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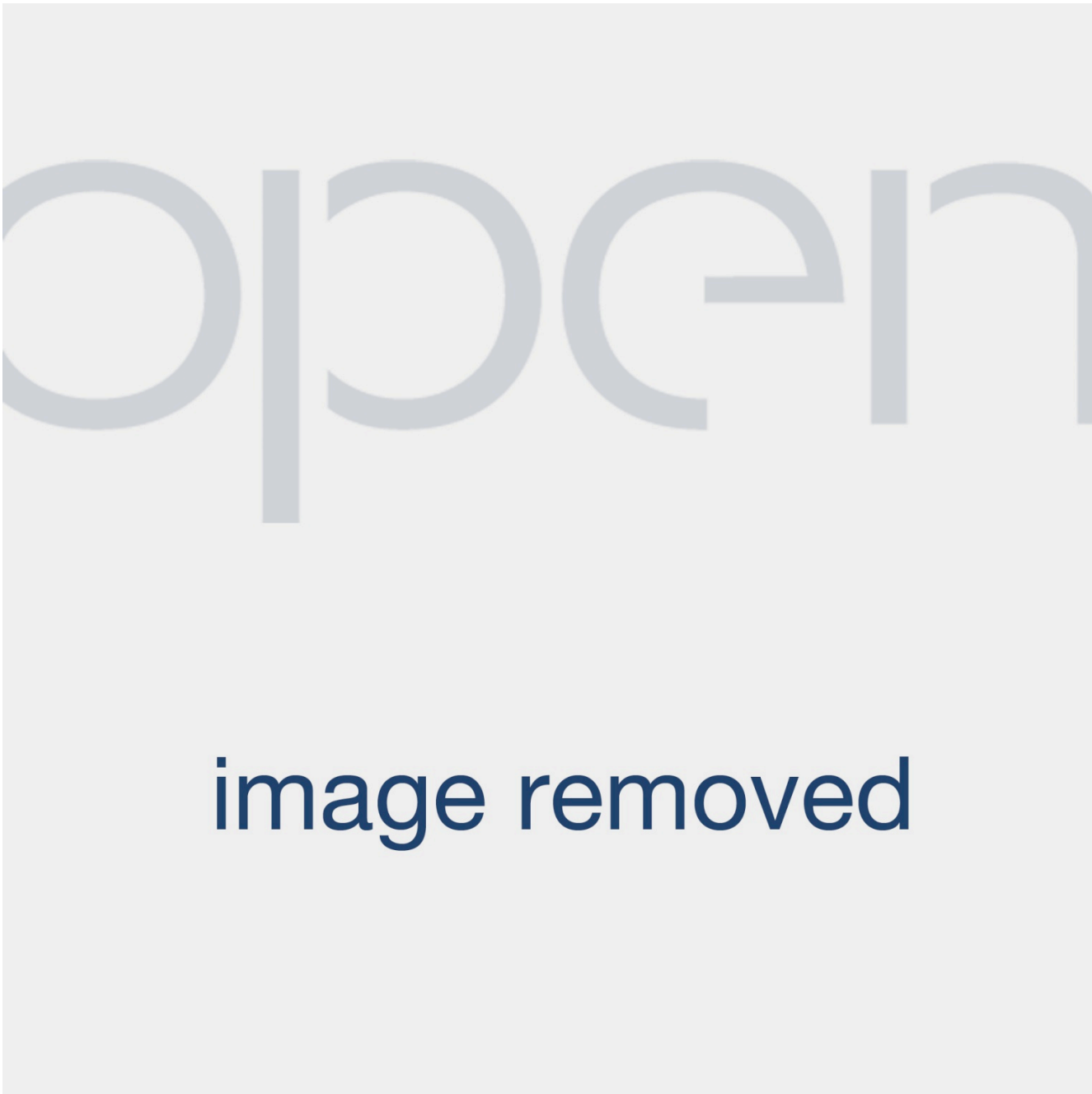


SI 410 ETHICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Week 9b: Avatars and Anonymity

THEMES

- What is anonymity?
- Relationship to information ethics
- Anonymity and self-esteem
- Complications and examples



