becoming increasingly difficult to prevent the grains of information we give away from being gathered up by others and used in ways that do not conform to our will or interests.

However, while she is acutely sensitive to the value of anonymity as a means to privacy, she does not directly address the value of anonymity as a means to publicity.[48] To see this point we can note that while both privacy and anonymity involve concealment, they conceal different things. As Gardner puts it, 'privacy generally conceals *that* a thing has been done. Anonymity, in contrast, generally conceals only *who* has done a thing, not that it has been done.'[49] Thus, in a general election it may be publicly known *that* a vote for candidate x has been cast, but the identity of the particular voter is kept from public view. When one speaks privately, it is not publicly known *that* one has spoken at all. When one speaks anonymously, one's speech is public while the identity of the speaker is concealed. Anonymity, then, involves acting publicly while concealing one's identity.

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[46]Ibid.

[47]Here she is pushing back against arguments for public surveillance that focus on the free public availability of pieces of personal information, and which suggest that it is 'unreasonable to prevent people from perceiving, noticing, and talking about the goings-on in public realms' (Nissenbaum 1998, p. 573). The problem is that philosophers, lawyers, and policy makers, she claims, have not adjusted to a world in which we can no longer count on effective anonymity (in the sense of obscurity) in the public arena—when, like a jogger in the park, you can be 'seen by hundreds, noticed by none' (ibid., p. 576). The technological capacities enabling information aggregation and transfer mean that such effective anonymity is being replaced by routine monitoring and searching that amounts to stalking.

[48]Skopek (2014, p. 1755) makes a similar observation, arguing that anonymity has been generally misrecognised as an aspect or tool of privacy rather than as a means to 'facilitate and control the production and circulation of information and other social "goods"'.

[49]Gardner 2011, p. 930, n11.

The approaches I have so far discussed share a tendency to emphasise private goods, whether it is protection from abuse or protection of 'privacy in public'. Yet a similar ambivalence about the value of anonymity appears also in work that more directly addresses the large scale discursive effects of anonymity. By insulating citizens from observation and thus from soft social pressures or hard sanctions and punishments, anonymity can enable citizens to speak in public in a way that is consistent with their own private views. Anonymity can thus mitigate the dangers of what Timur Kuran calls 'preference falsification'.[50] Misrepresenting one's private preferences in order to align with perceived public opinion, Kuran argues, brings two dangers.[51] One is that the suppression of minority opinions in public speech can eventually lead those private opinions to weaken and wither, partly by individuals reducing the cognitive dissonance associated with differing from what other people think (or appear to think), and partly by making arguments and information in support of the minority opinion harder to come by in the public sphere. The other is that such private opinions will not disappear, but rather will be hidden from public view until a sudden and radical shift takes place. Kuran uses this sort of model to describe the rapid collapse of Soviet socialism.[52] This regime of enforced public silence created a false impression of conformity, but in fact masked a huge amount of discontent, which led to a sudden collapse in support for the regime once it became clear how superficial public support for the regime really was. Danielle Allen uses Creon's regime in Sophocles' *Antigone* to make a similar point: 'political situations where authority is established through, and a public sphere is constructed out of, silence would be better understood as situations not of stability but of blockage and paralysis, susceptible to rapid, radical change'.[53] Regimes that enable anonymous speech may thus avoid the fragile rigidity associated with regimes of enforced public silence.

However, as Allen recognises, anonymity also permits strategic action in the domain of speech. By concealing one's identity, and further, by leading your audience to believe you are

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[50]Kuran 1997, p. 3.

[51]Kuran 1997.

[52]Kuran 1997, p. 261. He also uses the example of affirmative action, which Kuran claims, is a source of deep private white resentment at the same time as overt public support (ibid, p. 138).

