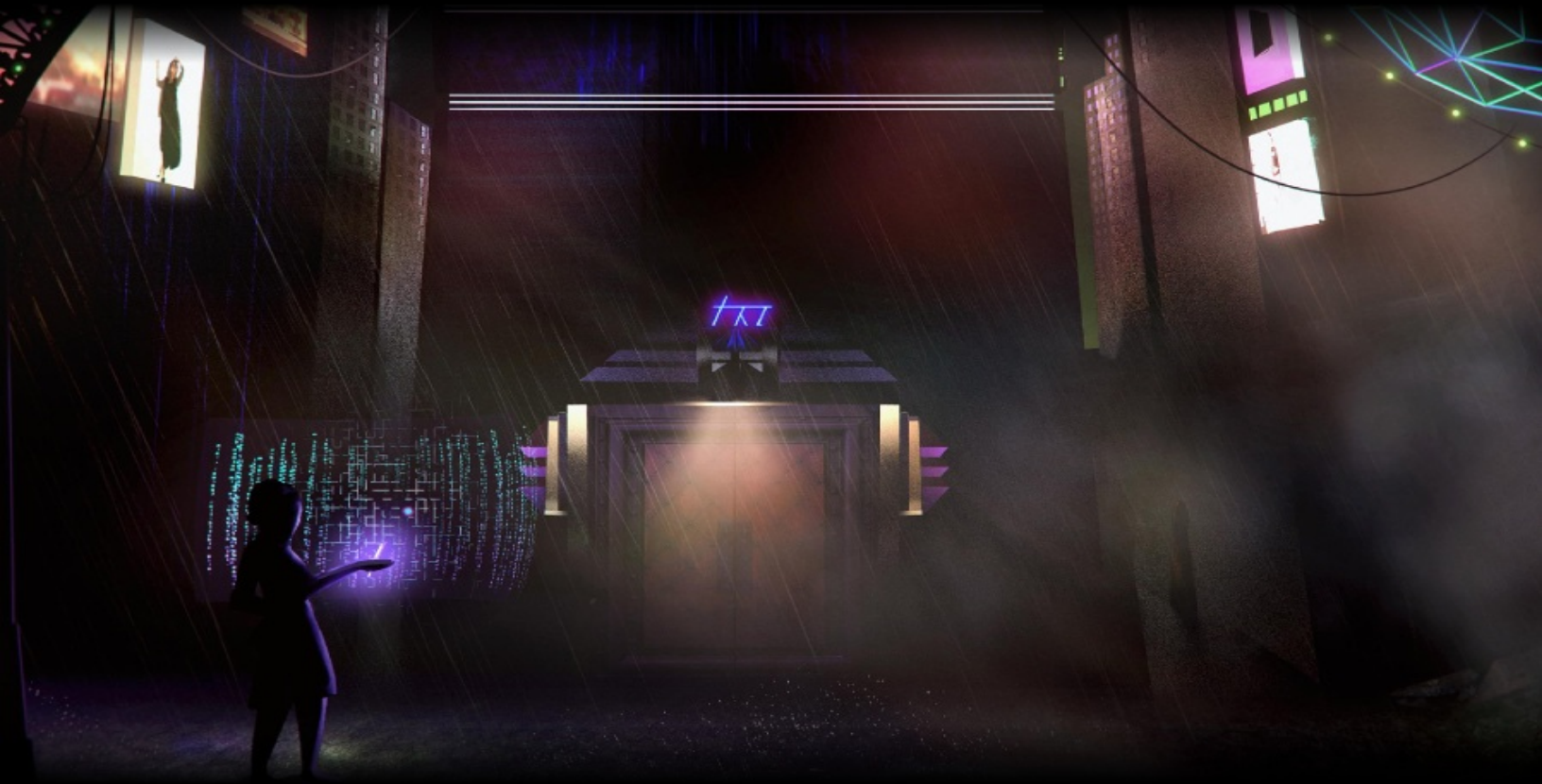




QUEER PRIVACY

Essays from the Margins of Society



Compiled by
Sarah Jamie Lewis

Queer Privacy

Essays From The Margins Of Society

Sarah Jamie Lewis

This book is for sale at <http://leanpub.com/queerprivacy>

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To everyone who has been forced to hide who they are from the world.

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Front Cover Illustration by [Marisa Erven](#)

About This Book

In this book I present to you a collection of essays written by and about people who intersect with Queerness.

While there is a trend in modern media to use queerness to just refer to non-heterosexual sexualities, it is important to state that Queer as used in this book is inclusive of those who are non-cisgender¹ including transgender², intersex³, non-binary⁴ and and/or two-spirit⁵ people.

I am not here to define queerness⁶, the entire word to me is a rejection of classifications and categorizations, but for the purposes of this book queerness refers to being or being-seen-as non-cisgender and/or a non-heterosexual.

Even this definition has problems, but what is important is that the stories told in this book are read, reflected upon and acted upon, to make the world a little better.

When I was compiling this book and talking with the authors I found each and every one of their perspectives fascinating, real and educational. I can promise you that many of the scenarios you encounter in this book will be new to you, they may shock you. I hope, however, you will stay to listen, understand and then apply the lessons we can learn from these stories to your own activism, development or life.

You will encounter stories of domestic violence, societal oppression, unsupportive families, bigotry and suicide. Sadly these elements cannot be decoupled from the lessons or from the tales, they are essential to the wider lessons of this book.

Thank you for reading.

About The Authors

It may come as no surprise that while some of the essays in this book are associated with a “real” identity, more are associated with pseudonyms.

While compiling this book, author privacy was a big concern, many of the stories in this book deal with family abuse, violence, harassment and many authors were worried that revealing their identity could result in repercussions.

The stories written under pseudonyms are no less real or consequential than any other. In many cases they are the most powerful examples of the challenges that the queer community faces when it comes to privacy.

As such I would ask that any biases you have about anonymity and truth be put aside, as I present to you the contributors to this book in their own words:

- **Ada Collins** was raised in the New York area. They received a degree from an Ivy League institution, where they greatly enjoyed the old trees and communal crossword-puzzle solving around the breakfast table. They care for their two young children and adore biographies.
- **Kath Rella** is a 33-year-old bisexual woman from Greater Manchester, United Kingdom. Currently a full-time carer, Kath has qualifications in politics and law, sociology, criminology and recently in creative writing. She is an avid film fan, preferring the darker, non-mainstream side of cinema. In recent years, Kath has taken up creative writing. Her short film script, ‘Embrace It’ was a finalist in the 2016 edition of Follow, and she is currently working on a dark fantasy novel, Ashes of the Forgotten.
- **Audrey Howard** is a graphic designer and sometimes-writer. When she’s not working, she likes finding new local places to eat, reading historical romance novels and marathoning shows on Netflix. Audrey lives in the USA with her partner and their two cats.
- **Avi Zajac** loves rabbits, cheesecake, and cute things like prime numbers, triangles, half diamond lock picks. A queer and trans/nonbinary nomadic hacker Avi likes to chase after telephone wires and ride on the Metro’s 7000-series trains.

- **Morgan Potts** is an angry anarchist queer who writes about gender and violence. He's a part-time sex worker and a full-time sad trans boy. He co-runs a queer boxing group and a support group for men (trans, cis, and intersex) and non-binary survivors of sexual violence. He likes plants, sci-fi, and anti-zionist Yiddish singing.
- **Violet Hargrave** has spent the last three years combating internet-based bigotry and abuse, working with numerous non-profits, activists, sociologists, and non-profit organizations, in addition to her own extensive investigations into the organization and recruitment efforts of numerous hate groups. She always writes under a pseudonym.
- **Norman Shamas** is an activist and educator whose work focuses on human-centered information/digital security and privacy.

Who Should Read This Book?

As a queer privacy researcher, who at other times has been a software engineer and a security engineer I think that everyone in all of these areas should read this book.

Queer People: This book contains some of our stories, some will feel familiar others might seem alien, but they are all part of our shared marginalization and it is important that we understand the challenges we face, as well as the challenges of others.

Software Engineers / Security Engineers: We need to build better tools, we need to build better community engagement. We can't do either until we understand the challenges they face. This book is one attempt at building a bridge between the communities to foster collaboration and empowerment.

Everyone Else: The stories and essays presented in this book are about people, who live on this planet with you. People who face challenges that you might never have thought about. The first step in making this world more fair, more equal and more free is understanding each other.

What Is Queer Privacy? *by Sarah Jamie Lewis*

Nothing About Us, Without Us.

Privacy is the right to consent.

Privacy is the right to withdraw consent, to only provide information to the people you want to provide it to, when you want to provide it.

The modern debate around privacy has been focused on its contention with security, and framed to be about terrorism and criminality.

Lost in this debate are the very real day to day battles that we all face. Employees searching for new jobs without telling their boss, teenagers hiding partners from their parents, choosing what information to reveal on a dating profile; the list of times we actively choose what to reveal about ourselves is practically endless.

Those scenarios take on more serious tones when we discuss marginalized populations: people of color, native indigenous peoples, queer communities, sufferers and survivors of domestic violence as well as disabled people, undocumented immigrants and others who dwell outside of the typical presented “norm”.

While every population intersects with every other, these are not distinct groups but part of the overlapping spectrum of humanity, I want to focus on a particular intersection, those who intersect with queerness.

Human sexuality and gender is complex and complicated and in many parts of the world non-normative behavior is heavily stigmatized and actively oppressed.

Those who are queer still date, they still love, they still live, but many do so under constant fear, doubt, dread, anger and sadness.

I believe that the privacy and security community can build tools to make the lives of those who intersect with queerness better.

I also believe that to do that we need to understand those lives. We need to understand exactly what queer privacy is.

And finally I believe that this movement must be driven and must involve those within the queer community. Nothing about us, without us.

Many modern companies and organizations promote software to keep you and your data private. These tools are awesome and the world is a better place because they exist.

However, these tools are not perfect. Reading any study about how queer communities use these tools you will quickly discover a pattern, they don't.

Much of the modern rhetoric around these tools is focused on state surveillance. Queer communities often wish to hide things from some of their family and friends, while also being able to share parts of their life with others.

Making friends, dating, escaping abusive situations, accessing healthcare, exploring themselves and others, finding jobs, engaging in safe sex work are all aspects of queer lives underserved by the modern privacy community.

Many people within the security community reject the need to focus on threat models centered around domestic violence or online dating. They choose to see these as “non-technical”, “not-infosec” or simply “not-interesting”.

Because of this we have been forced to adapt less secure tools to our own threat models and, as illustrated by this book, with limited success.

This is a status quo which cannot continue. If the goal of technology, and by extension securing technology is to make the world a better place, then we must also make sure to better the lives of queer communities as well as other marginalized peoples.