Please see original image of Roz Chast's "The Ungoogleable Man" at The New Yorker, <http://www.cartoonbank.com/a-man-is-seen-walking-down-the-sidewalk-with-word-bubbles-around-him-declaring-his-inability-to-/inv/134539/>,

ANONYMITY

1 Anonymity

2 Ethics

3 Esteem

4 Complications

- OED: anonymous, *a.* : [f. Gr. (whence also in L. *annymos, annymus*), f. priv. + , in Æolic , name. Often used in Gr. form early in 17th c.]
 - 1. Nameless, having no name; of unknown name.
- Gary Marx (1999): seven dimensions of anonymity

TABLE 1
Types of identity knowledge

1. Legal name
2. Locatability
3. Pseudonyms linked to name or location
4. Pseudonyms that are not linked to name or location
 - a. For policy reasons
 - b. Audience does not realize it's a pseudonym
5. Pattern knowledge
6. Social categorization
7. Symbols of eligibility/noneligibility



Wallace, K.A. (2008) On-line Anonymity. Entry for Handbook on Information and Computer Ethics, eds. Herman Tavani and Ken Himma, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 165-189

ANONYMITY

TABLE 2
Rationales for anonymity

-
1. To facilitate the flow of information
 2. To obtain personal information for research
 3. To encourage attention to the content of the message
 4. To encourage reporting, information seeking, and self-help
 5. To obtain a resource or encourage action involving illegality
 6. To protect donors or those taking controversial but socially useful action
 7. To protect strategic economic interests
 8. To protect one's time, space, and person
 9. To aid judgments based on specified criteria
 10. To protect reputation and assets
 11. To avoid persecution
 12. To enhance rituals, games, play, and celebrations
 13. To encourage experimentation and risk-taking
 14. To protect personhood
 15. Traditional expectations
-

 PD-INEL

Gary T. Marx, "What's in a Name? Some Reflections on the Sociology of Anonymity", The Information Society, 1999, PD-INEL

TABLE 3
Rationales for identifiability

-
1. Accountability
 2. Reputation
 3. Dues paying and just deserts
 4. Organizational appetites
 5. Bureaucratic eligibility
 6. Interaction mediated by space and time
 7. Longitudinal research
 8. Health and consumer protection
 9. Currency of friendship and intimacy
 10. Social orientation to strangers
-

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ANONYMITY

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4 Complications

- Wallace: “noncoordinatability of traits in a given respect
 - Someone known to exist but not “who”
 - Action not coordinatable with traits and locations
- Criteria:
 - Potentially identifiable trait is known
 - No limit on the kinds of traits
- Trait: property or attribute
- Location: position in a social network

ANONYMITY

1 Anonymity

2 Ethics

3 Esteem

4 Complications

- P. 170. “... Anonymity: unable to coordinate some known trait(s) with other traits such that the person cannot be identified.
- “non-identifiability by others in a shared social environment, even if only or primarily by virtue of the effects of one’s actions.”
- Anonymity is social-context specific.

ANONYMITY

1 Anonymity

2 Ethics

3 Esteem

4 Complications

- Anonymous versus Unknown
- Unknown: not knowable
- Anonymity requires action that is not traceable, where person cannot be identified.
- Social isolation, as un-knownness, is a means toward anonymity.

ETHICAL ISSUES WITH ANONYMITY

1 Anonymity

2 **Ethics**

3 Esteem

4 Complications

- Data mining, tracking, surveillance
 - Pros and cons
- Attribution bias
- Expression of self
 - Pros and cons
- Globalization
 - Libel or cross-fertilization
- Identity theft

ETHICAL ISSUES WITH ANONYMITY

1 Anonymity

2 Ethics

3 Esteem

4 Complications

- Categories of purpose
 - Agent: Anonymity for the sake of furthering action by person or agent
 - Recipient: Anonymity for sake of preventing or protecting from harm
 - Process: Anonymity for sake of a process
- Accountability (double edged sword)