[53]Allen 2010, p. 117.

someone else, you can manipulate and deceive them. Anonymous speech leaves the listener unable to judge the interests, agendas, and biases of the speaker, and thereby creates opportunities for strategic and deceptive communication. This is the logic behind the use of automated or paid anonymous commenters to intervene in public discussion, a practice that has recently been revealed in the case of the Chinese and Russian governments, and in Britain's EU referendum.[54] Allen usefully highlights the value of anonymous speech in the public sphere. But she reproduces the simple dichotomy between anonymous and identified speech, where identification is necessary in order for the hearer to judge and evaluate the speech according to its source, and the interests and biases of the speaker, but such connectedness (in my terms) exposes the speaker to social and political pressures to conformity and self-silencing. She also says little about the role of anonymity in everyday political talk about matters of common concern, focusing instead on the value and danger of anonymous accusations against powerful actors. Allen thus does not consider anonymity *within* public discussion. Thus, although both Allen and Kuran emphasise the benefits to the public sphere of enabling the expression of 'private truths' or 'truthful dark speech, which gives voice to meaningful and valuable silences and makes accurate accusations',[55] they retain the framework of the simple distinction between identifiability and anonymity, and thus overlook the deliberative potentials of pseudonymity.

C. Pseudonymity and Public Impersonality

Many commentators, then, have observed the distinction between pure anonymity and real-name communication, and framed anonymity as a means to evade communicative accountability, for both good and ill, suggesting a trade-off. This trade-off takes place in the realm of one of the great threats to the freedom of public opinion, namely, the capacity of public authorities to police speech. However, I have argued that we would benefit from taking a more nuanced view of anonymity and pseudonymity, and paying more attention to the distinct ways in which they condition communication. This draws our focus to the other

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[54]See King et al. 2017; Alexander 2015; and Dewey 2016.

[55]Allen 2010, p. 130.

great threat to public opinion, namely the pressures of social conformity. The idea of masking as productive of publicity is developed by sociologist Richard Sennett, who emphasises its capacity to remove, or at least bracket out, various inequalities of status and social position. 'Wearing a mask', he writes, 'is the essence of civility. Masks permit pure sociability, detached from the circumstances of power, malaise, and private feeling of those who wear them'.[56] Western democracies over the post-war period, he suggests, have been characterised by a shift in modes of public expression from 'the presentation of a mask to the revelation of one's personality'.[57] The 'fall of public man' is a story of the rise of an ideology of intimacy. Sennett shares the idea of privacy as a means to protection for the development of the self, but he emphasises in particular the harm that can come from the inability to interact in public without the pressure of intimacy. The modern self is 'robbed of the expression of certain creative powers which all human beings possess potentially—the powers of play—but which require a milieu at a distance from the self for their realization'.[58] The self is 'injured by estrangement from a meaningful *impersonal* life'.[59] The issue is not so much being *private* in public, but being *impersonal* in public. Pseudonymous communication can enable the meeting of strangers under terms of structured impersonality.

What Sennett is describing is a hollowing out of both the idea and the practice of civility. In studies of the deliberative (and not so deliberative) qualities of online discourse, incivility is usually taken to mean rude, abusive, or offensive language. Civility in this work is implicitly defined simply as refraining from obnoxious, cruel, and offensive speech. It has lost its positive association with impersonal modes of public interaction. To recover its lost meaning in the context of public life and civic duty, Sennett defines civility as 'the activity which protects people from each other and yet allows them to enjoy each other's company'.[60] It is for this reason that he treats wearing a mask as the essence of civility. Much of today's social media, for Sennett, would presumably be *unsociable* media. Civility in this sense may

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[56]Sennett 1974, p. 264.

[57]Ibid., p. 261.

[58]Ibid., p. 264.

[59]Ibid., p. 264, my italic.

