

Hosting Together via Couchsurfing: Privacy Management in the Context of Network Hospitality

AIRI LAMPINEN¹

Mobile Life Centre, Stockholm University, Sweden

Practicing network hospitality—that is, taking part in the processes wherein users of hospitality exchange services, connect, and interact with one another online and off-line—is commonly approached as a dyadic interaction between a host and a guest. In contrast, this article elaborates on communication privacy management theory in the context of network hospitality based on an interview study of how multiperson households regulate access to their domestic sphere as they welcome visitors via Couchsurfing, an online hospitality exchange service. The findings depict how multiperson households (1) establish privacy rules related to hosting, (2) cooperate to control interior and exterior privacy boundaries, and (3) manage privacy with the help of physical and temporal boundaries. The study contributes to communication privacy management theory by applying it to the study of network hospitality and providing insight into how privacy management unfolds as a cooperative process within multiperson households in settings where networked media are used to arrange social encounters that raise questions of physical space and territoriality.

Keywords: communication privacy management theory, privacy management, boundary regulation, domestic space, network hospitality, Couchsurfing, sharing economy

Introduction

Beyond popular practices of sharing digital content online, ranging from peer-to-peer file sharing to social media use, networked technologies are lauded increasingly as tools for coordinating the sharing of domestic spaces and physical goods (see, e.g., Sundararajan, 2013), often under the rubric of *sharing economy* (see, e.g., Schor, 2014; Schor & Fitzmaurice, 2015). As one example of how these technologies help strangers to connect and coordinate peer-to-peer exchanges, members of the Couchsurfing community arrange to host others in their homes via this hospitality exchange platform. Both ongoing

Airi Lampinen: airi.lampinen@iki.fi

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curiosity for intercultural socializing and more recent technological developments facilitate these hospitality exchanges and related practices, such as short-term rentals and roommate matching. Further societal developments provide favorable conditions for peer-to-peer exchange: Contemporaneous trends (see, e.g., Jacobsen & Mather, 2010, 2011)—such as high rates of unemployment, a decline in homeownership, and the tendencies to delay marriage and acquire more education—form a backdrop against which it is not unthinkable for previously weakly embedded individuals to share communal households and invite others, even strangers, to visit.

The emergence of network hospitality as a large-scale phenomenon has reinvigorated scholarly interest in guest–host relations. *Network hospitality*, a term coined by Germann Molz (2012), refers to the way users of hospitality exchange services “connect to one another using online social networking systems, as well as to the kinds of relationships they perform when they meet each other offline and face to face” (p. 216). Members of the Couchsurfing community engage in nuanced negotiations over access to physical spaces and social interaction as visitors (*couchsurfers*) are welcomed to stay in the homes of hosting participants (*hosts*) (see, e.g., Bialski, 2012a).

This article examines cooperative practices of network hospitality through the lens of privacy management (e.g., Altman, 1975; Petronio, 2002), taking as its particular case a set of multiperson households that intentionally seek to share their homes via Couchsurfing. Although communication privacy management theory has been primarily concerned with the way people manage private information, the theory allows for applications to privacy in terms of space and territoriality, too (Petronio, 2010). The article builds on this potential by reporting on an interview study of how multiperson households, including both self-defined domestic partnerships and sets of loosely connected housemates, regulate access to their domestic sphere as they offer to host couchsurfers. The analysis focuses on how members of these groups regulate both their collective privacy boundaries and the personal boundaries of their members as they engage in this peer-to-peer exchange activity where hospitality is offered via a networked platform to strangers who are known in an informational sense through their online profiles yet unknown in a conventional social sense.

The next two sections review literature on privacy management and network hospitality, respectively. After articulating research questions, along with presenting the research material and methods, I turn to empirical findings on (1) establishing privacy rules related to hosting, (2) cooperating to control interior and exterior privacy boundaries, and (3) managing privacy with the help of physical and temporal boundaries. The article concludes with discussion on how these findings contribute to our understanding of privacy management and network hospitality.