Queer Privacy, therefore, is about understanding the challenges and abuses of power impacting queer lives. Queer Privacy is about educating a new generation of activists to see these threat models as legitimate and worthy of research and respect. Queer Privacy is about building tools to destabilize and destroy the status quo which, at best, ignores and, at worst, outright oppresses people whose

only crime is trying to live in world that believes their sexuality and/or gender identity is illegitimate.

This is Queer Privacy.

Privacy, Perversion, and Power *by Ada Collins*

Sex is the easiest escape, though my “sex” may not be the sex you picture.

I wake up at 6:15, feed the kids and drop my kindergartener off. I head home with my youngest for an hour. I brush my teeth, wash my face, and try to put on a bra before climbing into my SUV for the second drop-off.

Living in the Bible Belt, I gesture at respectability enough to be ignored most of the time. When I want to be more confident that I will pass, I wear my “safety earrings,” small gold hoops that don’t feel particularly feminine to me. Part of my superstition.

I can’t wear clothes in those colors invented just for women. The sterile lilacs and periwinkles of Land’s End. Wearing signs of everyday femininity short-circuits my ability to relax. I’m already prone to anxiety so I do what I can to be at ease with myself.

I do let my female side play on special occasions. When I’m high on myself in a silky, curve-hugging dress and chunky black heels, preferably with lots of straps. Adding these to my dark hair and serious nature, I’m not taken for a girl who doesn’t know what she wants. The initiated, the miserably unowned, see me for what I am: a dominant person with an hourglass figure who is happy to inflict pain on a partner.

Submissive men can be volatile. At first, they tend to quickly despair of finding a dominant woman to serve, falling into a habit of whining when they’ve only been looking for a few weeks. Intent to claim their own powerlessness, they imagine any dominant woman will be able to lift them out of misery and into ecstasy. Of course there are a thousand ways to make a bad match, and it’s up to the dominant to show some restraint.

Submissive men say they “just want to obey a woman,” but that is not slightly true. When a fantasy is refined, alone, over decades, it hardens into something no human can inhabit. A dominant woman is treated like an Xbox - a sleek

object awaiting someone else's script. Dominant women don't easily accept any kind of insertion. The art of domination is a creative process, and dominants delight in surprise. If the submissive simply wants an actress, he'll have to hire one.⁷

I am pansexual⁸ and non-binary, the most non-identifying identity pairing. I can date any gender and be any gender. I can choose to fit in at church, at PTA meetings, and at the ex-in-laws' fancy neighborhood Cinco de Mayo party. And when I pass, I can forget that wearing a cock and fucking men is one of the most disturbing things I could be doing in my bedroom. Being me doesn't feel extraordinary or shocking. Planning kinky events (Who will bring the 7-layer dip? Who will bring the ropes?) doesn't feel or look much different from planning the elementary school Valentine's Day dance.

Not knowing that kinky people are as common as a cold, the popular imagination connects us to serial killings and harm. We are broken people who break others. We live in the shadows with our sickness. We should go to great lengths to suppress our sexual natures or else pay the price like an idolator in the Old Testament. But honestly, we're just a bunch of nerds who find it flattering to be considered so exciting.

Nearly all acts of BDSM can be considered illegal, putting kinky people in danger of not only smear campaigns and loss of employment and child custody, but also jail time. So, yes, most of us exist in secret spaces under scene names. Because we can't trust the police or legal system, dungeon owners and scene guardians keep watch over what happens in public play spaces. Logging into FetLife, you will encounter entreaties to reverse banishment from local play spaces and parties. Most cities have only one club, and being blacklisted means you might never play in that town again.

I am a single mom to two young kids. Yes, I mop up spilled yogurt and search for lost swim goggles. Yes, my car looks as though we eat three meals a day inside it. I change diapers, heal goldfish (both real and imaginary), and bake muffins. I send chili to church for sick acquaintances, read the same book over and over to the toddler, and stay up late assembling doll houses on Christmas Eve. It's lovely, exhausting, and if you need to be told, incredibly stressful.

Sex is the easiest escape, though my “sex” may not be the sex you picture. I’d specify that what you call sex is merely “PIV” sex, for “penis-in-vagina.” There are so many ways to have sex, and so many body parts, both biological and prosthetic, to engage. I know I’ll never get to everything on my kinky bucket list. The abundant, yet specific, nature of my kinky desires comforts me.

Some of my play partners never see me undressed. None of them are given my name. My face doesn’t appear on my dating profiles, I use multiple email addresses and messaging apps to protect my legal name and privacy.⁹

Without even a face on a profile, first dates are common and brief. We meet in public, somewhere I’m not known, for about an hour. I can always extend the time, but my date can’t. I can break my rule of never playing on the first date, but my companion had better not ask.

My dates always want to know my criteria, as if it will be so different from vanilla dating. My play partners must be intelligent, respectful, and trustworthy. It’s disappointing when I have to say no to someone I like because I can’t trust them. A mention of guns, poor treatment of previous lovers, or paranoia about doxxing¹⁰ ends our evening.

I have enough of a system in place to constitute a superstitious practice. I know it won’t absolutely protect me. I prefer to be at ease rather than focus on how to be more careful. I could hide my license plate. I could refuse to give a photo of my face.¹¹ But I want to feel in control, and that requires a bit of faith.

I can’t have any fun if I don’t allow myself to trust my partner. I know I will eventually move on. I can’t put myself in the position of worrying about revenge. In my BDSM practice, I break open my partners to ransack their emotions and long-feared desires. Some men aren’t strong enough to endure it. Some are, but then feel used when it’s over. (Women seem less dangerous this way, perhaps because women are allowed to submit sexually.) I have to choose the strong partners who understand themselves, both because they are more fun and because they are less likely to throw me across a room or pay for a private investigator to look into my identity.

The screening, the apps and second name allow me to be fearless in my Sadistic practice. I am free, I am myself, I am perfect during a play session. I control my partner, I hurt my partner, and I am bursting with joy and arousal.

North Carolina had its conservative turn four years before the rest of the United States, culminating in an emergency legislative session which created House Bill 2 (HB2), an overreaching law designed to strip us of many civil rights, especially our right to choose a public restroom based on our gender. Now, when you are in North Carolina, you must use the restroom that agrees with your birth certificate. I've seen citizens policing each other's restroom choice in bars. It is a threatening act, underwritten by violence.

As Trump became President, North Carolinians welcomed a new governor who supports a full repeal of HB2. The legislature is still controlled by a Republican supermajority, so repeal is uncertain. It often seems that cis people don't want to be bothered with our civil rights, and that they just want to get the NBA to stop boycotting our state. Some cis people heartily enjoy complaining about the state legislature and don't seem to remember that gender-nonconforming bodies are at risk.

A wealthy acquaintance asked me to run for office, and I immediately said no. Other friends independently asked me, and still I declined and cited my personal life and history. Most of these people know I am non-binary and queer, but none of them know I am a Sadist. When I say I can't take the exposure, they laugh it off, maybe imagining me smoking pot as an undergrad twenty years ago. They think they'll convince me one day.

I am an ethical person, an essential requirement for a Sadistic dominant. Obviously I like taking charge. I also have a lot of opinions about government's role in our lives. Being in public office would be gratifying, and the idea is hard to resist. I spent four days psyching myself up to run for a position in city government. I cycled through all the reasons I must allow this person to run my campaign:

- If anyone in the kink community recognizes me, it will probably be a friend who won't betray my identity.
- No one can prove that I'm kinky.
- The office comes with a small salary. I'm already attending so many political meetings- why not take a seat at the table?
- Who cares about kink in 2017 anyway? "Secretary" came out fifteen years ago and Rihanna and Justin Timberlake have been singing about BDSM for almost a decade.

- A queer, non-binary politician would be great for the city, for the state, for human kind!

As my imagination brought me to new heights of non-binary power, it also gave me a glimpse of my downfall. If a malicious person linked my kinky persona to my legal persona, my children's father would have some potent ammunition. Visions of my kids being ripped away from me in a dark courtroom made me want to vomit. I can dwell in my fantasies and make some of them come true, but not this one.

It hurts to see the limits of my power. I have so much privilege, including my Ivy education, and I yearn to use it to help transgender and queer people, especially the ones affected by HB2. I reproach myself for puncturing my reputation and ruining my chance to help.

I'm used to feeling like a bad person because I lust after women, because I want to control and hurt my sex partners, and because I was born female. I sift through each encounter and try to erase it, turning it into something alien to me, but I have a stain that won't come out. I am kinky, it's not just something I did.

Sam Steward, a gay man born in 1909, reveled in male homosexuality. His legacy includes a comprehensive card catalog of his sexual exploits, a vast collection of homosexual erotica, and a collaboration with Alfred Kinsey. Steward treated queerness as a vocation at a time when it was illegal and considered a mental illness. Compared to the trope of the pre-Stonewall self-hating gay man, Steward's courageous devotion to queerness is exhilarating.

Steward's revolutionary life reminds me that rooting out all traces of heteronormativity is a worthy life-long project. Misogyny, transphobia, and queerphobia surround us all. As I age, I am able to find the strength to walk away from these limitations and toward my unique gender and sexuality.

Sam Steward could never have run for public office. He had to leave academia when he was outed. Yet Steward's friendship with Alfred Kinsey changed the discussion about male homosexuality permanently. A more careful, more closeted person could never have assisted Kinsey's research to the extent Steward did. That alone is a precious gift to leave at the altar of queerness. Steward's name was mostly unknown until the 2011 publication of "Secret Historian: The Life and Times of Samuel Steward, Professor, Tattoo Artist, and

Sexual Renegade,” but with each year, other sexual deviants find inspiration in this brave, wild man’s personal story.

I have to leave my legacy to others to sort out. I can’t control it by running for office. I can only embrace my desires and hope I leave a large enough crack in heteronormativity for others to get a glimpse of what is possible.

What's In A Name? by Kath Rella

It's awful being forced to hide your true self from others.

What's in a name? I have two. There's the name I was born with, that I use in the real-world. And then, there's Kath, my online alter-ego. It would sound strange to many, but Kath is the real me. Online, I can be who I truly am. Offline, I don the metaphoric makeup and put on a show.

That's not always true, of course. Fragments of the real me are shown to certain people; those who would respect me for who I am, and who would not hate me for what I am. I'm a bisexual.

My sexuality has been a heavy weight to bear all these years. The reason for this? My family.

I grew up in a religious environment. My wider family practice a particularly strict branch of Christianity. Consequently, deviants such as me are not to be treated with respect. They are to be hated. I was thirteen, or fourteen before I heard the word "gay" used in the context which most would understand. Before that, I had only ever heard other words - "faggot" and "dyke" being the two most common.

I'm not sure when I realised that I wasn't the heterosexual girl that my family life insisted I be. My schoolgirl crushes flitted between male and female. One moment I would be drawn to Leonardo Di Caprio, the next I cast more than admiring glances towards Sharon Stone. There are those who believe that such flirtations with the same-sex are something people grow out of in time. I never have, and at this point, I can safely say that I never will.

