

Privacy and Self-Presentation

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Abstract

It has often been argued that one of the reasons why we should value privacy is that it enables self-presentation and impression management. According to this approach, it is valuable to be able to govern the impression one gives, as the capacity to govern impressions is an instrument by which people take care of their various social relationships. In this paper I will take a closer look at that approach on privacy, with specific reference to the alleged threats to privacy created by brain imaging technologies. I will argue that brain imaging can threaten our capacity for self-presentation, but that the link between privacy and self-presentation is only contingent, although their relation is strong. The conclusion is that *brain privacy* cannot be grounded only on the importance of self-presentation, although self-presentation provides an important reason for respecting the privacy of our inner lives.

Keywords: impressions, self-presentation, privacy, brain imaging

Introduction

It has often been emphasized that one of the reasons why we should value privacy is that it makes self-presentation and impression management possible (Gavison 1984, p. 366; Gross 1991, p. 341; Posner 1991, p. 349; Austin 2015, p. 178). According to this approach, it is valuable to be able to govern the impressions one gives, as the capacity to govern impressions is an instrument by which people take care of their various social relationships. The social relationships, in turn, may be valuable *per se*, for instance in the case of friendship, or they may have instrumental value, as in the case of doctor-patient relationship. Either way, the importance of maintaining various distinct social spheres and specific relationships is often cited as one of the most significant reasons to value privacy. Given the way the world happens to be, protecting privacy is necessary, or at least very important.

In what follows I aim to take a closer look at the approach just described, with specific reference to the alleged threats to privacy created by brain imaging technologies such as fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging). To a certain extent, brain imaging technologies allow researchers to reveal not only possible physical anomalies in the human brain but also persons' inner lives, that is, their thoughts and emotions, for instance. The data that brain imaging provides is not limited to medical information, but extends to mental processes that can be considered even more personal than medical information. Potentially, brain imaging and other technologies used by brain scientists can also reveal beliefs and attitudes that are unknown to people who have them. The fields of application of brain sciences and, in particular, brain imaging are expanding. The question is not merely one of research ethics. Brain imaging technologies raise significant questions of privacy in various social contexts, including workplaces and courts (Uttal 2009, pp. 102-106; Richmond 2012, p. 1). Therefore, it is important to consider whether brain imaging can threaten our capacity to present ourselves and manage impressions.

'Self-presentation' and 'impression management' are relatively familiar terms, especially in social psychology, but they are used in various senses. In what follows, I do not presuppose that influencing other people's impressions is always motivated by strategic reasons (i.e. that a person who aims to influence people's impressions of herself always does so in order to achieve some further goals). Nor do I presuppose that the impression the person intends to give is always meant to meet other people's expectations. Instead, I assume that a person may want to give a certain impression of herself only because the impression is in her view appropriate and reflects her self-understanding and a relevant part of the picture she has of herself (see further Velleman 2009, p. 67).

I will argue that brain imaging and similar technologies can indeed have a negative influence on our chances to govern other people's impressions of us. However, I will also argue that although the link between privacy and self-presentation is strong, their relation is only contingent. It follows that *brain privacy* cannot be grounded only on the importance of being able to govern impressions. Self-presentation provides one important reason for respecting brain privacy. Another implication is that, in some cases, brain imaging and its applications may threaten our capacity for self-presentation while not threatening our immediate interests in privacy.