[60]Ibid.

be the key to the value of pseudonymous interaction online. Pseudonymity is a device that provides protection from intimacy, yet allows sufficient stability to enable the construction of a mask and the exercise of powers of play. Sennett draws an analogy with the city. Public space is space for performance. Expression and play conducted in the masks of impersonality are enabled by the very structure of the city, as a space of strangers, and rules for impersonal engagement. (Though, as Nissenbaum's example of the jogger in the park vividly exemplifies, this sort of anonymity is also being eroded by technologies of identification.) Online architectures create spaces for encounter, performance, and play. Pseudonymous spaces are a condition for such play because they are a security against the tyranny of intimacy. They provide a protection against social sanction and pressure, to be sure (as we would emphasise in the question of anonymous voting), but more to the point here is the positive potential for social interaction structured according to the impersonal rules of the forum. Wendy Chun has for this reason warned of the downside of shifting from a 'public anonymous' Internet to a friendly space with no anonymity, and emphasises the value of maintaining boundaries between different domains and enabling play. Chun observes that our friending behaviours (connectedness, in my terms)

> breach—make leaky—the borders between work and leisure, acquaintances and family, public and private, and on- and offline compromise and expose us in unwanted ways, from school admissions committees who surreptitiously examine potential student profiles to employers who use posted comments as bases for firing employees.[61]

This is important because social media 'work technically and socially by breaching … the boundary between private and public'.[62]

While the Internet was not yet a part of public life when Sennett wrote of the 'fall of public man', aspects of his approach can be seen in a strong defence of the culture of anonymity by David Auerbach (2015). Auerbach takes on a hard case, that of 4chan, an online space in which interactions are anonymous and evanescent, where in my terms there is neither connectedness nor durability. Such spaces 'offer a lack of accountability for what one

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[61]Chun 2015, p. 106.

[62]Ibid. See also Beyer (2014) on caring for pseudonyms in online environments.

says, a way to hide unappealing facts about oneself, and an instant escape hatch if things get unpleasant'.[63] But precisely these features form the basis for a distinctive community characterised by what he calls anonymity as culture or 'A-culture'.[64] Social networks such as Facebook rely on revealing users' characteristics such as age, race, gender, and level of education, and thereby connect users to offline sources of social status. A-culture removes the possibility of distinction by characteristics and instead relies 'on interests rather than the personalities of users to sustain a community, and involves an 'intentional disconnect between one's real life and one's online persona (or, frequently, personae)'. The evanescence of pseudonymity in these spaces—while some pseudonyms are durable across time on a single site, others persist only for the duration of one conversation thread, or even one comment—creates an 'economy of suspicion', as 'pervasive gaps in information and this focus on masquerade produce a general sense of unreality'. With so little stability and a pervasive decontextualisation of statements, it is not only hard to tell true from false, and sincere from insincere; the instability generates a 'conflicted coexistence of sincere personal involvement and detached spectatorship'. However, this sense of unreality is precisely the point and the attraction of anonymous online spaces. They are spaces for 'unserious, disinterested' recreation, that is, for play:

> The anonymity of A-culture has unexpectedly provided the conditions for a reestablishment of what Huizinga thought had disappeared by the nineteenth century, with its increasingly bourgeois, professionalized, and industrialized cultures. With those elements of individual identity that might be divisive and might reference the positions and responsibilities of 'real' life obscured, freedom is reestablished. What looks like anarchy from the outside is rarely actually anarchic; it is play, carefully regimented and circumscribed.

A-culture is a 'space for playing with unrestricted notions of identity'.

The importance of using anonymity to enable a degree of playfulness with identity would seem to put Auerbach close to Sennett. So too does the general idea that anonymity

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[63] Auerbach 2015 (this is an unpaginated online text, so I cannot provide page citations).

[64] See also Coleman (2015) for a nuanced discussion of the culture, structure, and activism of 'Anonymous'.