It's awful being forced to hide your true self from others. I spent the majority of my life loathing what I was. Why wouldn't I? My conditioning was such that, despite holding no religious beliefs, feelings of being an abomination remained so deep-seated that suicide often seemed like an appropriate course of action. Suicide may have even been safer. I have no idea what vengeance some of my

family would seek against me for defying their God, but I have no doubt that it would be violent.

Despite my inner turmoil and fear of the real me, I had dabbled in same-sex activity. Hailing from Greater Manchester, England, the famed LGBT district, Canal Street, is almost on my doorstep. During my younger, club-going days, Canal Street offered some relatively inexpensive establishments perfect for the poor student. The mix of intoxicants and carefree attitudes of fellow patrons led to me letting my hair down and relaxing. Over the years, I have woken up next to a few different women. The seeds of my personal liberation, however, were sewn online.

My parents, though traditional and working-class, were keen that I stay on top of emerging tech trends. As a result, I was one of the first in my school peer group to get an Internet connection.

The Internet became a lifeline for me and remains so to this day. In addition to my bisexuality, I'm also something of a BDSM enthusiast. My sexual preferences are far from vanilla. Chatrooms, websites, and yes, pornography all contributed to helping me cope with my inclinations and preferences.

There has, rightly, been a lot written about the damaging effects of porn on the young mind. I dare say that the mainstream industry is far from a beacon of ethics and morality. Behind the slick production values of your average twenty-minute video is a hive of toxic masculinity. Yet there is so much more beyond the mainstream. Amateur material and independent studios do produce responsible pornography, where women are more than a semen receptacle.

On the social side, "Kath" was born in an online game. She was a hero of Azeroth, in the MMO video game World of Warcraft. The freedom which comes with being represented by an avatar led me to experiment with being more open about who and what I was. It remained a slow process. Like a child learning to swim, I would dip a toe in and test the waters. Small pieces of my true self slowly revealed until I realised that unlike my family, most people didn't care. Indeed, I met one man who has become a close friend; this man even encouraged me to invest in the same-sex relationship I'm in now.

Sadly, The British government have declared a proxy war against the Internet. They use the moral panic generated by fears over online pornography, terrorism and other cyber crimes to pass legislation that threatens the open, accepting Internet that likely saved my life. This year, the Investigatory Powers Act (IPA) came into effect. The IPA, or Snooper's Charter, as it is known colloquially, requires communications providers to store information about individuals. It matters not whether a person is suspected of a crime. If you use the Internet in the UK, your actions will be logged.

Furthermore, the IPA bestows the right to snoop on multiple government agencies. Law enforcement, the ambulance services and even the Food Standards Agency have the right to look at your browsing history. The government argues that their unprecedented surveillance powers are responsible, that there is a double-lock in place before any snooping takes place. Their history in this area is not encouraging.

A recent [Freedom of Information request by the Liberal Democrats](#) revealed that local councils have been using the previous RIPA¹² laws to spy on citizens for the oh-so-heinous crimes of littering, feeding the pigeons or putting their bins out on the wrong day. Over 55,000 hours of surveillance has been conducted using legislation designed to protect against terrorists. Like using a sledgehammer to crack a nut, such use of surveillance powers is grossly disproportionate.

RIPA powers were employed by a local authority in Poole to ascertain whether a family [was fibbing about living in a school catchment area](#). [Several councils have even been found to have used RIPA powers to spy on their own employees, over issues so utterly ridiculous as where someone parked their car](#).

And if this sounds like a few cases of silliness, [Big Brother Watch](#) published figures showing that [local councils have mounted 8,575 surveillance operations over a two-year period](#).

On average, this means that **councils alone have carried out eleven surveillance operations per day during this time**. How many more operations can we expect to see once the Gambling Commission is granted access to data? And this is before we even get to GCHQ¹³, and the National Crime Agency.

The argument made by many, that the government is only interested in serious crime, falls apart when we look at how pre-existing powers are being used. With such comprehensive access to people's personal information, the likelihood of more invasive surveillance of innocent people only increases.

Of course, there are those who believe that if you are truly innocent, then you have nothing to fear. I disagree. I have a clean criminal record, and other than acquiring marijuana for recreational use in my younger days, I have stayed on the right side of the law.

However, as I pointed out above, my wellbeing is dependent on certain people not being made aware of my sexuality and relationship status. Looking through the full list of agencies with access to my data, one does not need to reach the sixth degree of separation to draw a link to someone who could mean me harm.

Could you honestly say that if you had the potential to access the personal information of your friends, family, coworkers, etc. that you could resist temptation?

Even if we trust the government and every single employee of each and every agency to behave in a responsible manner, can we trust them with data security?

[According to the National Audit Office \(NAO\)](#), 9,000 personal data breaches occurred in UK government departments between 2014-15. Only fourteen were reported to the Information Commissioner. Under the [Data Protection Act](#), Whitehall can decide for itself which security breaches it reports. The NAO, however, say that due to the lack of self-reporting, there is no way to ascertain how serious these breaches were.

We now have to accept that we have an all-seeing government with access to our most intimate secrets, while simultaneously possessing a ludicrous laissez-faire approach to data security. It would not take a rogue employee to put an individual such as myself in danger; it would simply take a skilled hacker having a lucky day.

It's not as though data breaches are rare. The website [Have I Been Pwned](#) maintains a list of major data leaks posted to public forums, on the Deep Web, or Pastebin. Millions of users of sites such as [Yahoo](#), [MySpace](#), [LinkedIn](#), [DropBox](#), [Tumblr](#) and many others have been affected by security failures.

And let's not ignore the "big one" - Ashley Madison. The [Ashley Madison hack](#) resulted in an unprecedented amount of personally identifiable information reaching the wider Internet. Whatever you may personally feel about adulterers, we cannot hand wave the destruction caused to familial and working relationships resulting from the mass extortion attempts of cyber criminals.

I, myself, have been a "victim" of such a hack. I subscribed, for a short period, to a particular adult site. The data was leaked, and a few months ago, I received an email demanding payment of 10 Bitcoins (approx. £7,000 at the time) in exchange for secrecy. If I failed to meet the demand of the blackmailer, they would inform my friends, family and colleagues of my fondness for glamour photography.

In this instance, I felt safe to ignore the email. They provided no information that suggested they had anything more than an email address. However, if they had access to my full email and phone records, along with a list of sites I visit, they could have done a whole lot of damage.

And while you might consider this a one-off, it's not. Being one of the more tech-savvy people in my social circle, I've become the first port of call for computer-related queries. Threatening emails such as this have cropped up from time to time. Targets are often the most surprising. However, the simple fact is we all have a private life. We should all have a right to a private life. Our government does not feel this is the case.

Since we cannot trust the government to behave responsibly, nor can we trust them with our information, the only thing we can do is change our behaviour. This is the antithesis of freedom. Nobody should feel that they cannot do something completely legal because the wrong person could gain access to their data. If it is dangerous for you to out yourself as LGBT, then the sad truth is that the only way to be safe in Theresa May's surveillance state is to refrain from visiting any site that could hint as to your true self; whether it be porn or even support forums. The freedom that I experienced to become comfortable with being me does not exist today.

The IPA leads into the Digital Economy Bill (DEB), specifically Section 3. Under the Digital Economy Bill, commercial websites that offer adult content will be required to vet the age of UK users. Any site failing to do so will be

blocked behind Britain's answer to the Great Firewall of China. While it seems easy enough to block Pornhub and xHamster, let's not ignore Tumblr, Twitter, Reddit and a whole host of other non-adult sites that host pornographic content. Were the DEB to be enforced in full, it would almost certainly require virtually every Internet user in the United Kingdom to place themselves on some sort of register.

The DEB goes further than simply blocking pornography from people who are unable or refuse to verify their age. It also aims to prevent people from viewing "unconventional" sex acts. Yes, the government arbiters of morality have decided that facesitting, female ejaculation, spanking, whipping, any form of restraint and various other acts that you can engage in at home are to be hidden from the apparently feeble minds of British viewers.¹⁴

At what point do we allow our government to dictate to us what type of sex is deemed conventional? The DEB is a direct attack on those who enjoy BDSM content, and I dare say grossly irresponsible. Have the government considered that responsible BDSM content providers, such as Kink, depict how to engage in such acts safely? If public health is their overarching concern, then wielding the ban hammer against Fifty Shades of Grey would be a more prudent measure than attacking the websites that have a genuine interest in responsible portrayals of BDSM.

Censorship only ever begets more censorship. Porn is a soft-target, as the cries of "think of the children!" echo in the halls of Westminster. Our desire to protect children from harmful material overrides our desire to protect adults from prejudicial attitudes. We have constructed an ideology in the UK that BDSM practitioners are weird and potentially dangerous. A handful of salacious news stories about a sexual predator with interest in vaguely termed "violent pornography" leads to furthering the moral panic, and the acceptance of such invasive attitudes by our overbearing nanny state.

However, much like with the IPA, we ignore the real issue. If children's attitudes to sex are being informed by online pornography, then sex education in the United Kingdom is utterly inept.

Why wouldn't it be? Under current law, Sex and Relationship Education is not a mandatory subject. A parent can withdraw their child from sex education, and

many do. Furthermore, when I was in school, sex education consisted of a few hours of working out what to call genitals so that children would understand. This was followed by a simplistic rundown of an act we're biologically programmed to know how to do anyway.

Discussions on positive body attitudes, gender-specific issues and everything else that goes into a truly fulfilling, healthy sex life went completely ignored. Approximately 30% of UK households contain any children. Many of that 30% will include 16-year-olds. We're applying a general law that will affect everyone, which by intent, should only apply to a much smaller number.

Let's be brutally honest, here. Children are not as technologically naive as their parents. They will know how to use a VPN or other such tools to circumvent the block. The devious ones will even nab daddy's credit card while he's asleep to get their porn fix. Therefore, it behooves the government not to think in such simplistic terms but to increase education. Enforce Sex and Relationship Education in schools, and educate parents on being better net-aware and to not fear the awkward conversations with their kids.

We must come back to the privacy argument, as well. Adult sites have shown they're preferred targets for hackers. In addition to Ashley Madison, we've seen [Fling](#), [Naughty America](#), [xHamster](#), [Brazzers](#), [Adult Friend Finder](#), [YouPorn](#), [Fur Affinity](#) and several others hacked. The DEB in its current form provides no data security criteria.

To block the supposedly "unconventional", it stands to reason that each website will need to log what each user views. This is especially true on porn tube sites like PornHub where so much content is uploaded, it will be nigh-impossible to proactively filter what is forbidden by the British government. Therefore, we'll be creating a database of UK porn viewers and their viewing habits. This is another potentially devastatingly short-sighted move to outing people who are not ready or willing to be outed. Furthermore, since the law is fluid, the government could quite feasibly ban more acts and then have a nice little list of people who had previously viewed them to surveil under their IPA.