Self-Presentation and the Control of Information

The most common variant of the thesis that privacy is important because it enables us to keep up appearances and influence impressions people have about us is based on the idea that privacy allows people to control information about them. The ‘strategic version’ of the *control argument* can be found from Richard Posner’s ‘Economic Theory of Privacy’. He argues that ‘the demand for private information [...] is readily understandable where the existence of an actual or potential relationship, business or personal, creates opportunities for gain by the demander’ (Posner 1991, p. 349). This formulation suggests that Posner’s aim is merely to *explain* why we value privacy, but it is quite clear that the point is (also) to say that having a right to privacy is *justified* because of the strategic benefits that such right provides. Lisa Austin has recently defended a similar idea. In her view, privacy norms ‘secure our ability – let’s call it our power – to self-presentation’, and the right to privacy allows individuals to hide information that is ‘important to particular social interactions’ (Austin 2015, p. 178 and p. 182).¹

Posner and Austin do not claim that the benefits privacy brings are related to social relationships, although they point out that a person can *use* social relationships when she tries to achieve the benefits. The idea that our interest in privacy is primarily a social matter is defended by Hyman Gross who is among those who base their arguments on the view that we should value privacy, as it makes self-presentation possible and enables us to influence others’ impressions concerning ourselves. Gross (1991, p. 341) argues:

Why is privacy of the person important? This calls mainly for consideration of what is necessary to maintain an integrated personality in a social setting. Although we are largely unaware of what influences us at the time, we are constantly concerned to control how we appear to others, and act to implement this concern in ways extremely subtle and multifarious. Models of image and behavior are noticed, imitated, adopted, so that nuances in speech, gesture, facial expression, *politesse*, and much more become a person as known on an occasion. The deep motive is to influence the reactions of others, and this is at the heart of human social accommodation. Constraints to imitation and disguise can become a pathological problem of serious proportions when concern with appearances interferes with normal functioning, but normal behavior allows, indeed requires, that we perform critically in presenting and withholding in order to effect certain appearances. If these editorial efforts are not to

¹ Austin (2015, 182) refers to Posner and emphasizes that while Posner’s argument may be ‘overstated,’ as it stresses the manipulative aspects of our behavior, the argument makes nonetheless an ‘important point.’

be wasted, we must have a large measure of control over what of us is seen and heard, when, where, and by whom.

Gross (1991, p. 341) suggests that the basic motive for securing privacy is that it allows us to ‘maintain an integrated personality in a social setting’, but he does not explicitly argue that integrated personality is particularly needed in maintaining different social relationships. The claim that it is *social relationships* that are the real issue is explicitly stated by Ruth Gavison in her classic paper on ‘Privacy and the Limits of Law’. According to her, one of the key functions of privacy is that it promotes ‘liberty in ways that enhance the capacity of individuals to create and maintain human relations of different intensities’ and ‘enables individuals to establish a plurality of roles and presentations to the world’ (Gavison 1984, p. 365). Self-presentation, understood as the ‘control over “editing” one’s self,’ is of crucial importance, as ‘it is through the images of others that human relations are created and maintained’ (Gavison 1984, p. 366). As a concrete example, Gavison mentions relationships that are ‘highest in one’s emotional hierarchy.’ Privacy enables individuals to live in such relationships ‘without denying one’s inner thoughts, doubts, or wishes that the other partner cannot accept.’ One can simply hide those feelings as carefully as possible. (Gavison 1984, p. 366.)

The point of the control argument is that successful self-presentation often requires that one’s audience is unaware of certain things, and that many privacy norms (such as ‘one should not reveal confidential information’) are meant to help people to keep outsiders ignorant of those things. This argument has intuitive plausibility, and it rests on a rather harmless idea, namely that the process of self-presentation consists of an action or actions. Sometimes people act in certain ways just because they want to foster a certain impression of themselves, but often our actions have goals that are not related to impressions and are only *constrained* by our interests in governing the impressions others will have (Leary 1995, p. 3). For instance, a person may have lunch because she is hungry, but use fork and knife in civilized ways in order to give a civilized impression to her foreign colleague. The main message of the control argument – that a violation of privacy may spoil a person’s self-presentation – is easy to prove by an example. Suppose that a person would like to present herself as an ordinary middle class person to her relatives. However, without anyone’s permission, a relative who works in a bank has gone through her bank account details and noticed that she is actually extremely wealthy. As a consequence, the person fails to give the intended impression of herself, at least to the relative who has violated her right to privacy. Possibly, her failure influences their future relations.