Privacy Management: Regulating Collectively Held Boundaries

Altman’s (1975) boundary regulation framework conceives of privacy as “an interpersonal boundary process by which a person or group regulates interaction with others” (p. 6). The framework depicts boundary regulation as a dynamic process of trying to achieve the right amount of interaction, avoiding both too much and too little. Altman (1975, 1977) argues that the process of boundary regulation takes place in all social interaction, but desired degrees of interaction fluctuate temporally and

culturally, and the particular behavioral, cultural, and environmental mechanisms by which accessibility is negotiated differ across contexts. Boundaries are regulated by how physical spaces are built and decorated but also through the behaviors that take place in them. Considering domestic spaces specifically, Altman and Gauvain (1981) argue that the home is a particular privacy regulation mechanism that its inhabitants use both for self-expression and to indicate openness to social interaction.

The idea that both individuals and groups need to regulate their boundaries was a part of Altman's (1975) original characterization of privacy as boundary regulation. Petronio and colleagues developed this notion further in communication privacy management theory (CPM; e.g., Petronio, 2002). CPM allows for understanding how people make decisions about revealing or concealing information they consider private. It involves three main elements (Petronio, 2002, 2013): First, *privacy ownership* refers to the idea that individuals and groups develop and use rules for controlling the ownership and flow of private information. These rules are derived from core and catalyst criteria, including motivations, cultural values, situational needs, risk-benefit estimates, and changes in circumstances. Second, *privacy control* symbolizes the engine that regulates conditions of granting and denying access to private information. Successful privacy management is achieved through coordinating and negotiating privacy rules with relevant others. Collective privacy boundaries are regulated through decisions about who else may become privy, how much others inside and outside the collective boundary may know, and rights to disclose information. Third, *privacy turbulence* refers to moments when boundary expectations have been disrupted and when, consequently, rules for regulating private information must be renegotiated.

A central focus for CPM has been family privacy (Petronio, 2010). This line of work has examined how family members manage private information across both *interior privacy boundaries* to share selectively within the family and *exterior privacy boundaries* to share certain things within the family but not with others outside the larger collective privacy boundary (Petronio, 2002). The regulation of privacy boundaries within families is a complicated issue, and it becomes more complicated when decisions are made to grant or deny access to people outside the family (Serewicz & Canary, 2008).

Although Altman (1975) created the boundary regulation framework originally to depict privacy management in physical spaces, several scholars have applied it to networked settings, mapping boundary regulation mechanisms online (see, e.g., Lampinen, Lehtinen, Lehmuskallio, & Tamminen, 2011; Palen & Dourish, 2003; Stutzman & Hartzog, 2012). Recently, CPM has been applied to social media (for a review, see Petronio, 2013). For example, there have been studies of blogging privacy rules (Child, Petronio, Agyeman-Budu, & Westermann, 2011; Child, Haridakis, & Petronio, 2012) and examinations of managing familial and organizational contacts on Facebook (Child & Westermann, 2013; Frampton & Child, 2013). Although the interconnections of privacy management in online settings and physical spaces remain relatively underexplored, networked platforms are increasingly used to share not only digital content but physical resources. This article contributes to CPM by exploring privacy management in the domain of network hospitality where networked media are used to arrange social encounters that raise questions of physical space and territoriality.

Hospitality Exchange in the Networked World

The tradition of organized hospitality exchange predates the emergence of networked technologies and the recent rise of network hospitality. Before online systems disrupted the practice, people relied on telephone calls, letters, and postcards to arrange homestays around the world (Germann Molz, 2012). During the past decade, hospitality exchange services, such as Couchsurfing and Airbnb, have joined this attempt to burst the *tourist bubble* by replacing traditional commercial intermediaries, such as hotels, and facilitating peer-to-peer connections between travelers and locals. Although there is certainly room to critique the narratives of authenticity that surround network hospitality, it seems evident that hosts and guests alike find value in these exchanges.

Prior research on Couchsurfing has examined various aspects of network hospitality, including practices of posting recommendations to exchange partners' profiles after visits (Teng, Lauterbach, & Adamic, 2010) and the disclosing of information in online profiles (Peterson & Siek, 2009). Others have analyzed notions of reciprocity and trust (Lauterbach, Truong, Shah, & Adamic, 2009; Rosen, Lafontaine, & Hendrickson, 2011; Tan, 2010) from the starting point that trust is a crucial requirement for letting a stranger sleep in one's home or for staying on someone else's couch. These early works are significant in describing how the practice of couchsurfing emerged and what motivates hosts to participate in an activity that involves risk and uncertainty.