The truly dangerous cyber criminals will continue to go about their business. They'll switch on their VPNs, use encrypted messaging services and go underground using [Tor](#). The rest of us - the law-abiding citizens - are the ones

that end up living under the surveillance cloud. Oh, we could turn on our VPNs too, but how soon is it before the state decides all VPN users are probably criminals? Wanting to protect your privacy from a government that I, personally, have no trust or faith in will likely be seen as the actions of a Person of Interest.

Most of us close our curtains every night. We do so not because we're breaking laws, but because we have an expectation of privacy. Whether you're watching television, playing a video game or having sex, you tend not to invite the neighbours to stand outside and gawp. Yet, without consent, the government and its agencies are forcing their way into our homes.

The Internet of Things ensures that even more of our household items are online. It's not paranoia to believe that the information these gadgets hold about us will be passed on. Furthermore, with powers under the IPA to monitor webcams, to activate cellphone microphones and all these other little additions, how long is it before we're profiled by an unseen, unaccountable agency? The ideas of dystopian novels may not be so far-fetched, as it seems our government have taken them as a manifesto.

As a bisexual, trying her best to live a normal life but knowing I'm only ever one mistake from potential harm, the direction the UK is going fills me with dread. By allowing moral panic to decide the law over reason, the UK is allowing itself to become a near-fascist state.

I will try to continue as normal. My girlfriend deserves as much. Yet I do so knowing that any mistake that leads to my outing may not be mine. All of the assurances of respect for our data are meaningless when all of the punishments are implemented after the fact. Regardless of our supposed tolerance, LGBT people still continue to experience prejudice. Fear exists within the community; fear of homophobes, of discrimination, and yes, of our families.

Now, people like myself have to fear the government, who are supposed to be protecting us, because one leak can put us in danger.

Moreover, though, I am mostly concerned about where this may lead. The UK claims to champion freedom and liberty but if such an assault against privacy is still regarded as the actions of a free country, then what other freedoms will be taken away next?

Exploring Polyamory in Private *by Audrey Howard*

We have so enjoyed being openly bisexual and polyamorous that going back to a life of monogamy and hiding who we are seems almost unthinkable

With everyone's Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other profiles linked to one another, it's easy to follow along with the lives of loved ones, old friends and even strangers.

It's not unheard of for friends and family to find out about new romantic relationships as they appear online. The relationship status of people we know can be a source of constant interest and gossip.

But what about when we have more than one relationship at a given time? Ethical non-monogamy, or more specifically in my case, polyamory, is something that has grown in popularity in recent years.

Polyamory usually refers to having romantic and/or sexual relationships with multiple people at once (with the consent and knowledge of everyone involved).

Communication, honesty and trust is key in ethical non-monogamy, and being polyamorous is certainly not a license to cheat.

For most people, the concept of any style of non-monogamy may be confusing, and for some it may seem nothing short of absurd.

However, for my partner and I it is something we find exciting and desirable as we enter our thirties. This is due partly to the fact that, in recent years, we have both come to realize we are bisexual. Discovering this while in a long-term, committed relationship has been complicated and confusing, but it is something we have both embraced in ourselves and in each other.

Finding a community of queer women and gender non-forming people online—particularly on Twitter and Tumblr has greatly helped me embrace being

bisexual.

Chatting to people like me, hearing their stories, seeing them being unapologetically queer on my timelines every day made it easier and easier for me to not only accept being bisexual, but to be proud of it.

Now, being bisexual and being around fellow queer people (even if only online) feels so normal to me that I can't imagine life any other way. And the best part is that I was able to find these friends and communities in private, away from the potential judgment of my family or friends.

Beginning to explore your sexuality and identity is such a delicate process; so delicate that it could only take one question or odd glance from a well-intentioned but ignorant family member to totally shatter everything. Social media communities can provide a relatively private and safe space for people like me to feel welcome, loved and valid—no matter their identity.

While neither my partner or I have officially come out publicly about our sexualities, I have told a few family members whom I trust.

Sadly, my partner's family are very conservative and homophobic, so we have been keeping our sexualities and our changing relationship dynamics private for the most part. Now that we have started to seriously explore ethical non-monogamy, we have had to consider a path forward that allows us to date other people while also maintaining a sense of privacy. This is especially important while we find our footing as our relationship changes.

Luckily, thanks to dating apps like [OkCupid](#) and [Tinder](#), we have been able to explore dating new people on our own terms and in a way that feels comfortable to us individually, and as a couple.

OkCupid has been especially helpful with this. It has the option to change the settings so your profile cannot be seen by straight people. We have connected with other ethically non-monogamous people via these apps, and we have both gone on a date or two.

Traveling overseas has made it easier for us to keep our exploration of our sexualities and polyamory private. Dating apps use location based services to

connect you with people nearby or in the same city - this has meant we haven't had to worry about people we know back home stumbling across our profiles. Right now, that allows us a great sense of freedom to be completely ourselves and live openly with the people we choose to date. We don't feel like we have to hide.

But questions loom about what we'll do once we return home. *Do we delete the apps? Do we remove our profiles altogether and erase everything we've started?* We have so enjoyed being openly bisexual and polyamorous that going back to a life of monogamy and hiding who we are seems almost unthinkable.

If there was an option to navigate the apps in a way that kept our profiles private while still connecting with people, we might be able to make it work. But with location services and public profiles a vital part of online dating, that seems unlikely.

Tinder poses a further problem, as it tells you if you have mutual Facebook friends with a potential match. I have already stumbled upon a few people who I have mutual friends with. All it would take is for someone who knows my partner's family to see our profiles for our privacy to be snatched away from us and our family relationships threatened.

To make it even more difficult, most of these apps are free and publicly accessible. It doesn't take much effort for someone to sign up for an account with one of these services and to discover our profiles. Seeing either one of us on a dating website would rouse immediate suspicion, and while I'd like to think most people I know would be polite enough to just ask me about it directly — *despite the fact that, ultimately, it's no one else's business* — I can't help but fear they would draw immediate conclusions. They would assume that we are cheating on one another.

New relationships can be tricky to navigate at the best of times. For me, personally, I like for blossoming romances to be private at first, something special between the two of us. I appreciate having the time to get to know someone without the opinions of others getting in the way.

And then there is the question of what to do if either of us fall in love with someone and no longer want to hide it. How much of our new relationships do

we make public? Friends and family may not be able to accept this new version of ourselves, but it's not fair for anyone to have to hide who we are or who we love.

Maintaining privacy when we go home is going to be complicated, to say the least. But thanks to the experiences I've had on dating apps and going on dates while overseas, I feel more and more confident about who I am. With a little more time to explore this new life privately, I may feel ready to come out and be openly bisexual and polyamorous. My partner feels the same.

But for the time being, and with the help of dating apps, we are keeping this part of our lives private - at least for now.

Privacy is something we all deserve, and something we are all entitled to.

Skylar by Avi Zajac

People want a happy ending.

I distinctly recall the first time I declared myself to be an activist in elementary school excited about protecting animals. As I grew older my activism took roots inside of the LGBTQ community and within human rights organisations.

Coming out with my sexuality sophomore year, as genderqueer in my senior year, followed by coming out as a trans guy and nonbinary later on - this I did not do alone.

It was part of a back and forth exchange; shared experiences of which I am now the sole remaining half. As an activist who additionally supports transparency, privacy, and anonymity, which intersect with my queer and trans identity, I am fighting for the other half to prevent the erasure of our histories and to undo the failures of the other intersectional communities I belong in.

Through the media we have been conditioned to accept stories with predictable trajectories and narratives, the ultimate climax of where the protagonist must do something to challenge the bad in the world, have it finish in one happy ending.

We don't like to look at the news and think that a problem won't ever fully end nor do many of us think there's more to the headline or what the media tells us.

Then there are the topics and subjects we consider too taboo or sensitive to talk about and are told never speak of it. Topics like suicide, mental health, domestic abuse and violence, we must remain silent to preserve the dignity of all parties and respect for the dead. To argue and fight is to be uncivil and rude.

Across my four years of high school and since then locally and nationally we heard and seen the news coverage of queer and trans youth suicides. Transgender Day of Remembrance is one such event in which we do an annual roll call of trans deaths: share their names, their photos, if there are any, and their stories.

A week and day after my 18th birthday walking out of AP Computer Science to art class my heart dropped as whispers began. She was supposed to be in class like the rest of us.

My teacher in the next class got the call eventually.

She jumped.

A few things didn't happen and certain other things did. Initially misgendered they corrected the reports and the newspaper corrected themselves. Her obituary claimed she only "passed away suddenly". My high school did not offer counselling for any of the students and there was no talk about suicide prevention. I found out the truth about what happened in her last thirty minutes through a few other folks a few weeks after.

We were angry; we were numb; we were heartbroken, but time kept going and so did we.

Months later the state journal published an editorial where for the first time we felt an immense sense of helplessness. It featured her parents who suddenly claimed and presented themselves as having known her for all of these years. Not only did this piece out her natal name, it also used the wrong pronouns to start off, and a slew of claims and outing of her mental and psychiatric diagnoses. It was a grossly done piece spinning what was supposed to be a heartbreaking tale on transgender suicides into a transphobic story of a person I could not recognise in the words. There was nothing I, nor anyone else, could do to protect her story.

To the world that didn't know her, she had been all but erased by her parents. The rest of my senior year was an academic disaster but I maintained my non-profit and activist work. I pushed my younger sibling, now a freshman, to join the clubs at school where was on the leadership team as well as the youth leadership board I was a member of at the LGBTQ non-profit I had joined my freshman year.

Like activists and as siblings do we had our disagreements on the various problems we faced. That was okay, I thought, my sibling just needed time to grow. We had a very rough spring to early summer together after a falling out over a topic my sibling felt very strongly about fuelled as an excuse for why my sibling could not use my correct pronouns. Despite those issues I came out as

trans, we got our dog–Nugget, short for Chicken Nugget–that we bonded with immediately, then two weeks later my sibling watched me walk across the graduation stage where we got mac and cheese pizza together after.

Days later I was on a flight to the east coast leaving behind my sibling. A month later they also came out as trans and nonbinary. Came out as Skylar.

I thought I'd never look back.

That wasn't exactly true for a few different reasons.

Growing up was survival. There were years when Skylar and I didn't have anything but boxes, and boxes, of cereal that were long expired. Everything was expired but it was "okay" to eat it if it didn't kill us. We didn't have booster seats and it was okay to kick us out of the car while driving somewhere. Just walk home... *actually...* just never come back.

Sundays consisted of trying to hide under the bed or in the closets. *Fists, screams, shouts.* We wanted to play games on the internet, not go to a church where hatred was spewed in the pews and gossip.