Notice that the notion of impression has an everyday meaning that is not used in the control argument. A philosopher who is annoyed about her colleague's negative review of her book may give an 'impression' that she is not annoyed when they meet at a cocktail party – although everyone knows very well that she is annoyed (Nagel 1998, p. 12). This is not the sense of 'impression' we are interested in here. We are interested in the impressions that are meant to be *believed*. The philosopher who pretends not to be annoyed tries to make relevant parties believe that in her view it is inappropriate to discuss the review at the cocktail party. That is the impression she wants to give to her audience – rather than the impression that she is not annoyed.² In general, a typical self-presenter chooses which aspects of her inner life (thoughts, opinions, needs, feelings) and personality (appearance, character, talents, history) her behavior expresses, but of course it is also possible to try to mislead one's audience by deceit and feigning (Goffman 1959, p. 14). In the bank account example, the self-presenter wants to mislead her audience. Still, many of us would not morally condemn her, given that her performance does not involve actual lying or anything like that.³ The control argument does not justify feigning to an intolerable extent – although this can of course be a matter of discussion. Some people think that the 'emphasis upon the maintenance of a private side to life tends to encourage hypocritical and deceitful ways of behavior' (Wasserstrom 1984, p. 331). (Obviously, when a person tries to deceive, say, tax authorities by giving a wrong impression of his wealth, he has no right to hide the relevant facts, and in this case his capacity for self-presentation need not be supported.)

However, even if the control argument seems morally acceptable, some clarifications are in order. Here I will mention only two important points. The first point is that only some privacy violations reveal facts that people would like to hide. Most of us agree that privacy norms such as 'one should not eavesdrop' or 'one should not stalk' are very important, but when a person or an organization (such as NSA) violates those norms, it does not necessarily follow that now something secret or

2 Not all impressions we give are under our control. Some impressions are involuntarily 'given off.' We could speak about active and passive self-presentation. Dean Cocking (2008, p. 129) argues that 'the presentation of more "passive" aspects of our selves often provides the object for the expression of certain relational aspects of respect for another's privacy. For the purpose of respecting people's claim to keep certain of their thoughts and feelings to themselves and to have some choice and control over the "self" they present to us for public engagement or scrutiny we can, and often should, choose put aside what their conflicting, less chosen and controlled self-presentations might tell us. We can leave unacknowledged or unaddressed these thoughts and feelings we present and know about one another (either in general or in specific terms) for the purpose of getting along in such social encounters and to show respect for one another's claim to the public/private boundaries of the self we choose to present to one another.'

3 Thomas L. Carson (2010, p. 12) distinguishes between honesty in a negative sense and honesty in a positive sense. Honesty in a negative sense refers to a strong moral disinclination to tell lies while honesty in a positive sense goes beyond this and requires us to be open and willing to reveal information.

personal has been revealed. The same holds of privacy norm 'one should not peep.' When the peeping Tom (in Sartre's famous example) is watching through the bedroom keyhole, he is violating someone's privacy, but it is possible or even likely that he will not get any new information that the victim would have liked to hide. The victim would not have liked to be *seen*. It follows that various privacy violations are possible without a revelation of anything special, and hence without creating a threat against anyone's capacity for present or future self-presentations of the sort that presuppose control of information. It seems that, in many cases, a person can respect another person's chance to various self-presentations that require control of personal information, while *not* respecting her right to privacy.⁴

The second important point concerning the control argument is related to the first point. The second point is that many processes of self-presentation do not require special control of information. Granted that our moral task is to secure people's chances to successful self-presentation (so that they can handle their social relationships) this can be done to some degree *without* securing people's interest in hiding certain facts about them. A father who is playful with his children can be a cold-blooded negotiator in his workplace. When someone at the workplace reveals that he is actually playful in the company of his children, no harm has been done to his self-presentation, for it is common knowledge that people behave differently in different social contexts. Even in cases in which it might seem that the control of information is needed, this is not always so. A person who has once again received a grant may not want to talk about it to her unsuccessful colleague. She wants to keep a low profile. When others meet the unsuccessful colleague at the canteen of the campus and reveal the news, her self-presentation has not been spoiled, as her intention was merely to give an impression of modesty. Surely she is only happy that the news about the grant was told by others and that she did not need to emphasize her success.