Moreover, previous work on Couchsurfing (e.g., Bialski, 2012a; Germann Molz, 2014; Lampinen, 2014) has emphasized the value of intense, sociable encounters for both hosts and guests. In contrast, recent studies on Airbnb (Ikkala & Lampinen, 2015; Lampinen & Cheshire, in press) indicate that an initial financial exchange between hosts and guests may, perhaps surprisingly, support sociable interaction by alleviating perceived social obligations and facilitate social exchange and interpersonal interaction.

Other studies (Bialski, 2012a, 2012b; Buchberger, 2012; Zuev, 2012) have considered how people negotiate access to personalized spaces and adopt roles that help create both new boundaries of how to act and new forms of familiarity between participants. Germann Molz (2014) points out a need to complicate notions of guest and host, because, in practice, these roles often get blurred into a collaborative activity where everyone makes hospitable gestures. Although the emphasis has been on the dynamics of host-guest relationships, scholars have acknowledged that encounters do not necessarily take place between one host and one guest (Bialski, 2012b; Buchberger, 2012): People often share their homes with others who may get involved in hosting more or less voluntarily. Introducing guests to domestic spaces "can cause unease to those who normally have a lot of control over that space" (Bialski, 2012a, p. 76), such as household members who have not been alerted to a guest's arrival or who are unaware of the context or conditions of a visit.

Research Questions

Communication privacy management theory has been primarily concerned with the way people manage private information (e.g., Petronio, 2002). Yet the theory allows for applications to privacy in terms of space and territoriality, too (Petronio, 2010). The present study builds on this potential by

addressing three research questions regarding how multiperson households cooperate to regulate both their collective privacy boundaries and the personal boundaries of their members as they engage in a peer-to-peer exchange activity where hospitality is offered to relative strangers and is managed, in part, with the help of networked technology.

First, deciding to begin hosting couchsurfers represents a significant transition point in the life of a household. As members negotiate over hosting and prepare to welcome visitors, the necessity of agreeing on privacy rules regarding domestic space and interaction becomes unusually visible. This leads to the first research question:

RQ1: How do multiperson households establish privacy rules as they agree on welcoming couchsurfers?

Second, successful privacy management requires coordination and cooperation. This leads to the second research question:

RQ2: How do multiperson households cooperate to control their interior and exterior privacy boundaries in the course of hosting couchsurfers?

Third, examining network hospitality provides an opportunity to explore the roles of physical and temporal boundaries in privacy management. This leads to the third research question:

RQ3: How do multiperson households manage privacy with the help of physical and temporal boundaries?

Material and Methods

Seventeen people (eight women and nine men) from nine multiperson households who host couchsurfers were interviewed about their experiences with Couchsurfing. Seven households consisted of heterosexual couples. One of these couples had a child, and another shared their house with two housemates. The other two households consisted of sets of three and five housemates, respectively. Participants' ages ranged from 22 to 56 years, with the exception of a 10-year-old who took part in the study with her parents. Most participants were in their mid- to late 20s. Participating households varied in hosting experience: One household had yet to receive someone in their home, and others had hosted so many visitors over four years that they could no longer recall all instances. In line with previous research finding that over time members tend to engage in Couchsurfing as both guests and hosts (Lauterbach et al., 2009), participants from all but two households had stayed with others via Couchsurfing, too.

Interviewees were primarily recruited through personal messages on Couchsurfing to profile owners who indicated that there were several people in the household. (Couchsurfing profiles feature an option to explicitly represent "several people" instead of one individual). Two pilot interviewees were recruited through my colleagues. Finally, one interviewee was reached while he was staying as a couchsurfer with one of the interviewed couples. Although the recruiting message welcomed recipients and

all household members to participate in the study, all household members were available for an interview in only four cases.

Interviews took place in participants' homes (apart from the pilot interviews, which were conducted over the phone) in two metropolitan areas in the United States in July and August 2012. All interviewees except the aforementioned couchsurfer (from Europe) lived and hosted in these areas. With one exception, all households were easily accessible by public transportation. The interviews ranged from 30 to 70 minutes in length. Each interviewee received \$20 as a reward for participation.

The interviews covered participants' Couchsurfing experiences broadly, with a focus on hosting. Interviewees were prompted to discuss how they got started with Couchsurfing, how their household makes decisions about when and whom to host, their best and worst hosting experiences, and what they find most rewarding and most burdensome about hosting. The interviews included a step-by-step discussion of hosting experiences from receiving a request for a stay (a "CouchRequest" in the system's terms) to welcoming guests and writing references. All households were asked to weigh in on the pros and cons of hosting as a multiperson household as opposed to hosting alone.