Being chased. My first memory is one of terror as I tried to hide under the covers in my bedroom as my birth mother screamed and pounded her fists, scratching me to get the blanket protecting me, dragging me into the living room. *Fists, screams, shouts.* Often my sibling would blame me for breaking something or doing something and I'd get the hits for it. I got angry as it wasn't me but over time recognised if it wasn't me it would have been Skylar.

My birth father could not stop any of this. Contrary to the traditional Korean patriarchal culture my birth mother was the head, my birth father quiet and meek. Growing up we watched as my birth mother had issues with alcohol, toxic behaviour, leading her to being removed from several communities, all the while with her insistence that she was a strict child of God.

Sure, there were occasionally the good times awarded every few weeks after the initial abuse, the silence, once in a while the rarely spoken half apology, as the apology was the good times. The vast majority of the time was survival and relaxation only if she was passed out on the couches while the TV was on.

Our approaches to survival were near opposites. My birth mother had a lot of fantasies, illusions, a sense of self-righteousness, importance, and grandiose. She often talked about having wanted to be a famous actress with photos and books of Audrey Hepburn and other actresses around, believed the thousands and thousands she paid for ballroom lessons and competitions made her elegant and beautiful. This and other things she tried to push onto us. Skylar chose to go along and ride it out which led to things like taking ballroom lessons, dance classes, church, and more...while I refused.

I still ended up doing years of dance myself as my sibling needed a dance partner. He chose silence in front of her rather than being authentic. I refused which led to fights with my outspokenness and refusal to concede by bluntly telling my opinions on things, bearing the brunt of most of my birth mother's wrath. My first taste of freedom was running down my street in the third grade, by the end of high school I had found my comfort in 24 hour gyms and coffee shops. It was bad enough when I came out as an atheist and Skylar as agnostic leading to Sundays as they would. Coming out as queer was the last straw. Skylar followed me in coming out but, as I flaunted my identity in front of my birth parents, Skylar remained silent.

We found solace with each other and on the internet due to the fear, shame, and humiliation of our lives. Making plans and support for the other whether it be graduations, escaping our hometown, or survival.

Escape, get my own place, get custody of Skylar.

The last time I ever texted my brother I hoped xe¹⁵ would have a good school year and to let me know if he ever needed help with trans health. Eventually I got to the stage where I felt prepared for having Skylar, buying a Lego set of the Eiffel Tower for xir. At the time I worked at the airlines and with flight benefits I intended to reunite, get waffles, and offer him to get onto my benefits, join me on the east coast and go to France, and if xe wanted me to take custody of him. After getting sick, the trip was postponed to a week later, making it 470 to 471 days since I had left.

Monday, 28 September 2015, 468 days since I had left.

I got the call.

The sand in the hourglass that had stopped at 1150 days from 16 years and 10 months prior separating the age difference between my brother and I began. Skylar had an autopost on xirs Tumblr account stating his intentions of suicide.

My birth parents were notified hours after I had been but even I had not been the first to have found out: it was the non-profit we were both a part of that was informed, first. They were xirs emergency contact.

When my birth parents called to reconcile with me I was exhausted and thankful at the chance of not having to fight legally in the courts. I flew back the same night, went back to their home, and immediately took over. Prior to leaving I had them promise me they would not do the same things they had done to me to my sibling. This was not the case and even worse: frequently calling the police on my brother, kicking xir out, and more. The shock of their actions across the years finally coming into fruition was too much which allowed me to take over most of the procedures.

On the online obituary they had dead named Skylar with his full natal name, the wrong age, and terrible bland description. I completely fixed it, wrote the obituary authentically as possible. I obliged my birth mother's insistent request to add "advanced ballroom" to it even though xe had not done ballroom for years as it was her thing, not his. The funeral was on Friday a few blocks from my high school. Inappropriately laughing and saying random things while folks gave their condolences. Two days later cremating Skylar's body. The next day, a week since the nightmare had begun, I turned 20 years of age and received the funeral bill, ashes, and paid for the burial lot. Three days of cuddling the urn later we buried him. I put the first two handfuls of dirt to ensure the rainbow ribbon from our desk wouldn't move, the final shovel of dirt, put the grass layer back on top, and watered it.

In the time I had left my sibling took over from where I left off and went much farther than I had ever gone as an activist. His death went national and I was flooded, as the sole online contact, with messages of condolences and hatred. The media was the point of anger I held for weeks and even now. Several of them outed xir, had incorrect information, and even after providing the correct information or requesting to have things removed they did not correct themselves. Skylar's Tumblr note and account went viral, people began flooding his social media accounts to be added. I found my own natal name and history in some of these reports, too. Xir lost his privacy and I did too over my own past.

For years I had participated in events for trans and queer deaths by suicide, often sharing news articles and media about them without fully vetting them if at all. Now it was turning onto me directly. I felt pure anger for the first time in a long time at the media sensationalising Skylar's life and death, falsely analysing and putting into their own narratives and claims of why xe did it, statistics he did not belong in, everything was an out of control disaster. People used xir to support their view of trans deaths by suicide whether it be out of malice or an attempt to do good but only served to purpose more incorrect information. The world moved on eventually but it wasn't the end.

Initially it seemed my birth parents wanted to make up and amend what they had done. My birth mother said she would become an activist, that is if activism is lying, false stories of parenthood, and closeness. At the time I didn't know they were manipulating me out of obsession and for a need of control but I also helped enable them and their behaviour by coaching them how to speak, what to say, what to write, providing my words to make up for the lack of theirs. My words have become appropriated in her speeches since. Facts cannot be changed by disillusion, denial, or grief; facts cannot be changed by a new public persona and face exuded for acceptance from a community they said was full of sin and hell because of their religion, yet facts have largely been discounted by the media and by national LGBTQ organisations because it is the perfect tragic sob story. "Wisconsin Mother Calls for Deeper Understanding of Transgender People"

"Mom of trans kid tells heartbreaking story of suicide"

People and the media want a happy ending to this story. They've accepted this happy ending in the form of a sudden "change of heart". False allyship has allowed these voices to override real trans voices even after being informed of the truth.

Sheer inability for accountability has led to the corrosion of trust I had for national LGBTQ organisations and groups I formerly believed in, one such group being the GSA Network who worked with my birth mother to create the Skylar Lee Leadership and Activism Award scholarship. Any person who truly knew my brother would know that xe hated school.

They have allowed my birth mother to use the few old photos she has with Skylar before he transitioned as her "proof" of closeness, which further degrades

any sense of anonymity or privacy with his past. She claims to have been an “ordinary mother” until Skylar came out using false and inconsistent dates. She spreads the same false narrative of trans people hating themselves and their bodies using Skylar as her vehicle. Any truly inclusive and trans friendly organisation or media should recognise that is not okay.

Somehow people have ignored that my birth parents breached Skylar’s Facebook account and read all of xirs private messages with people, this alarmed the senders of the messages (as it is terrifying seeing a dead person suddenly having “read” your message). Perhaps this ignorance stems from the taboo of speaking against the family of the dead but our birth parents were never family for us.

Their clear eagerness to tear down the last of Skylar’s privacy has been ignored and the attempt at erasure of our histories and lives with a false narrative of “parenthood” seems to at least for now largely been successful by my birth mother. It did not help that Skylar tried to prevent a witch hunt on his Tumblr post by saying xe was not pushed to the edge by family, adding Korean American culture has become a scapegoat to blame for transphobia and homophobia, which are legitimate issues that unfortunately he helped by not being truthful for the sake of trying to not become a sob story.

The greatest disappointment in all of this has come from people who intimately have known or know of the truth but say if what she’s saying is doing good then that’s all that matters. People ignore her inconsistencies and lies with her narrative, her illusion of a relationship in which she imagines happened with Skylar (she was never a mother to us, we were predominantly raised by other people), history of abuse, because it is for the “greater good”.

People want a happy ending and with my birth mother have been swayed by her inconsistent sob story as an “ordinary mother” of a nationally recognised dead trans and queer youth activist: the tragic story they want to hear. She is being given awards, making speeches at conferences, and more, all being taken word for word because she simply happened to be the birth mother of a dead child.

She has forgotten Skylar’s request:

“In conclusion, I am a depressed teen like many others. However, what I am not, is a sob story. Don’t turn my name into a hash tag. Don’t treat this like glory

suicide-fest. I am not killing myself because I am trans and queer. However what I do know, is that when trans and queer kids complete suicide, that there is a chain reaction. This is only heightened by the media portrayal of us being sob stories. I am not a sob story, do not turn me into one.”

Skylar and I both made mistakes, terrible decisions at times. Sometimes we were hateful at ourselves, each other, our homes, the world. Other times we were in love with the world. We were both trying to survive. Our lives are too complex and intersectional for clear headlines, easy to understand narratives and trajectories, or clickbait.

My younger brother may have lost xirs privacy. Yet I am now the last survivor of shared experiences and I will share our valid and raw authenticity and histories until my own end.

Privacy On The Margins by Morgan Potts

Reclaiming my privacy has been important both as an activist and immigrant, and on a personal level to regain control over my life.

Tech stuff is socially inaccessible to femmes and queers and anyone who's not a straight white dude, but we're using it anyway.

Privacy is especially important for anyone who transgresses social and political boundaries. People on the margins of society do that just by existing. State surveillance is everyone's problem; but it's a bigger problem for those seen as threats to the state.

I use encrypted communications to: separate my personal life from my sex work, and keep myself and my clients safe; communicate with my fiancé about our marriage and the immigration paperwork; organize with activists; organize with other sex workers; and sell hormones to my trans friends who can't get them through "official" channels. I also use encrypted messaging to chat with "baby trans" people who are just beginning to explore their genders and are nervous about being outed.

My threats as a queer and trans immigrant, activist, and sex worker are personal and from the US and UK states. I need to ensure that my communication about activism and political dissent isn't too unpalatable for the state, or I risk detention and deportation. There is a constant underlying threat, and it is very stressful. I'm about to get married to one of my partners in order to legitimize my immigration status, which will put us both under extra state surveillance.

Organizing with activists requires secure channels of communication. It means keeping information secret from all but those who need to know, and until the moment they need to know it. My role in direct actions has been one of support, not leadership, which usually means I hear about the general location of the site a few days prior, and the exact location less than an hour prior. Some activist groups I've worked with prefer [Telegram](#), but I favor [Signal](#), honestly just on the word of some of my more infosec-experienced friends.

As a sex worker I'm careful (now) to vet my potential clients to protect myself (and, less importantly, to protect them). But most of the violence that sex workers face is at the hands of the police and the state, not from clients.

The work I do isn't illegal, but it provokes scrutiny. I also make an effort to keep my sex work "identity" very separate from my personal/public identity, by having separate devices and accounts and photographs for each. I've changed my habits on social media, and now I only post about places I've already been rather than places I'm going to, and at least a day later.