The control argument seems to exaggerate the role of hidden or unrevealed information in self-presentation processes. Given that we would like to enhance people's capacity for self-presentation, it is far from clear that we should be concerned only about issues of privacy. After all, self-presentation processes can be ruined in various ways not related to privacy violations. For instance, forcing a person to participate in a *social drama* may spoil a person's self-presentation in an unfair way. Suppose that the reviewer and the author meet at a conference reception and the reviewer loudly says to the author that 'You wrote a stupid book, eh?' and continues to criticize the book in

⁴ It is customary to distinguish between (1) an approach to privacy that characterizes it as a form of control of information and (2) an approach that characterizes privacy as a constraint on access (Nissenbaum 2010, p. 70).

rather arrogant and salient ways so that everyone notices the incidence.⁵ No matter what the author does, that kind of primitive attack *can* spoil the author's attempt to give a civilized impression of herself, as now there is a good chance that she will be remembered as a party in a conflict – whether or not people realize whose fault *their conflict* was. The result is a wrong impression of the author.⁶

The control argument is strong and it is understandable that it has been widely supported, but (as I tried to show) the argument needs to be interpreted carefully.

Self-Presentation and the Control of Access

Let us now turn to an alternative view that aims to establish that privacy is important because it enables us to influence impressions people have about us and thereby helps us to create and maintain our social relationships. According to the *access argument*, unwelcome access that compromises our privacy tends to prevent people's self-presentation processes or make them difficult. Difficulties in processes of self-presentation, in turn, may harm the maintenance of various social relationships that require people to modify their social selves.

The access argument has been defended by James Rachels, for instance. He argues that the value of privacy is 'based on the idea that there is a close connection between our ability to control who has access to us and to information about us, and our ability to create and maintain different sorts of social relationships with different people'. In his view, 'privacy is necessary if we are to maintain the variety of social relationships with other people that we want to have' (Rachels 1984, p. 292). According to Rachels (1984, p. 295), 'we have good reason to object to anything that interferes with these relationships and makes it difficult or impossible for us to maintain them in the way that we want to.' Since privacy violations do interfere with these relationships, we should object to them. Rachel's (1984, p. 296) example is a couple who needs privacy:

Again, consider the differences between the way that a husband and wife behave when they are alone and the way they behave in the company of third parties. Alone, they may be affectionate, sexually intimate, have their fights and quarrels, and so on; but

⁵ In 'Exposure and Concealment,' Nagel's discussion about the importance of appropriate reticence is motivated by the assumption that such reticence enhances the quality of public debate but, as Annabelle Lever (2012a, p. 20) has pointed out, it is not clear whether the causal link between these two always holds.

⁶ Distributing false rumors is an effective way to spoil another person's self-presentation process. Whether such distribution is also a privacy violation is not obvious.

with others, a more ‘public’ face is in order. If they could not be alone together, they would either have to abandon the relationship that they would otherwise have as husband and wife or else behave in front of others in ways they now deem inappropriate. These considerations suggest that we need to separate our associations, at least to some extent, if we are to maintain a system of different relationships with different people. Separation allows us to behave with certain people in the way that is appropriate to the sort of relationship we have with them, without at the same time violating our sense of how it is appropriate to behave with, and in the presence of, others with whom we have a different kind of relationship. Thus, if we are to be able to control the relationships that we have with other people, we must have control over who has access to us.