creates the possibility of a cultural space distinct from the social world as defined by substantive connections between people that persist over time and become entangled in ways we cannot control. But one important difference is that Sennett is concerned precisely with masking within public life. In Auerbach's description of 4chan, anonymity is an escape from the pressures of publicity, public morality, the weight of distinctions based on background, from being 'corralled into demographic groups' and placed in a 'hierarchy of prestige'. Anonymity enables seclusion from publicity. Thus, he comments on the 'inward looking' nature of anonymous online spaces, and notes that 'A-culture contains far fewer collateral indicators of "everyday reality" than one finds on Twitter or Facebook'. The 'offline world', he says, 'is to be minimized, not invoked'. It is its seclusion that enables its 'persistence and autonomy as a space of play'. For Sennett, by contrast, pseudonymity is a means to publicity, providing a repertoire for performance in public at the same time as a means of protection of one's intimate life. Masking for Sennett is a social leveller, to be sure, which excludes or at least suspends distinctions and status. Yet for Sennett the point of masking is not, as in Auerbach's A-culture, to 'minimize the offline world', but rather to constitute public discourse. Auerbach assimilates the connected world of Facebook to public life, and frames anonymous space in terms of seclusion and protection from that world; Sennett would (I suspect) hold that the world of Facebook is a false form of publicity, a dangerous combination of intimacy and publicity. On my account, the disconnect—which Auerbach rightly emphasises—'between one's real life and one's online persona' can also enable public engagement. Furthermore, I suggest that reiterated identity and hence reputation can serve to underpin a minimal sort of communicative accountability while preserving the levelling effect of anonymity.

The evanescent anonymity described by Auerbach brings into relief the significance of the dimension of durability. While many of the critics considered above focus on connectedness as a means to accountability, in the sense of a process of justification to an external public audience that would lead to greater consistency between publicly acceptable justifications and actions, I want to emphasise the distinct mode of communicative accountability which involves justification to an internal audience in a particular context, and which requires only the durability of identity over time in that context. This sort of

justification is analogous to the way deliberation might work in particular institutional settings, where participants would need to respond to demands for justification and do so in a way that was plausibly continuous over time. They would not be held accountable for any differences between the opinions expressed in the room and how they behave outside the room. But the claim about deliberative spaces is that *in the room* there would be a filtering and refinement of preferences, beliefs, and attitudes as a result of the process of making and meeting demands for justification.

The durability of identity within a particular discursive context is a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for the possibility of at least minimal deliberation. By minimal deliberation I mean an 'exchange of arguments for or against something'.[65] Deliberation in this sense is communication oriented to the formation of a collective opinion or decision, that aims to persuade others in virtue of its validity (whether of claims to moral rightness or factual accuracy) rather than in virtue of the credibility of threats.[66] This 'minimal' conception of deliberation is a good deal thinner than the 'classic' accounts of deliberation. It does not require that deliberation is oriented to consensus. Nor does it insist on a criterion of competence or information. Minimal deliberation also does not emphasise equality or inclusion. And it does not demand empathy, respect, civility, or an orientation to the common good. However, 'minimal' deliberation in the sense of an exchange of arguments is nonetheless more than just everyday talk, sociable conversation, or discussion. It involves not just the declaration of statements or positions or reasons, but an *exchange* of arguments. That is, minimal deliberation requires engagement with interlocutors, as opposed to merely the delivery of monologues. It is fair to say this is perhaps the central desideratum in most accounts of deliberation, which include reference to 'mutual justifiability' and 'rational dialogue', and a 'reason-giving requirement'.[67] The minimal conception gets to a core feature of what we want from public deliberation, namely, an exchange of arguments in a context in which demands for communicative accountability can be made and met. In social-psychological terms, such argumentation is demanding, risky, and uncomfortable. It invokes

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[65]Landemore (2013, p.214), following Aristotle: 'Deliberative speaking urges us either to do or not to do something' (Rhetoric, Bk.1, 1358b8).

[66]Manin 2005.

[67]Mansbridge et al. 2010, p. 67; Thompson 2008, p. 498.

the discomfort associated with conflict.[68] It demands articulacy and brings the risk of embarrassment 'if we do not know or cannot articulate what we believe'.[69] As Schudson puts it, 'people prefer sociable conversation to potentially explosive conversation. Such talk is threatening enough to require formal or informal rules of engagement.'[70] It makes sense that in spaces where one's real-name identity is not invoked and one's statements are not connected across different spheres of life (or at least online life) or liable to be revealed in other contexts, then one might be more willing to speak up, to test claims, to advance arguments. My central point is not, as in Kuran's and Allen's arguments, that anonymity permits people to speak 'dark truths' or reveal their private convictions (though it may do that too), but that it enables people to engage in public discussion without exposing themselves to the weightiness of having their statements connected to their real-world selves, and thus promotes a degree of deliberative playfulness.[71]

The minimal conception of deliberation, however, also requires reciprocity or communicative accountability.[72] Deliberation requires an *exchange* of arguments, which is to say, a degree of back and forth over time in response to arguments, information, and demands for clarification and justification. This in turn requires continuity of identities of interlocutors, at least in that particular context. Continuity is necessary for communicative accountability. Communicative accountability, to put it another way, involves a demand for consistency.