But this isn't foolproof. Once a client asked how I was and, feeling particularly proud of myself I said I was great because I'd just been published in the Guardian (under my real name). He shamelessly said he knew, and proceeded to tell me all about the topic without realizing how uncomfortable and dangerous that it was for me. He's now been blacklisted on workers' forums for being a disrespectful creep (if you're reading this, Rob, get lost).

Being trans and queer and a sex worker also makes me vulnerable to personal attacks from strangers and radical "feminists" on the internet. I'm careful to protect my personal information so that the transphobic, queerphobic, whorephobic abuse I get is limited to my public online accounts and doesn't bleed into my physical reality.

Trans people are consistently denied access to healthcare in the UK. There are lots of online support groups which have varying levels of privacy and anonymity, and the most-discussed topics are how to navigate the healthcare system to get access to hormones and other gender-affirming treatment.

I use Signal, an end-to-end encrypted secure messaging app, to discuss hormones with trans people who are struggling to get them on the NHS. If I'm careful, I'm able to get testosterone for my friends who need it but can't get it because the NHS is too slow and dismissive, and the costs of private care are too high.

We also use encrypted chat to discuss forging documents that assist in changing gender markers or convincing GPs to give them a "bridging" prescription while they wait on the NHS. People are very resourceful. This can slash the wait time for people getting on hormones from several years to a few weeks.

I've had many closeted trans people message me semi-privately (on insecure channels like facebook messenger or twitter DMs) about their genders and transness. Like me, in the past, their primary threat isn't the state but rejection by their immediate social group; they don't care if the state reads their messages about gender feels as long as their parents and partners don't find out.

They use the internet as a safe space to explore their gender identities and get peer validation. Every trans person I know has agonized about medically transitioning because we're afraid it will warp our personalities and make us eternally unattractive; it's extremely comforting to talk to someone who's already undergone treatment to hear that this isn't the case. Then there are just as many people who need to hear that they don't have to do any medical transitioning to be trans, and they need not aspire to a binary or traditional gender expression. So we have transition-related forums, selfie-appreciation groups, and threads about how to fuck and love trans bodies.

For a long time the threat for me wasn't just the state, or identity thieves; more than anyone else it was my partner. For three years I was in an abusive relationship where my then-boyfriend cyberstalked me. He used our shared network to get access to my browser history. He would use that information to pretend he knew me better than I knew myself, and to exploit my fears. He also used a keystroke program to get my email password and therefore all my social media passwords, and made my email account passively forward him every email I sent and received.

He regularly looked at my phone too. None of my written communication was private; if I wanted a private conversation I needed to call people or speak to them in person, but of course my boyfriend curbed my social life by undermining my self-esteem and explicitly forbidding me to talk to some of my friends.

He blocked my ex's friends from my facebook account in a fit of jealousy and it felt less embarrassing to let them believe that I impulsively cut them out than to tell them the truth about my controlling boyfriend.

I now use two-step verification wherever I can, a password manager with unique and high-entropy passphrases, and I have a strong passphrase on my hard drive. Reclaiming my privacy has been important both as an activist and immigrant,

and on a personal level to regain control over my life. It's been empowering to realize that tools and methods which my ex used against me can be frustrated and blocked with tools of my own. Now my ex would need access to my phone (which is encrypted with its own passphrase) in order to gain access to my email or social media accounts. My confidence in my privacy from the prying eyes of the state is medium to low, but at least I'm fairly confident that my abusive ex can't track my movements across the city anymore—and if he did, my friends have bats at the ready.

Convincing my friends and clients to use secure channels for communication has been a challenge: not because they're lazy or they don't have a stake in it, but because everything tech is still extremely inaccessible to people who aren't already steeped in it. The learning curve is high, and the culture around computer science, coding, and information security is still misogynistic and queerphobic. Women and femmes need to prove themselves in a way that men don't. Older people (most of my clients) are justifiably intimidated by it. Even writing this article now, I feel like a fraud because I don't have fully-blown expertise in surveillance self-defense. I'm still learning about threats to my security, and how to manage the threats that I already know about.

I'm trying to change that in the small ways that I can by employing good practices and encouraging my friends and family to do the same.

Earlier this month¹⁶ I ran a diceware skill-share workshop in my living room. We set up strong passphrases on our accounts and hard drives, and installed [Tor browser](#) and Signal. My white suburban mom is using Signal now, in solidarity with me and other people who need to disappear into the Signal crowd lest using it becomes a way to identify “undesirables”. My friends and I have “email encryption and tea” meet-ups. The sense of camaraderie among privacy activists is really encouraging and heartwarming. I highly recommend looking into crypto parties, where experienced users explain infosec and help less experienced users set up tools like PGP, and they exist all over the world. Oh, and don't forget to cover your webcam.

The Myth Of The Anonymous Troll by Violet Hargrave

As no shortage of articles will tell you, social media sites in general suffer from a very serious “trolling problem.”

There’s a fair bit of confusion on what exactly having a “trolling problem” means, with some very sheltered people confused at why victims can’t “ignore a few people shouting irate nonsense at them.” There is not nearly enough discussion of just how the disgusting comments highlighted in articles on this topic are accompanied by police battering down doors after receiving calls about “executing hostages,” death threats made to elderly grandparents, child protective services being called to investigate abuse allegations of siblings/cousins/children, or the evergreen favorite of employers being bombarded with calls and emails accusing victims of every unsavory act under the sun until the victim is fired, if only to shut them up.

While the more serious and life-endangering aspects of these harassment campaigns are hard to find easy solutions for, running aground against woefully out of date police departments, or the anonymity of disposable prepaid phones and spoofed e-mail addresses, the one thing everyone seems to agree on is that social media sites really need to institute policies where everyone must register under their real name, because trying to hold anonymous posters accountable is impossible.

Unfortunately, this seemingly common sense approach doesn’t come close to addressing the real problems, as any victim of such an attack can tell you, and as sociologists and abuse prevention experts constantly explain in public talks.

First off, the “trolls” aren’t anonymous. There are a few moves in the serial abuser’s playbook which involve registering a huge number of dummy accounts and using them all to send similar messages, to conduct DDoS attacks or harass employers with “widespread e-mail campaigns,” but those are inherently disposable single-shot accounts, never to be used again whether they’re banned from a service or not, and don’t make up a significant percentage of any

dedicated harassment campaign's activity. The persistent sources of abuse- the organizers, the stalkers, the performative types who compete with each other to see who can make the most outrageous posts or provoke the strongest reactions, almost always do so under their real names, or at least under professional names they can't simply step away from.

In many cases, the people who orchestrate these sorts of campaigns earn a living off it. Crowdfunding sites like Patreon are rife with "internet personalities" who produce rambling 4 hour youtube videos consisting of nothing but a neonazi staring into a camera and delivering rambling monologues about the imagined crimes of arbitrarily chosen victims, or reposting videos from feminists and other social activists, pausing after every sentence to make a rambling 'counterpoint.' This is a hugely lucrative business for some, [bringing in thousands of dollars each month](#) between ads and subscription based donations. This of course on top of the [financial backing millionaire neo-nazi Palmer Luckey](#).

Those who don't have the savvy or the drive to monetize their hatred need their names attached to satisfy their egos. Twitter in particular is swarming with monstrous little scumbags who make games out of harassment, keeping score by how many women they've been blocked by, or how many tweets they got in before a target stopped responding. Others, like [ego driven misogynist Markus Persson](#), or genocide-minded bigots like [Cathy Brennan](#) seem to take perverse joy in how many of their followers will attack a target after nothing but a pointed finger and display of disapproval.

Meanwhile, it's the victims of these attacks who suffer the most from efforts to "combat anonymity." [Facebook's real name policy](#) is routinely abused to shut down the profiles of people of color, trans people, and those posting under pseudonyms, specifically to avoid the sort of harassment the policy ostensibly exists to prevent. Trans women under the age of forty are exceptionally likely to spend years exploring their true gender via roleplaying games before coming out to friends and family, particularly online games like World of Warcraft. Online gaming communities are also [notorious for violent queerphobia and misogyny](#), so when Blizzard Entertainment's instituted a policy tying accounts to legal names, staggering numbers of trans players were suddenly exposed, and women both cis and trans, already facing abuse and harassment in-game, suddenly had to contend with their names being readily available, to search for social media accounts and home addresses.

This in turn ties back to the most dangerous aspects of “trolling problems.” Even without the aid of real name policies, uncovering the contact information of victims in order to further escalation is a huge priority of harassment campaigns. Take the [case of Sarah Nyberg](#), an unassuming young woman pseudonymously discussing the transphobic comments she received on twitter to a modest audience. After over a year of traditional abuse, “trolls” compromised the security of the server hosting an old user image of hers, discovered her real name, then used Facebook searches and ancestry websites to research her entire extended family, and publicly accuse her of sexually abusing her youngest living relative.

Such efforts to strip victims of their anonymity (often referred to as “doxxing”) are frequently coordinated by means of dedicated stalking sites, like [8chan's /baphomet/board](#), or [Kiwi Farms](#). Social media sites routinely refuse to treat links to these sites as harassment, claiming to only have jurisdiction over what they personally host, but have similar excuses when people’s personal information is directly exposed by way of their services.

Personally, I have been inundated for months with tweets from users advertising their ties to Kiwi Farms, shouting names and attaching photos of various people they believe me to secretly be. When I report these, the response from Twitter is that they will only remove the posts if I can provide them with photo IDs, proving myself to actually be each of these random men. Random innocents are being harassed now in an effort to attack me, and the only action the platform is willing to take would be to confirm to my stalkers that they finally guessed the right name if I provided verification.

How then, one might wonder, do these nefarious creeps avoid the consequences of repeatedly, if not regularly, leading campaigns of hatred and abuse against innocent people? Campaigns so severe as to end careers, force people into hiding, and capture international media attention? It isn’t that they’re anonymous. Perhaps their rampages aren’t as high a priority as others? Not the case. Having personally reviewed tens of thousands of cases of reported abuse, first time and minor offenders are far more likely to see action taken against them than high profile repeat offenders.

Perhaps then, there are mitigating circumstances? Exceptions for people with a big claim to fame unrelated to their campaigns of abuse? That would certainly

explain why Persson gets a pass, having sold the company behind Minecraft for an absurd sum of money before retiring to his current lifestyle of bringing hell down on women he gleefully refers to with the most unspeakable obscenity in the country he currently calls home. It would also cover the lack of consequences for Adam Baldwin, the C-list actor who gave the most famous sustained campaign of abuse in history its name by referring to what was then called “The Quinnsspiracy” with the hashtag [#gamergate](#). Perhaps we forgive all the bizarre abuse and photos of squirrels hanging upside down by their testicles because we remember him as Jayne on Firefly?