The access argument differs from the control argument in many respects. One of the differences is that, unlike the control argument, the access argument does not say that privacy violations tend to *spoil* people’s self-presentation processes. Instead, the access argument says that privacy violations tend to *prevent* those self-presentation processes that people would like to have. Suppose that two teenagers are constantly disrupted by the other one’s mother when they try to talk about their friends and other things. It is likely that the disruption prevents them from presenting themselves in the ways they would want to. I assume many of us would agree that we have a moral problem here (given that the mother does not have a special justification for her behavior, and so on). If so, then the access argument is morally speaking plausible, although it can certainly be criticized on similar grounds as the control argument. Someone might claim that ‘our culture would be healthier and happier if we diminished substantially the kinds of actions that we now feel comfortable doing only in private, or the kind of thoughts we now feel comfortable disclosing only to those with whom we have special relationships’ (Wasserstrom 1984, p. 331). But these kinds of claims are implausible, I take it. A more plausible view is the one that is supported for instance by Ferdinand Schoeman (1984, p. 409), who writes that, generally, ‘so long as a person does not misrepresent himself to those who, within the relevant domain, reasonably rely on his projected image, that person is not acting deceptively,’ and thus should have a right to not to be prevented from having various social roles.⁷

⁷ One may add that, actually, misrepresenting oneself may be morally acceptable even in cases in which others do rely on a person’s projected image. Here is an example: ‘homosexuals who attempt to pass as heterosexuals may feel compelled to construct an imaginary heterosexual appearance, possibly including dates with the opposite sex, making up descriptions of heterosexual exploits, etc.’ (Derlega and Chaikin 1977, p. 112).

The access argument needs clarification, however, even if we grant that it is based on a morally plausible assumption that people ought to be free to behave differently in different relationships. Let me mention two points in this context as well. The first point is that there are many actions that violate privacy and break the wanted control over access, but do not prevent anyone's intended self-presentation. Again, when the peeping Tom is watching through the bedroom keyhole, he is violating someone's privacy, perhaps a couple's collective privacy, but his action does not have any effect on their self-presentations, given that they are *unaware* of Tom's presence.⁸ The access argument fails to establish that privacy violations prevent self-presentation processes when the control over access has been compromised. The argument mistakenly presumes that people are always aware when their control over access is broken. As far as we are interested in securing a couple's capacity for intended self-presentations that are supposed to be constitutive of their relationship, it suffices that we keep them ignorant of possible interferences. In the case of two teenagers, the mother should simply *spy* on them and thereby allow them to have their social roles. (Of course, in the long run, people would not trust anymore that they have control over the access, were that control broken frequently enough.)

The second point is that there are many actions that are not privacy violations although they clearly (1) prevent people from presenting themselves in the way they would like to and (2) compromise, at least in some sense, people's control over who has access to them. Suppose that you would like to talk with your colleague at your office about some delicate issue. One of the members of your research team knocks on the door quickly, steps in and sits down. This is not a remarkable moral offence and surely it is not a violation of your privacy, but probably the intervention prevents the self-presentations you intended to perform and the access is unwelcome.

The access argument needs to be interpreted carefully.⁹ Taken together, the access argument and the control argument give good grounds to avoid unnecessary negative influences on people's self-presentation processes, but even so, the link between privacy and self-presentation is clearly contingent.¹⁰

⁸ The notion of collective privacy is obviously consistent with the traditional idea that privacy is a feature of individual person. However, the existence of 'core individual self' can surely be challenged (Hongladarom 2015, p. 213).

⁹ Still another rather 'traditional' argument for the right to privacy is the claim that privacy is essential because it provides moments when individuals can lay the masks aside and take a break from self-presentation processes (see further, Steevens 2009, p. 198). She refers to Erving Goffman, Georg Simmel and Alan Westin. This argument seems to confuse the right to privacy to the 'right to be alone' and, arguably at least, implausibly suggests that a person need not choose which of her inclinations and desires her behavior expresses when she is alone.