ETHICAL ISSUES WITH ANONYMITY

1 Anonymity

2 Ethics

3 Esteem

4 Complications

- The challenge of care ethics – depersonalization through anonymity
- Privacy as an overriding value that supports anonymity
- Consequentialism: weighs anonymity in terms of harm versus benefits

ANONYMITY AND THE INFOSPHERE

- 1 Anonymity
- 2 Ethics
- 3 Esteem
- 4 Complications

- “A moral agent is an **interactive, autonomous and adaptable transition system** that can perform **morally qualifiable** actions.” (Floridi and Sanders 2004)
 - Interactive: system and environment (can) act upon each other
 - Autonomous: system (can) change state without direct response to interaction
 - Adaptable: interactions (can) change the transition rules [learning from experience]
- Action is moral if it CAN cause good or evil

ANONYMITY AND THE INFOSPHERE

1 Anonymity

2 Ethics

3 Esteem

4 Complications

- Information objects as moral agents
- Moral agents as anonymous but not unknown
- Duty of any moral agent is to contribute to the sustainable blooming of the infosphere
- Any process, action, or event that negatively effects the whole infosphere is evil.

- 1 Anonymity
- 2 Ethics
- 3 Esteem**
- 4 Complications

- Esteem and reputation are intimately related..
 - What do these terms mean? (+ and -)
- Reputations compound across domains.
 - What do the authors mean by this?
- What happens to esteem and reputation in the case of multiple identities, some of which are anonymous?

EXAMPLES IN THE REAL WORLD

1 Anonymity

2 Ethics

3 Esteem

4 Complications

- Pseudonyms (multiple identities)
 - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pseudonym>
 - Esteem is variable
- Name change (identity management)
 - Esteem migrates to the new name
- Secret society
 - Esteem is internal to the group

- If esteem is an object of desire, why the secrecy?

THE ROLES THAT ANONYMITY PLAY

1 Anonymity

2 Ethics

3 Esteem

4 Complications

- Insurance strategy
 - Anonymity as a personal risk management
 - When risk abates, the value may remain
- Esteem-optimizing strategy
 - Hide motives, enable aggression, permit socially unacceptable behavior
 - Esteem is optimized when **fewer** people observe.
- Ad hoc strategy
 - Containing esteem to associates
 - Containing dis-esteem

ANONYMITY AND THE INTERNET

- 1 Anonymity
- 2 Ethics
- 3 Esteem**
- 4 Complications

- Esteem devolves to the avatar, whose reputation is a crucial factor in social relations
 - Let’s find some examples of high and low esteem situations...
- Esteem for the avatar devolves to the owner
 - The management of identities servers multiple needs of the owner