If that were the case, it still wouldn't let Brennan off the hook. Her entire life revolves around the vindictive, life-endangering persecution of trans women and has for years. And it most certainly wouldn't excuse the actual creator of Gamergate, Eron GJoni, a man whose entire claim to fame in life is recruiting an army of honest to goodness neo-nazis to punish a woman he used to punch in the face for dumping him, and continuing to direct their attacks as they grew into a general purpose hate group responsible for so much senseless abuse and ruination that the governments of several countries have drafted new legislation in direct response. One would reasonably assume that at the very least, he'd be suspended from the social media sites specifically called out in the restraining order issued against him. Yet there he is, under his real name, running crowdfunded efforts to continue tormenting the same victims.

Twitter considers stalking and abuse to be examples of “active engagement” that drive ad revenue, and outright reward some of the worst offenders with special treatment. While they eventually made a big public display of suspending the primary account of Milo Yiannopoulos, an offender so over the top, blatant, and clearly dangerous as to essentially be a cartoon villain, this was done purely as a symbolic gesture in the face of massive blowback against twitter as a company for [his campaign against actress Leslie Jones](#).

Prior to his banning, Yiannopoulos was the specific subject of many meetings, discussing literally thousands of clear cut cases where he exhibited behavior unacceptable by any standard. Willfully endangering the lives of women he suspects are trans, attacking their character with completely fabricated stories of drug abuse and child endangerment, sharing sexually explicit photos of teens, encouraging people to visit child porn sites, and once distributing a photo of a victim's dead sister with a nazi flag added to the background.

The sad truth of the matter is that social media sites actively enjoy hosting these sorts of serial harassment campaigns. Publicly of course, they constantly issue statements to the contrary, affirming their commitment to safety and decency, and announcing formal partnerships with anti-abuse organizations to help clean house. Given that, it would frankly be absurdly cynical to speculate that they secretly love their hordes of trolls.

As it happens though, we don't need to speculate. Confidentially prevents me getting into the specifics, but the details of meetings conducted within these "partnerships" reveal what sorts of high profile abuse cases have been brought to their attention behind closed doors, the pathetic excuses given not to act on them, and the honest reasons that come through when those come out. Many of the sordid details are also publicly available.

Reddit's founders have admitted, in public discussions on their internal operations, to introducing "gold" as a way to fan the flames of abuse on the site while profiting off it, and [chose to oust a CEO](#) rather than shut down forums openly dedicated to white supremacy, with [outright unspeakable names](#).

Twitter considers these actions, and the torrents of crowd sourced hate that follow vital to the site's profitability, generating huge page view spikes and accompanying ad exposures, going as far as to promote Yiannopoulos' "articles" as "top news stories" relating to his targets.

Facebook is notorious for enabling bigotry and [silencing activists](#) through its features, blaming it on flaws of the system, but [actively patrols for even the slightest sleights against dangerous bigots](#).

The problem has never been that anonymity allows abusive people to avoid consequences. There simply aren't consequences for abusive people.

Digital Security for Trans* Communities *by* Norman Shamas & Anonymous Trans* Activists

I want to focus on reality. The reality trans*¹⁷ communities in the US face every day related to their identities.

This isn't about possible threats from nation states or how to protect against a surveillance state that more often targets marginalized communities. It is about lived realities. Due to constraints, it does not include all realities or situations that trans* communities face.¹⁸

Most importantly, this is meant as a starting point. There aren't easy answers and, sometimes, the questions haven't even been asked.

To get started, let's go back to January 2014 when [Grantland published an article that outed a trans woman](#). This article was nominally about a golf putter and its claims of scientific superiority. However, the article turned into an investigation into the creator of the putter. Investigations that dove into her background and ultimately 'uncovered' her transition.¹⁹ All of this was part of an article that was meant to evaluate the claims of the science of the putter, not the scientist.²⁰

One of the most terrifying parts of this article is that this type of investigation into a person's background is an acceptable practice in journalism if someone becomes a 'public' figure. These types of investigations are also an ever-present threat for trans* people through background checks by employers, financial institutions, health insurance providers, and other social institutions.

This threat from background investigations makes identity management, privacy, and security difficult for trans* communities. It is this reality that remains excluded from digital security resources—even ones that claim to directly address the needs of trans* communities.²¹

Let's go through two examples to show what identity management for a trans* person is like. These examples are based on real situations, but are composites of

multiple examples to protect anonymity.

Case 1: Closeted Trans Person*

The Internet provides some great opportunities for closeted trans* persons to explore new identities (as adage from 1993 goes, “on the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog”²²). However, there has been an increasing trend in social media and other online communities to verify identities and prevent anonymous users. One prominent example is Facebook’s ‘real name’ policy. Often times these policies require submission of government issued identification in order to reinstate an account or verify identity.

Trans* people face a great deal of emotional distress due, in part, to a fragmentation of and/or non-representative identities. For a closeted trans* person, this emotional distress is present, but the comfort that comes from coming out publicly as trans* might not be present—only a feeling that a different type of identity provides help.²³

In these situations, one thing that a closeted trans* person can do is to experiment with identities and identity presentations. Their digital identity can be molded to how they want to be perceived with little to no relation to their birth identity. They might even transition into this identity.

Now, imagine you are a closeted trans* person using Airbnb, a social room rental service, while traveling. This decision arose out of cost and the ability to present yourself how you want to your host. You are careful in the hosts you select and use it when traveling with trusted friends to rent out an ‘entire home’ to prevent any potentially awkward encounters with the host.

Then, out of the blue, Airbnb asks you to verify your identity shortly before you begin a trip.²⁴ The only way to verify your identity is to send in a government issued ID²⁵ to their 3rd party vendor, Jumio. If you don’t verify your identity, then your current reservations will be canceled and your account will be deactivated.

What do you do in this situation? You know your ID does not have the same information you’ve included in your Airbnb profile. If your account gets deactivated, then you will have to book through another service at much higher financial cost.

In this situation, the biggest concern is around being outed. Who knows who has access to verification information at Jumio and Airbnb. Sending your data to Jumio would require some explanation of name differences without the guarantee that it would be accepted. Is that information available to Jumio's other clients who use them to verify identities? Even if your account gets reactivated, will Airbnb protect your privacy and rights as a trans* user?²⁶

The available resources I have reviewed do not provide any assistance in the creation and maintenance of identities in a way that is trans* inclusive (in some instances despite their claims²⁷). The threat model that is addressed in these resources is typically the creation of a new/fake identity to insulate activists attacked by online trolls and misogynistic movements, such as Gamergate. While a valid and important threat model, it is very different from the needs for trans* people.

In *The Smart Girl's Guide to Privacy*, Violet Blue provides some information about protecting data when sending in an identity document (ID). However, it is under the assumption the service you are sending your ID to already has your information. In particular, Blue is writing about the need to send in government ID to get information removed from people searcher sites.

In addition, the available guides are primarily written for laptop or computer use. Some of the guides will go so far as to recommend installing a new operating system that are oriented for security through isolation—a big request of an average user.

The reality of being trans* in the US includes lost economic opportunities. Part of this is related to marginalization and bias in the hiring process. But, there is also the fact that hormone therapy and gender confirmation surgery cost a lot of money and are not always covered by insurance.

What all of this equates to is a different perspective. One that these guides ignore in their framing (including intended threats, access to technology, etc) and intended audience.

Case 2: Transitioned Trans Person*

This second example might seem more familiar. It is the story of a person who has transitioned and is no longer using their birth name in public.²⁸ Depending

on their situation, they might have undergone hormone therapy and/or gender confirmation surgery. They have removed all the pictures and references to their birth identity that they could. There is still information connecting them to their past—snippets, like where they went to school or shared connections—because they didn't want to create a fake identity, but transition into a new one.

A number of years after transitioning, someone posts on social media asking if this trans* person is someone they knew from high school and uses their birth name. This is extremely concerning, because even though they have transitioned, they don't want people knowing their birth identity lest it be used as a form of harassment.²⁹ *What are they to do? What could they have done to prevent this?*

At the moment, there seems to be a lack of resources to address this need. To complicate issues, in the U,S there is no federal standard for something like a name change—the procedure(s) vary by the state. Many states require the publication of a name change, putting trans* people at high risk.³⁰ For example, Washington, DC removed this requirement after it led to the deaths of trans* people.³¹

At a minimum, any resource on digital/information security for trans* people should recognize these legal requirements, the related risk, and provide information or resources to get more information. In addition, organizations focusing on policy in the digital security and privacy space, should ally with trans* focused legal organizations, such as the [Transgender Law Center](#), to jointly advocate for reform of legal and digital laws or policies that endanger trans* people.³²

Suggestions

At this time, the digital security and privacy community has largely ignored trans* communities.³³ Despite trans* community members, the community itself is typically absent from diversity initiatives or community leadership roles. There are also very few trainers in the community who are trans* or work with trans* communities.

Despite this lack of representation, the community claims to be addressing the needs of trans* people. In my experience, that is not the case. Below are a few suggestions to reduce trans* marginalization in digital security and privacy.

- **Don't claim to be speaking to or for the trans* community (or any group) if you have not interacted or worked with them.** While I would think that this is an obvious point, there are numerous examples of the digital security and privacy community doing just that for trans* people.
- **Stop using LGBTQIA+: refer to the specific community or communities that are represented.** While connected to the previous point, it deserves explicit mention that using LGBTQIA+ (or any variation) is inherently reductive and marginalizing. I understand this is language that is used in policy and by donors—so it will still be in use. But the reality, in the US and abroad, is that LGBTI³⁴ typically refers only to gay men. Instead of creating a false impression of shared goals and needs, explicitly state which communities are represented or discussed.
- **Build communities that are trans* inclusive.** Inclusion and which groups are represented are choices made by a community. When 'diversity' initiatives and community events do not include or consider trans* people, they are not trans* inclusive. At a minimum, ensure you have a code of conduct that addresses typical forms of harassment and anxiety trans* people face (e.g., intentional misgendering, anxiety around which bathroom to use).
- **Fund work with trans* communities across the globe (including in the US).** At the moment little to no funding goes to projects, tools, or organizations working primarily with trans* communities. Some reasons for this are restrictions to funding work to particular locations and funding descriptions that more readily accept another secure messaging tool than a trans*-focused policy organization. If the digital security and privacy community wants to support trans* communities, as it claims to do, provide them with financial support.

Taking the above suggestions is not enough. The digital security and privacy community needs to start recognizing and addressing threat models that are relevant to trans* communities.

The trans* communities that I have worked with do not always share concerns or even legal and social risks. Due to the lack of tools or resources aimed at trans* communities, I have found digital security and privacy to require a largely human approach to risk management. In other words, something that varies from person to person.

A good start to building tools and resources that are trans* inclusive is to recognize the complexity of threat modeling for trans* communities.