¹⁰ Notice that the result that the actual link between privacy and self-presentation is contingent is consistent with the claim that people may consider privacy violations wrong '*because* they interpret them as threats against their having

Privacy, Self-Presentation and Brain Imaging

Let us now move to consider the relation between brain imaging technologies and the threat they possibly create to privacy. There are many possible routes how brain imaging might be involved in interventions in our ‘private sphere.’ In the literature concerning brain privacy (Glannon 2006; Levy 2007; Farah 2008; Rääkkä 2010; Wolpe et al 2010; Lever 2012b), the following three are often mentioned:

1. A person (say, a patient or an employee) can be ‘coerced’ to undergo a neuroscientific intervention that reveals information about his inner life, including unconscious beliefs and attitudes.
2. Brain scans can reveal information about a person’s inner life and this information can be misused (say, for the prediction of future behavior) or disseminated inappropriately (say, by insurance companies or employers).
3. Brain imaging and testing based on fMRI can provide personal information that is not intentionally searched for, and such information may fall into the wrong hands (if there are not sufficient measures to protect such information).

Our concern here is whether these kinds of (possible) infringements of privacy threaten people’s capacity for self-presentation and whether the value of self-presentation could thus provide a plausible ground that justifies the claim that those compromises are morally wrong. The answer is that incidents of the above mentioned types (1-3) can but need not threaten our self-presentation processes. Consider the *neuroscience of love* that brings us back to Gavison’s (1984, p. 366) discussion of the relationships that are ‘highest in one’s emotional hierarchy.’ As pointed out by Julian Savulescu and Brian D. Earp (2014, p. 7), by ‘looking at images of people’s brains when they are gazing pictures of their romantic partner, for example, and comparing those against images of the same people looking at pictures of a platonic friend, scientists have begin to fill in the various gaps in our knowledge about “what is going on in our brains” when we we’re in love.’ Furthermore, scientists ‘are also starting to identify a number of brain chemicals – such as oxytocin, dopamine, and serotonin – that seem to play a role in whether and how we form romantic and other social

multiple selves’ (Rääkkä 2014, p. 92). Even if my attempts at self-presentation have not, in fact, been thwarted, say, by snooping, there is still someone who has power to obtain the information against my will, and therefore a possibility that someone will use that information against me, or give it to someone else who may want to do that.

attachments.’ (Savulescu and Earp 2014, p. 7). Possibly, studies in neuroscience of love may open up new frontiers for how we understand our emotions in general.

Suppose now that a person participates in one of those studies as a research subject, and that then someone from the research group, against good scientific practices, reveals the results to their common friends, without the permission of the subject. There is no doubt that her privacy is violated (thanks to the brain scanning possibilities and the violation of norms). However, when we ask whether her process of self-presentation has also been spoiled, we should notice that the answer depends on the content of her actual self-presentation processes, that is, on the content of the impressions she is aiming to give of herself to her friends. Suppose that the scanning results are consistent with her self-presentation processes concerning her love life. In that case the violation of her privacy does not necessarily spoil her self-presentation – although it is still possible that the person’s self-created image as a person who is capable of controlling the data concerning herself is ruined. Certain privacy violations are of course also quite *likely* to spoil (or prevent) a person’s (present or future) self-presentation but, in individual cases, all depends on the content of people’s self-presentation processes.¹¹

Notice that, in some cases, brain imaging and its applications may threaten our capacity for self-presentation while not threatening our immediate interests in privacy. Here is a future-oriented example. Brain scan testing has become as common as genetic testing is today. A person goes to a fair and exhibition center and takes an inexpensive brain test although, among his antroposophic friends, he is known as a critic of neurosciences that are, in his own words, based on ‘neuroreductionism.’¹² By accident, his friends hear about the event. The person’s reputation is damaged, but he cannot complain that his privacy was violated. For it was not.