The ensuing analysis was framed from the perspective of privacy management. Qualitative, interpretive methods (see, e.g., Strauss & Corbin, 1990) were applied for a grounded exploration of participants' conceptions of hosting as a multiperson household and of the considerations this activity involves. The analytical approach was grounded in and driven by the research material. I initially open-coded the transcripts focusing on three broad themes that could speak to each research question: (1) excerpts pertinent to how households came to begin hosting couchsurfers as well as how they made choices of hosting in specific cases, (2) excerpts pertinent to how hosting unfolds on the Couchsurfing website as well as within domestic spaces during visits, and (3) excerpts pertinent to managing privacy with the help of physical and temporal boundaries. I paid special attention to agreements and disagreements within the household, challenges and violations expected and experienced by household members, and mechanisms used to achieve a desired degree of interaction. Each subset of the material was then further analyzed through an iterative process of reading transcripts several times. The resulting themes were formed with the help of emic codes and concepts adopted from the literature on privacy management. All names used in conjunction with interview excerpts are pseudonyms. Clarifications in the excerpts are marked with brackets; omissions are indicated with ellipsis points.

Findings and Interpretation

Inviting or not inviting someone to enter a home is a clear indicator of the occupants' desire for more or less social interaction (Altman & Gauvain, 1981). Echoing previous research (e.g., Bialski, 2012a; Germann Molz, 2012, 2014), all interviewees emphasized the social aspects of hosting and the importance of meaningful interpersonal encounters. Participants named meeting people and learning about different cultures and lifestyles as primary motivations to host, although this openness was limited in that many preferred to host likeminded people of their own age. Germann Molz (2014) has reported similar observations of likemindedness as a basis of trust, although she and Bialski (2012a) have both noted that

experienced couchsurfers may, in contrast, purposefully *engineer randomness* and embrace encounters that they expect to be more boundary spanning and even awkward.

Acts of opening up domestic space involve careful privacy management when it comes to network hospitality: Hosting via Couchsurfing is a proactive step toward inviting more interaction to the household, albeit one taken cautiously to prevent being overwhelmed. Making the leap to welcome strangers (who have been deemed trustworthy based on information provided in an online profile and messages exchanged via a networked system) can be a significant transition point for household members, because it reconfigures the household's exterior privacy boundaries. This is not entirely unlike the adaptation that newlyweds encounter as they settle into their new relationship status (Serewicz & Canary, 2008).

First Primary Theme: Establishing Privacy Rules for Hosting

When registering on Couchsurfing, aspiring hosts need to create a profile that presents them and indicates how they wish to participate. The online profile is the core mechanism for communicating basic rules and restrictions concerning a household's approach to hosting, such as the maximum number of guests welcomed at a time. Homes are opened with the expectation of enjoyable socializing, but individuals in multiperson households do not necessarily desire such interaction equally. Thus, when a multiperson household decides to start hosting, members need to negotiate internally over how and when to welcome guests. This entails balancing individuals' potentially mismatched wishes by adapting and establishing privacy rules that accommodate everyone's needs satisfactorily. Two secondary themes—negotiating mismatched wishes and varying levels of participation over time—emerged as central to establishing privacy rules for hosting.

Negotiating Mismatched Wishes by Prioritizing Consensus and Providing a Right to Veto

The first negotiation households have regarding Couchsurfing is whether to offer hosting at all. If this initial decision is affirmative, many particular choices then follow as hosts receive CouchRequests and negotiate whether to accept them. Jenna, Mike, and Christina had all needed to do some lobbying to convince their partners to try out hosting. For instance, Jenna described how once she had explained the concept of Couchsurfing, her partner agreed that it could "be cool" and was willing to give hosting a try. In another instance, Christina's partner John, a man in his 50s, had remained hesitant even after learning more about Couchsurfing: "I'm skeptical about a lot of things, but I knew it was important to her, or she wanted to try it." John agreed to host mainly because he recognized it was important for Christina. This is an example of how individuals are pulled into hosting by those with whom they share their home. Engaging in hosting shifts the collective exterior privacy boundary of the household, so even when only some household members are eager to host, the activity affects everyone.