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[68]Warren 1996.

[69]Schudson 1997, p. 304. See also Mansbridge (1980, p. 60–4), where she reports talking to participants in Vermont town hall meetings, where one farmer noted that 'it does take a little bit of courage. "Specially if you get up and make a boo-boo. I mean you make a mistake and say something, then people would never get up and say anything again. They feel themselves inferior."' Of participants at her meeting, 49% were women, but only 29% of those who spoke at all were women, and they only made 8% of what she classified as 'major statements of opinion', and initiated none of the 'controversial exchanges' (ibid., p.106).

[70]Schudson 1997, p. 306.

[71]It is something like this weightiness that concerns Nagel in his account of the value of concealment and conventions of reticence and non-acknowledgement in public discourse. His resistance to 'the invasiveness of a public culture that insists on settling too many questions' (Nagel 1998, p. 28) captures the sense that a healthy public sphere may require a degree of concealment of one's attitudes or beliefs in order to avoid contentious discussions. However, anonymity or pseudonymity, which enable public speech while concealing the source, can resist the 'invasiveness' of public culture at the same time as they enable contentious discussions, and thus may serve more effectively to promote plurality than a tacit agreement to not talk about uncomfortable issues.

[72]I prefer the term 'communicative accountability' here because 'reciprocity' is often associated with respectfulness, and what I want to focus on is simply the possibility of making and meeting demands for justification.

Making a demand for justification requires a continuity of identity such that one can get a response or recognise the absence of a response. In what we might call a local context, this is an intuitive (and necessary, though not sufficient) requirement of good deliberation. It means that when you say one thing and then immediately say something contradictory, or something which implies a contradictory position, you can be called out on it. Others can extrapolate and make claims about the implications of your position, and challenge you to either defend those implications or refute the reasoning that would connect those implications to your position. Real name identity should share this feature in so far as it too involves durable identities. But by adding connectedness it opens the door to the deliberative dangers of 'sociable' conversation. In this context

> people talk primarily with others who share their values and they expect that conversation will reinforce them in the views they already share. In these conversations, people may test their opinions, to be sure, and venture ideas that may not be warmly received, but they do so in full knowledge that they agree on fundamentals and that the assumptions that they share will make such experimentation safe.[73]

To exaggerate the point just a little: without durability, communicative accountability (in my second sense) is easily evaded; with connectedness it is rarely demanded.

While most empirical studies of online news commenting only distinguish between real-name and anonymous commenters, there is some work suggesting the distinct deliberative qualities of pseudonymous discourse in online political talk. The online comment management company Disqus distinguishes between the use of real names for authentication and the use of pseudonyms for expression, and have compared commenting behaviour under anonymity, pseudonymity, and real-name conditions.[74] They used a ratings system to enable users to evaluate comments, and found that comments made under conditions of pseudonymity were rated by other users as having the highest quality. The *Huffington Post*

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[73]Schudson 1997, p. 302.