¹¹ People tend to follow customary ways in their self-presentations. Perhaps we can even speak about norms of self-presentation. For instance, most people do not want to share the medical information about themselves openly and, in general, they seem to follow the norm that one should not act in ways that reveal the medical data to outsiders. Norms of self-presentation are valuable not only in guiding self-presenters in their self-presentation processes, but also for others who would like to respect people’s self-presentation decisions. An interesting detail is that the norms of self-presentation help us to see when people *fail* in their self-presentation processes. When a person unwittingly leaves the website of a dating service on the screen of her office computer, her colleagues are likely to know that the self-presenter was unsuccessful, as it is rare to announce to one’s colleagues that one uses such services – during office hours anyway (see further Velleman 2001, p. 43).

¹² ‘Neuroreductionists’ reduce complex mental phenomena to brain states and confuse correlation for physical causation. In their paper ‘Neuroreductionism about Sex and Love’ Savulescu and Earp (2014, p. 12) argue that ‘whatever the brain-level correlates of love or lust can teach us, they will always be lacking for a causal explanation.’

Now, both the control argument and the access argument emphasize self-presentation processes as they help people to hide and conceal things. But the other side of self-presentation (and the one which is widely introduced in the literature concerning self-presentation) is that it makes certain things visible and apparent. Fake episodes aside, it is a process by which people try to communicate their inner lives to others – by choosing which sides of themselves they show. A crucial point is to *assure* others that the sides that are shown are really there. Alan Ryan (1991, p. 346) explains functions of self-presentation, or the task of ‘theatrical model,’ as follows:

The ability to play a role in such a way as to communicate any number of different things about ourselves while we do it may be used for altruistic and public-spirited ends – the surgeon who pretends that he would rather be on the golf course is not trying to get his colleagues to believe that he really is an idle beast who cannot distinguish a scalpel from a niblick. He is reassuring them that he is so much in control of his bit of the team’s task that they can safely relax and not worry about him. Lightheartedness and conscientiousness may, agreeably, be allies. [...] I take it that a central element in the idea of privacy is that we have the right to control what information people possess about certain areas of our lives, and that other people have a duty to skirt round those areas – not that they have a duty not to *know* about us, but that they have a duty not to try to find out. And a central concern of the theatrical model is precisely with how we control what others do know about us. The assumption is that other people inevitably want to know a good deal about us, since they have projects at risk if we are unreliable or deviate from their expectations. Much of the time we shall want to make our private selves public for precisely this reason – we shall want to reassure others. Of course, this cannot be done by direct means; people look at our conduct to decide how far they can really trust our direct assurances.

The ‘assurance problem’ can make brain imaging relevant in a rather surprising way – if not now then perhaps in the future. Brain imaging has raised concerns about people’s privacy partly because the technology is supposed to provide rather *reliable* information about our inner lives, that is, information that is more reliable than that provided by people’s daily observations and that is much more reliable than our own reports can provide. The reports we give to others can be outright lies or they can be based on self-understanding that leaves plenty of room for improvement (Räikkä and Smilansky 2012, p. 517). Of course, the idea that brain imaging provides reliable information can

be contested, but as far as brain imaging does provide trustworthy information, it can actually *help* people in their self-presentation processes, at least in principle. Granted that one of the main functions of self-presentation is to reassure others, the brain imaging technologies may give us some tools to do it. Seen in this way, brain scans can also help people in maintaining and creating social relationships, given that the capacity for successful self-presentation is crucial for the existence of those relationships. Surely that is a bit surprising (or even counterintuitive) result and one which should calm down those who emphasize the threats of the future effects of brain imaging. Needless to say, the idea that one would actually use the results of brain imaging in her self-presentation processes is quite speculative, but as far as we are interested in principled questions, the implication sounds important.

Concluding Remarks

I have argued that one of the most plausible arguments in support of the right to privacy is the claim that privacy enables self-presentation which, in turn, is an instrument by which we take care of our various social relationships. I have also argued that brain imaging can threaten our capacity for self-presentation. However, I have tried to show that the link between privacy and self-presentation is only contingent and that, therefore, brain privacy cannot be grounded only on the importance of being able to present oneself. Self-presentation provides *one* reason to respect privacy. That sounds correct, although Gross, Rachels and others may have had something stronger in mind. Also, my claim may open the door for the view that privacy claims do not have any common normative ground. (Thomson 1975, pp. 295-314; Lever 2012, p. 209.)