By taking a trans* inclusive approach to Facebook's real name policy, a form of identity verification, it is clear that the issue is not just with what is considered a 'real' name, but also the notion that a government ID is the only way to verify an identity.^{35 36}

Trans* inclusive digital security and privacy inherently means an expansion of how digital identity is discussed. At the moment, the focus is on rigid sandboxing through tools like [Qubes OS](#). While Qubes has a place in digital security and privacy for trans* communities, tools that allow more flexible and permeable identity boundaries and resources that help manage identities and data that already exist and are potentially outside the user's control are also needed.

These suggestions are not the only ways for digital security and privacy to start addressing needs of and building new tools and resources for trans* communities.

I encourage others from trans* communities and who work with trans* communities to speak up and join the conversation to increase the trans* inclusive tools and resources available.

Where Do We Go From Here? *by Sarah Jamie Lewis*

I choose to believe that I can live in a world where I don't have to fear.

We saw signs many years back, we see it now, we will see it tomorrow.

As the media dances an ever more ominous tone it is clear that fascism is alive, it is strong and, remember, it is always good for the economy.

Progress on trans rights, gay rights, civil rights, human rights will halt, and reverse. The train has been running on borrowed tracks. Across the world we are seeing the rise of radical right wing organizations and, in many cases, we have seen them be given the reigns of government.

What a government is powerful enough to give, it is powerful enough to take. We can no longer afford to have optimism in progress being a one way street. The right to self determination, the right to build and raise a family, the right to healthcare are all being eroded, especially for those in queer communities.

Climate change, human displacement and the inevitable famine and war that follow them are now almost a certainty. We are over the edge, through the looking glass and there is no turning back.

As I write this there are multiple pieces of legislation in tens of countries that roll back or simply oppress those who are, or are seen to be, non-cishetnormative. Laws that would make it difficult for transgender people to obtain any kind of healthcare; laws that deny the equal rights to non-heterosexual couples; laws that make it impossible for polyamorous partners to visit their loved ones in hospital; laws that ignore or deny non-binary people the right to self determination.

As a society we have reached a fork in the road. One of those forks might see us grow, and love and explore this vast and ancient universe. The other will see our home destroyed, our civilization reduced to ashes before it has a chance to spread its wings.

As a community we either live, fully and without exception or oppression, or we die.

I choose to believe that we can grow, and love. I choose to believe that I can live in a world where I don't have to fear holding my partners' hand, where I don't have to fear for my friends around the world.

I choose to believe that I can live in a world where I don't have to fear.

We have heard stories from a vast cross-section of humanity who also intersect with properties society has chosen to stigmatize, ostracize. They, we, I do not have the luxury of waiting for humanity to decide to be better.

This is real life, and there is no next time around.

But, ultimately, all of that was just words. We need action. We need infrastructure.

We need to *Start Exercising Unwaivering Compassion*: There will be calls for unity. These should be ignored. The liberals will seek to improve the economy while turning a blind eye to the abuses of power to come. Some will fight the traditional political fight, and might even win, but not before huge damage has been done to our families, our friends and our planet. Throwing a minority under the bus for a chance at incremental economic progress is bullshit and anyone who advocates for such is not an ally. There can be no compromises when it comes to the assertion of queer rights and lives.

We need to *Fund Crisis Orgs*: With our time, and with our money. The next few years are going to be rough for many groups. No government is likely to continue funding their efforts for long. We need to understand that it will get worse before it gets better, and we need to invest effort into bringing as many people as we can along with us. We need to provide community resources for those who feel trapped by their existence. Suicide hotlines, relief shelters, free clinics, as well as community grants and funds are all essential to ensuring our future.

We need to *Start Enforcing Consent*: We are all different and I believe that we are all capable of love and compassion. Systems of power are design and structured to remove agency, to divide, and to rule. The only way I can see for all

humans on this planet to be free, to have agency is for us to withdraw our consent from these systems, or at least, to start enforcing it.

This means using tools like [Signal](#) to encrypt our phone calls and messages, this means lobbying existing systems to implement ways of blocking and otherwise withdrawing consent to communicate.

We need to *Build, Improve and Use Alternative Information Infrastructures*: Rulers can only rule if they have information, about events, about people. Prevent mass spying through encryption and anonymity technologies like Signal and [Tor](#).

Without information it is impossible to rule effectively without consent.

We need to make these technologies better, to make it possible for abused spouses, sex workers, closeted children and everyone else on this planet to find them and to use them. **A tool is nothing if it is not usable.**

We need more. We need to decentralize the media, decentralize the news and to decentralize the networks. We need better tools for organizing, ones not controlled by a central corporation, ones that are private by default.

We need to tell our stories. We need to support each other.

I don't intend to go quietly into the darkness. Neither should you.

Existence is Resistance.

Welcome to the Future.

Mascherari Press

[Mascherari Press](#) publishes unique insights on anonymity & privacy to understand how they affect the lives of those that rely on them and how to build new and better tools that empower people through them.

In order to understand what to build, we need to understand people and to understand people, we need to hear their stories.

When we started this project we didn't have a good idea of what the end product would be, but we knew we wanted to achieve two goals:

1. Tell untold stories that help empower marginalized communities
2. Pay authors to tell their stories - too many publications profit off of the stories of marginalized people without feeding any of that back into the communities.

What we have presented in this book is, we hope, the start of a long line of publishing projects that meet these goals.

Thank you for reading.

-Mascherari Press

Notes

- 1** Cisgender Person: A person whose gender identity matches their assigned sex at birth.↵
- 2** Transgender Person: A person whose gender identity conflicts with their assigned sex at birth.↵
- 3** Intersex Person: A person whose biology does not align with society's traditional definition of sex.↵
- 4** Non-Binary Person: A person whose gender identity does not fit within the traditional binary (e.g. man or woman) classification of gender. An umbrella term which includes those who don't identify as any gender.↵
- 5** Two Spirit is a modern term used by some indigenous North Americans to describe certain spiritual people – gay, lesbian, bisexual and gender-variant individuals – in their communities.↵
- 6** Many of the authors throughout this book refer to the queer community with their own terms and acronyms e.g. LGBT, LGBTI, LGBTQ etc. For the most part I have chosen to retain these to reflect the diversity of terms within the community but they can and should be read as inclusive of all queer identities.↵
- 7** known as a pro-domme or a dominatrix.↵
- 8** Pansexuality is the sexual, romantic or emotional attraction towards people regardless of their sex or gender identity.↵
- 9** (Of course, I am also protecting the fantasy of me. My suitors don't want to confront domestic me.)↵

10 *Editor's Note:* Doxxing (or Doxing) is the practice of discovering & broadcasting private, sensitive identifying information about a person or group usually with the intent of harming them.↵

11 Of course it's a photo that isn't anywhere else on the web. The devil is in reverse-image search!↵

12 *Editor's Note:* Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) is an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom which regulates the powers of public bodies to carry out surveillance.↵

13 *Editor's Note:* Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) is a British intelligence and security organization responsible for providing signals intelligence (SIGINT) and information assurance to the British government and armed forces.↵

14 *Editor's Note:* This essay was written prior to March 2017. Since then the UK Government have debated amending the bill to only legislate to prevent access to "extreme pornography".↵

15 *Editor's Note:* Xe/Xir/Xirs is a gender-neutral third-person singular subject pronoun.↵

16 This article was submitted to Mascherari Press in December 2016.↵

17 *Editor's Note:* Trans* is an umbrella term used by some to refer to all of the identities within the gender identity spectrum e.g. transgender, transfeminine, transmasculine, bigender, androgynous etc.↵

18 By nature of my experiences, I am talking primarily about trans* communities in the US. The term "trans*" in and of itself is complicated and problematic, especially when talking about global communities that had unique identities prior to the categorization of specific people as "trans*."↵

19 I won't go into a critique of the Grantland article and its institutional failure here. However, the [response from the editor](#) and [critique from a reporter at ESPN](#), Grantland's parent company provide no confidence that Grantland, as a media organization, understands concerns with identity for trans* people.↵

20 This sentence purposefully borrows language used early on in the article when Caleb Hannon introduces the first communication with Dr. V. In that communication she clearly states her willingness to be interviewed only if the focus is on the science, not the scientist. Her reasons were explicitly noted as concern for safety.↵

21 This article should not be seen as bashing any of the resources named below. They are good resources and provide a lot of helpful information. However, they are not directed towards trans* persons and do not directly address their needs for digital security.↵

22 This adage comes from a [July 5, 1993 cartoon by Peter Steiner published in the New Yorker](#)↵

23 It is also important to note that a trans* person might choose to not publicly identify as trans*. Even though the example focuses on trans* people who will likely transition, the situation is still applicable to trans* people who choose not to be public about their identity.↵

24 According to Airbnb, they have been asking [random users to verify their identity since April 30, 2013](#).↵

25 For more information about Airbnb's verification process, see their [help center page on it](#).↵

26 Despite ads and marketing material directed towards the US trans* community (e.g. Airbnb's 2015 ad for the ESPYs in support of Caitlin Jenner, which is now removed from YouTube), their practices seem to indicate a lack of understanding of and training against trans* discrimination. See, for example, [their handling of a host who rejected Shadi Petosky](#).↵

27 Perhaps the most egregious example of this is Tactical Technology Collective (TTC)'s "Zen and the art of making tech work for you" guide, which explicitly claims to be for trans* activists. However, they use language that can be hostile to trans* identities. In the context of preventing online trolling, creating a fake identity for use in online social media makes sense. However, it does not apply to online trans* identities in general, despite claims to do so by the creators of the guide. Even after bringing up this language issue, TTC and

the guide creators stand by its claim to be applicable for general trans* identities online.↵

28 In these cases, the trans* person could still be closeted with certain groups, such as family.↵

29 A recent example of this is when [hate speaker Milo Yiannopoulos publicly harassed a trans woman at an event he was invited to speak at by the University of Wisconsin](#). ↵

30 While I learned about this from my work with activists and organizations, [Nico Lang published a good piece of the name change process\(es\)](#). ↵

31 This was learned from my experience and conversations with trans* activists and organizations in Washington, DC.↵

32 For example, [Electronic Frontier Foundation \(EFF\) partnered with the Transgender Law Center to reform Facebook's 'real name' policy](#) in addition to their [piece on the concerns with Facebook's policy](#).↵

33 I would like to recognize Aspiration for their consideration of trans* attendees and concerns at their Nonprofit Software Development Summit. It is the only event I have attended in the digital security and privacy (or related) community that has required pronouns on the name tags. Even small steps of inclusion, like normalizing pronoun exchange, are missing from most events.↵

34 I use the acronym LGBTI here because it tends to be the most 'inclusive' version of the acronym used by donors, policy makers, and human rights organizations.↵

35 By including this example of Facebook's real name policy I am not implying that people did not take a trans* inclusive approach to campaigning against Facebook's policy.↵

36 See Case 1, above, for a representative anecdote related to this aspect of identity management.↵