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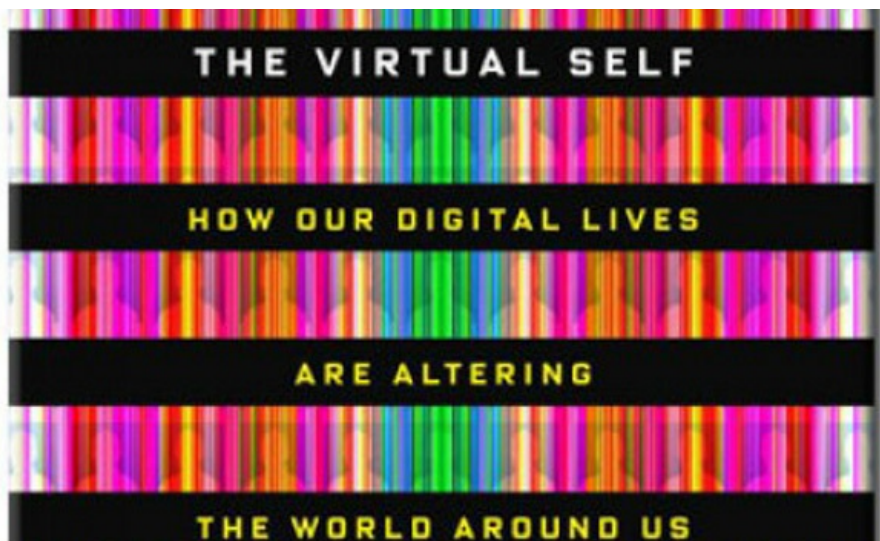
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Are we leaving too much information online?

By Conrad Collaco, [CBC News](#) Posted: Jun 14, 2012 12:28 PM ET | Last Updated: Jun 14, 2012 1:05 PM ET



The CBC's Nora Young explores the real life impact of the virtual information we leave online. (McGilland & Stewart)

In social media is there such a thing as too much information? Nora Young, the host of Spark on CBC Radio says yes. She had a lot to say, when she visited CBC Hamilton not long ago, about how all that information we leave lying around online and how it can be used against us in a court of law and elsewhere.

We spoke with Young about her new book [The Virtual Self: How Our Digital Lives Are Altering the World Around Us](#).

Below, is a shortened and paraphrased transcript of her interview at CBC Hamilton. You can see the full interview in the video on this page.

How can seemingly innocuous data be used to violate privacy?

Something that seems innocuous in one context can start to look troubling in another. Recently there was an app developed to work with foursquare. It took the information of women who had checked in on foursquare to neighbourhood bars. The app matched that to public information available of Facebook profiles. Suddenly, two things that seem innocuous like your Facebook profile and information about where you are right now in a bar and you have something that is troubling. We're only at the beginning of understanding, as we pull all this stuff together, what you can glean from what I call a data map and repackage in different ways.

How concerned are you about how much personal data we share online?

What I find most disturbing is that we are at the early stages of even figuring out the math. We're still figuring out what constitutes secure, truly anonymous data. We're just charging forward signing up for more and more services 'I agree' at the terms of services that we don't even read. That's what I find truly concerning. We are charging ahead without

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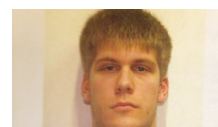
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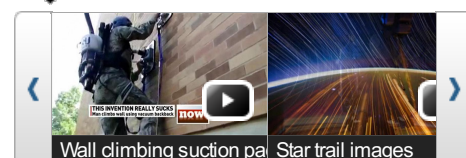


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knowing how this data might come back to haunt us.

How can we be better at protecting ourselves online?

There are basic, prudent rules. For a lot of us, not just young people, we have to have a really negative experience where our data has been taken from one context and put into another before we realize that what I thought was private or going to be reserved in a particular context really wasn't.

How important is sharing information on social media as a tool for social and personal change?

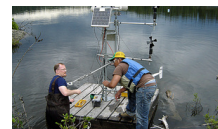
Even something basic like health and fitness. There are lots of people who are using these tools to make positive changes in their lives. The U.S. Army approved a mood-monitoring app to look for signs of post traumatic stress disorder in soldiers. There are lots of ways at a personal level that we can harness these tools.

You've got this great situation where you are looking at all these things that are happening in Hamilton and how the digital world and the bricks and mortar world are beginning to come together in very exciting ways. What I think is so exciting about this is the potential to use these tools in ways to build communities, smarter communities. you can see what happens when you start to aggregate people's tweets on what's going on in people's communities. When you bring that information together it can be really revealing about what's going on in a community.

Why right now is important in the debate on how new social media technology will be used in the future.

We're getting close to the stage where data about our lives is being available like how water comes out of a tap when you turn it on. This is the time when it is contested ground. This is the time when we can debate and discuss and use our powers as citizens and consumers and so forth and become data activists participating in the discourse on how this information gets used. There will be a time when the rules of the game are set and it becomes difficult to see that things might be otherwise. That's why I hope we start having these conversations right now because now is the critical time.

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Jun. 15, 2012 3:41 PM

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Quirks & Quarks

June 16: Rio +20

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Next week, the Rio +20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development will take place. We'll speak to Green Party leader Elizabeth May, who was at the first Earth Summit, 20 years ago, about what it did, and didn't accomplish.

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