It seems that brain imaging may threaten our capacity for self-presentation while *not* threatening our immediate interests in privacy. This result is in line with the more general claim that violations of privacy and difficulties of self-presentation are only contingently related to each other. This said, they are still very often, almost systematically, linked to each other.

There is a further reason to think that privacy is valuable because self-presentation is valuable.¹³ Although usual theories of self-presentation do not involve the concept of *negative self-*

¹³ The idea that we should respect people's customary ways of self-presentation tends to *preserve existing practices* and may have overly conservative implications. The problem is shared by some other theories of privacy. Helen Nissenbaum's (2010, p. 140) theory of 'contextual integrity' concerns privacy norms regarding 'the flow of personal information – transmission, communication, transfer, distribution, and dissemination – from one party to another.' The theory seems inherently conservative, since it 'requires that practices be evaluated in relation to entrenched context-

presentation, it is clearly possible to distinguish between positive and negative variants of self-presentation. Very often we are concerned about *not giving* any or any particular impression of us rather than giving it and, our interest in not giving impressions has considerable influence on our actions. A person may put on comfortable casual wear when she is alone at home, as she believes that she is *not seen* by anyone. Or she may go the doctor and explain her condition, as she trusts that the doctor will *not reveal the information* to his friends at the dinner. In both cases the decision to act is based on the assumption that outsiders will *not get* any impressions of her.¹⁴ We can postulate that the question is of negative self-presentation: a person's act is done only on the condition that people who are considered outsiders do not get a certain or any impression of her. As Gavison (1984, p. 366) argues, 'privacy permits individuals to do what they would not do without it.'

Possibly, by referring to the importance of negative self-presentation we can explain why many violations of privacy are wrong: to violate a privacy norm is to spoil the victim's ongoing negative self-presentation. For instance, when an eavesdropper breaks the privacy norm 'one should not eavesdrop,' he ruins a person's negative self-presentation that is based on her interest *not to give* the impression she is giving to outsiders. Perhaps her way of talking could have been very different had she known her true audience. The same holds for privacy norms such as 'one should not reveal confidential information' and 'one should not stalk.' Arguably, the same holds for *most* privacy norms, including those that aim to protect us from inappropriate implications of brain imaging. However, developing a full theory of negative self-presentation is a topic of another paper, and it may turn out that, eventually, the notion of self-presentation becomes too broad if extended to include negative self-presentation.

relative informational norms' – which implies that 'any new practice that contravenes entrenched norms is flagged as problematic' (Nissenbaum 2010, p. 159). For example, if the political culture of a country dictated the religious convictions of individual politicians as politically irrelevant, personal, and hence not suitable for public introduction, then those who would like to discuss the religious backgrounds of politicians would necessarily violate the norms of contextual integrity. This is a problematic implication, as it should be at least open to debate whether the political culture of the country needs to be revised (my example). Nissenbaum's (2010, p. 166) solution for this problem is to 'compare entrenched normative practices against novel alternatives or competing practices on the basis of how effective each is in supporting, achieving, or promoting relevant contextual values.' If the alternatives were better, i.e., more effective, then cultural practices should (somehow) be revised.

¹⁴ In some cases it is a matter of description whether an action represents negative rather than positive self-presentation. In general, however, the distinction is easy to draw. A person who does not want to give an impression that she is ill (or sick) to strangers (negative self-presentation) does not necessarily want to give them an impression that she is not ill (positive self-presentation). Notice that in some cases a person's interest in not giving certain impression may lead to a decision *not* to act in a certain way. An example is a person who does not speak about her domestic problems to her colleague, as she thinks that the colleague will gossip the news in any case.

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