[74]Disqus manages the comment space for many online news publications, and in this study they draw on data from 60m users and 500m comments. See <https://disqus.com/research/pseudonyms/>.

also provides an interesting case.[75] They changed their commenting space over two years from an initial policy of anonymity, in which users could easily set up new and multiple accounts (in my terms, low durability), to a policy of requiring registration of accounts to verify user identities but allowing users to maintain outward-facing pseudonyms (durable but not connected), and finally outsourcing their commenting platform to Facebook, so that comments appeared with an account name and photo and comments appeared not only on the news page but also (depending on settings) on the users' Facebook pages. The researchers gathered 50m comments on news articles featured on the *Huffington Post*'s front page across the period of these changes, from January 2013 to January 2015, and found that while the use of offensive language declined over all three phases, the bulk of the decline took place in the shift from anonymous to pseudonymous commenting. The decline in offensive language was also uneven: the real-name phase showed a higher density of insults directed at 'you' than in the pseudonymous phase. Furthermore, between the pseudonymous and real-name space, the pattern of interaction changed markedly, from conversations among commenters (with multiple sub-threads and comments on comments), to a greater proportion of direct comments on the article. Other qualitative research has suggested that connectedness brings the risk that participants may avoid confrontation, seek conformity, narrow the scope of criticism, and avoid holding people communicatively accountable.[76] These studies are far from decisive, but they at least ground the claim that pseudonymity has distinct deliberative potentials that are worth further investigation.

III. Conclusion

Thinking of online identity in terms of durability and connectedness casts a new light on an important but under-recognised aspect of online communication, and in particular suggests the deliberative value of creating spaces within which people can maintain stable or durable identities and yet remain disconnected. My suggestion is that pseudonymity can enable the

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[75] See Fredheim, Moore and Naughton 2015, and Fredheim and Moore 2016.

[76] This claim is supported by a recent study of online commenting, which suggests two broad models of audience participation: 'communities of debate' and 'homogeneous communities', conducted by Ruiz et al. (2011).

creation of spaces in which people are not bound by demands for consistency across different domains of their life, but only by the more limited demand for consistency within the forum itself. Durability within the context of the forum enables others to challenge, question, and criticise the claims made in the course of debate. Furthermore, by being disconnected from other sites of social status, it may lower the risks associated with speaking in public. The concepts of durability and connectedness might also help us think about the value of deliberation 'behind closed doors' in more familiar contexts such as parliaments, juries, and minipublics. Although there are few obvious face-to-face analogues for pseudonymity, there are other mechanisms (such as rules or norms of non-disclosure or non-attribution), which seem to play a similar role, preventing statements from being linked to particular individuals and thereby travelling with them into different social contexts. The analysis in this paper thus sheds a new light on aspects of face-to-face deliberation, but at the same time suggests what is genuinely new about communication online.

The argument in this article will, I hope, support the rapidly developing empirical work on the effects of online institutional design. A good deal of this online institutional design is done by default, as various discussion platforms tinker with their structures with a range of purposes in mind, from efficiency to the user experience (though rarely with the goal of enhancing the potential for public deliberation). The argument developed in this paper suggests that an architecture enabling durable pseudonyms may better promote minimal deliberation than real name or pure anonymity designs, a claim that would be worth exploring empirically. Does the practice of durable pseudonymity lead to endogenous constraints in a way that privileges argument? Is deliberative quality better in a minimal sense in pseudonymous spaces? The point is not to declare what would be the proper mix of design features to enable or promote deliberation, but rather to provide distinctions that might be usefully taken up in empirical research. Identifiability is not, it must be stressed, the only or even the most influential aspect of the design of online discussion spaces. Indeed, there is good reason to think that moderation is the most important factor in shaping the quality of discourse online,[77] and the make-up of the audience is also clearly crucial. My claim is simply that there are distinct deliberative potentials associated with pseudonymous communication that are worth further attention. Given the increasing numbers of people who

[77]See Grimmelmann 2015

read and discuss the news online, and in particular through social media platforms,[78] my argument suggests that news providers concerned with promoting public deliberation should use architectures that enable durable identities, requiring registration that demands commitment and communicative accountability from users and makes it harder for trolls and abusive users to act with impunity, but without demanding connectedness. There are good reasons, from the point of view of the quality of public deliberation (and not just from the point of view of fear of monopoly power and links to the national security state), to resist the concentration and integration of online discursive platforms. When it comes to online forums and platforms, there are good reasons why not everything should be connected.

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[78]Mitchell et al. 2014.

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