When household members disagreed over whether to accept a particular CouchRequest, the idea was typically dropped. Carl, a 24-year-old man living with two housemates, stressed that everyone should agree on hosting. To describe how each member has a veto to refuse hosting, he described a scenario in which a housemate is preparing for an exam and needs the house to be empty of distractions: "We have to respect. We can't force him to have a couchsurfer at the house."

Sometimes initial disagreement led to more delicate negotiations. Jenna talked about persuading her partner into welcoming couchsurfers from her county of origin, despite his initial resistance, by highlighting that a short visit during the week would require little effort and would not block their weekend: "I think that would be nice to host them. It's during the week. We are home. It's two nights. He said 'okay,' so it's not like . . . we will not fight over that, but that one I convinced him." Although Jenna was willing to push the negotiation slightly by emphasizing the visit's importance for her and its presumed effortlessness, she said that she would not invite couchsurfers without her partner's approval or risk getting into a fight with him to persuade him. This sentiment was repeated throughout the interviews.

Due to the importance placed on consensus, those with the least desire to interact with guests held the power to limit whether and when to host. When compromises over hosting were needed, household members considered too little external interaction more acceptable than too much, and they regulated their collective boundary as a household accordingly. For instance, Christina described how if there were multiple potential visitors, John might tell her to "pick one of them." This way, John limited the number of guests but gave Christina the freedom to pick whomever she thought would be most enjoyable to accommodate.

In sum, avoiding conflict with household members was central to establishing privacy rules regarding hosting couchsurfers: Reaching consensus and respecting each individual's right to a veto formed the baseline for negotiations. As a rule, relationships within the household were given higher priority than the household's (potential) connections with visitors. This echoes Petronio's (2010) remark that, because the exterior family privacy boundary is vital for the functioning of domestic life, families tend to work collectively to maintain its integrity.

Varying Levels of Participation Over Time to Maintain Motivation

Couchsurfing profiles allow hosts to indicate how likely they are to agree to host. Several households had used switching between "yes" and "maybe" as a way to match the amount of requests they received with the amount of hosting they desired to undertake at different times. As an example of this temporal fluctuation in the desire for interaction, Kevin explained how his household would move between agreeing and refusing to host: "It's . . . kind of cyclical, comes in waves. We do it for a little while, get sick of it, and take a break from it, and do it again, take a break from it."

Hosts' responses to CouchRequests varied over time partly because participants viewed hosting as more than just offering a place to stay. Welcoming couchsurfers while having little time to spare made some participants, such as Jane and Prateek, feel inadequate. When asked about stressful hosting experiences, Prateek mentioned hosting when one has insufficient time to interact with guests:

I think there have been times when both of us have been extremely busy and we've felt really guilty about or bad about . . . I kind of feel that you should spend more time with the people who are staying with you.

The perceived requirement for interaction led many to refuse hosting unless all household members could make sufficient time for the visitors.

On the other hand, being deprived of the attention one expects as a host felt disappointing. Participants' notion that "being treated as a hotel" was undesirable echoes Altman's (1975) claim that boundary regulation may fail toward not just too much but also too little interaction. Laura and Marco expressed having been disappointed by their first and so far only hosting experience. Although this couple in their early 30s considered giving hosting another chance, Laura was apprehensive after having felt ignored in her home: "I think definitely it would be helpful if someone who comes to my house would be open and willing to meet me . . . , because our feeling was that we were just used to give someone space."

Bob shared a similar experience that had not met his expectation of an interesting social encounter:

She didn't interact a lot with us. . . . We had a pretty bad feeling about her, because she was just sleeping and going to a conference. . . . For me, Couchsurfing is . . . more than just not being in your hotel; you have to be ready to share things, you have to spend time with the people that are hosting you.

These negative experiences were significant because they eroded the sense of hosting as enjoyable socializing and, thus, affected future negotiations over hosting. Over time, households fluctuated between accepting and refusing CouchRequests as a function of how much interaction they wanted and how much they expected to enjoy it. Jeff explained that a sense of being overwhelmed was likely to push them to say no to a request even if he and Kate were technically available: "I think even if we're available, if we've been run down lately, I think that makes us less likely to say yes." The *practical reason* of *being too busy* can be interpreted as a polite way to indicate and depoliticize priorities. By framing hosting as a choice rather than an obligation, participants felt free to forgo hosting when it conflicted with activities, commitments, or freedoms that were perceived as more important or enjoyable.