ESTEEM AND IDENTITY INTEGRATION

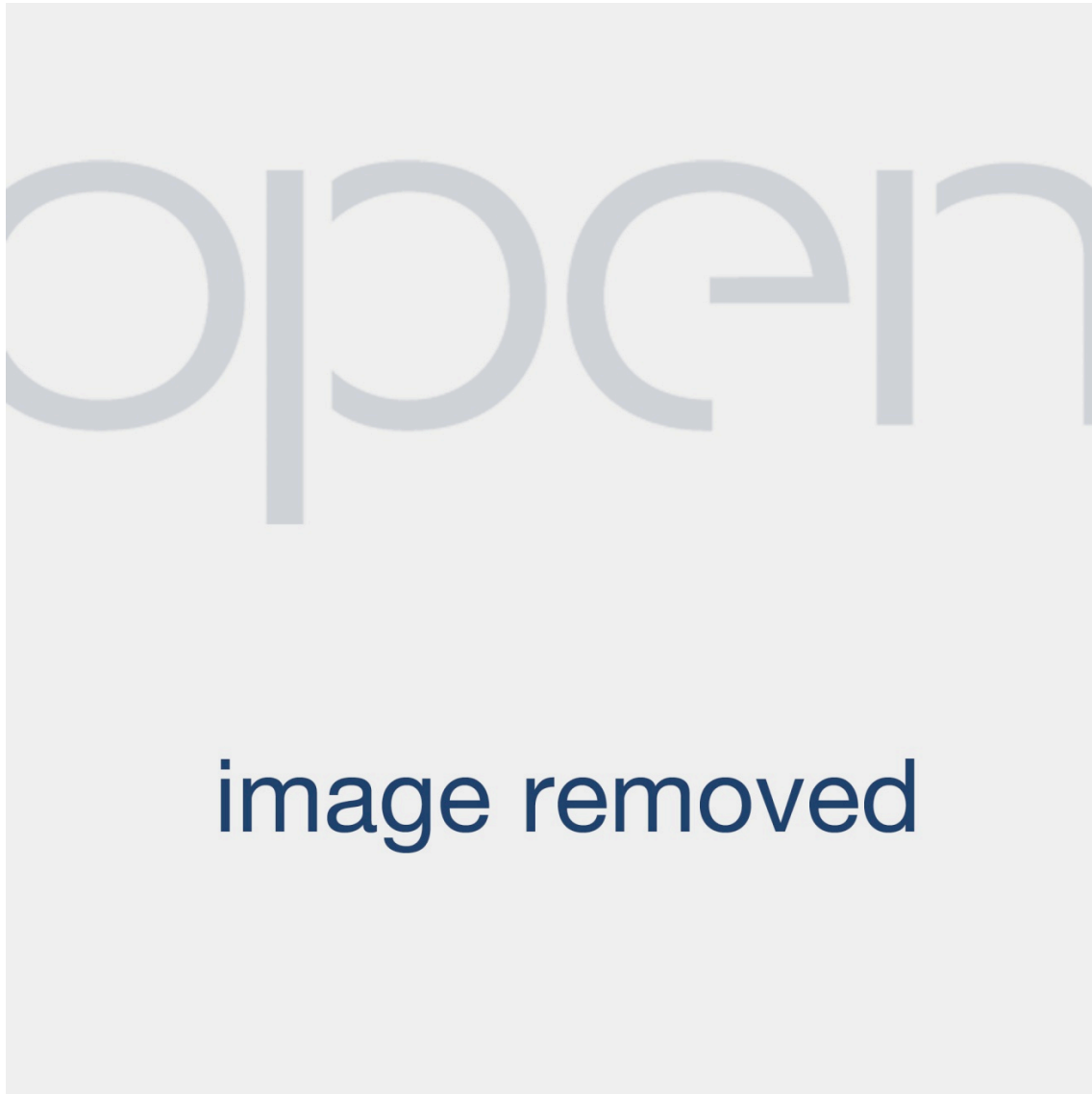
1 Anonymity

2 Ethics

3 Esteem

4 Complications

- Not always a good idea...
 - Online reputation can be higher than one’s offline reality
 - Personal advantage to separating identities
 - Online avatars as a secret society with special benefits



Please see original image of William Haefeli's "What was the point of writing a blog nobody else could read?" at The New Yorker, <http://www.cartoonbank.com/2010/what-was-the-point-of-writing-a-blog-that-nobody-else-could-read/inv1/135997/>

AVATARS AND IDENTITY - COMPLICATIONS

1 Anonymity

2 Ethics

3 Esteem

4 **Complications**

- The use of avatars to project identity (self)
- The use of avatars to hide identity (self)
- What are the ethical consequences of this choice?
- If esteem can turn to dis-esteem, where does the harm lie?

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Slide 5, Image 3: Please see original image of Roz Chast's "The Ungoogleable Man" at The New Yorker, <http://www.cartoonbank.com/a-man-is-seen-walking-down-the-sidewalk-with-word-bubbles-around-him-declaring-his-inability-to-/inv/134539/>,

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Slide 7, Image 3: Gary T. Marx, "What's in a Name? Some Reflections on the Sociology of Anonymity", The Information Society, 1999, PD-INEL

Slide 7, Image 4: Gary T. Marx, "What's in a Name? Some Reflections on the Sociology of Anonymity", The Information Society, 1999, PD-INEL

Slide 21, Image 3: Please see original image of William Haefeli's "What was the point of writing a blog nobody else could read?" at The New Yorker, <http://www.cartoonbank.com/2010/what-was-the-point-of-writing-a-blog-that-nobody-else-could-read/inv/135997/>



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