Once hosts had agreed to accommodate someone, though, they felt obliged to make time for the guests and accept occasional discomforts related to practicing network hospitality, including a sense of unease, exhaustion, or even violation due to what felt like too much interaction. Various issues—for instance, hosting too many guests at a time or having guests stay for too long—could result in feeling overwhelmed. Even when everything went well with individual visits, hosting what felt like too many couchsurfers back-to-back or within a short period was mentioned as lessening the joy of hosting and the willingness to host. Establishing privacy rules to allow for varying levels of participation dynamically over time made it easier for household members to avoid experiencing hosting as a burden.

Second Primary Theme: Controlling Interior and Exterior Privacy Boundaries

The second research question concerns how household members cooperate to control privacy boundaries as they open up the collective boundary of their domestic space. Household members need to

negotiate over not only what is made accessible but who communicates these boundaries to visitors. Hosting challenges multiperson households to both regulate their collective exterior boundaries and attend internally to each member's personal boundaries. Here two secondary themes depict delegation and turn taking.

Delegation

Although household members may share responsibilities over hosting, it is also possible for individuals to delegate particular privacy management tasks to others. As reported in prior work (Lampinen, 2014), most participating households had one individual in charge of the household's account on Couchsurfing. In setting up a profile, even one that is explicitly about several people, Couchsurfing allows for inserting only one e-mail address to which the system forwards all messages sent to the profile owner(s). Because messages also can be read directly on the site, and account credentials were shared in many households, multiple people could have access to the messages. In practice, though, participants relied on receiving messages via e-mail. The system's affordance for forwarding messages to only one address reinforced the tendency for an individual to become a gatekeeper to the household's shared account. For some hosts, this arrangement was unproblematic. Delegating responsibility to the most enthusiastic individual allowed those who desired less interaction with couchsurfers to participate more passively. Putting a motivated individual in charge of handling the hosting arrangements online served as a way to respect members' differing degrees of desire for social interaction with couchsurfers.

Some, however, wanted to manage hosting on a more equal footing. Kate and Jeff had created a separate e-mail account for redirecting forwarded messages to the primary e-mail address of each partner. Jeff stressed the importance of discussing requests: "We definitely always look at the request and talk about it together, before one of us would respond." The couple alluded neither to differences in their respective desire for social interaction with guests nor to separate personal boundaries.

Most households settled for a balance between complete delegation and full cooperation. Often the person who received messages forwarded them to others or brought them up in face-to-face conversations. Some shared everything diligently, while others selected only the most promising requests for joint consideration. Jane explained how her partner Prateek, primarily in charge of their account, kept her up to date and involved as negotiations advanced:

Usually the way we do it is he checks the account, but he sends me the details and then we discuss whether those days work and then I respond to him and he writes back and then he starts cc'ing me on any e-mail exchanges he has.

Christina curated carefully the CouchRequests she brought into discussion with John. Making hosting as meaningful and effortless as possible was her strategy for continuing hosting despite John's reluctance. Christina assumed responsibility for ensuring that both her partner and their 10-year-old daughter Stephanie would be at ease and enjoy couchsurfers' visits. She distinguished asking for permission from her partner from offering notice to her daughter, who enjoyed having visitors:

I pretty much have to open it up. . . . I would get a lot of anger, well, from John, in particular. I don't think I so much ask Stephanie unless there's a reason that we would need to use her room. . . . I don't want to put someone in her room without her permission.

Christina felt that John had to be consulted because he was drained by the presence of visitors, whereas Stephanie was energized by it. However, when Christina had once agreed that couchsurfers could stay in Stephanie's room without confirming this arrangement with her, a disagreement had ensued. This is an example of privacy turbulence that forced the mother and daughter to revisit their understandings of boundaries and renegotiate privacy rules. Thereafter, Stephanie's room was not made accessible without her prior permission.

Kevin did not forward requests to his four housemates, but he did inform everyone about upcoming visits. He explained that a conversation was typically unnecessary because guests were common and having couchsurfers was just another addition to the social life of the house:

People always have friends that come and stay . . . we all have friends that every once in a while, you know, at least once a week someone will be on our couch, that will be a friend, so I mean, it's just natural, if the spot's open, then we can invite somebody else.

Kevin's housemates Matt and David were happy to trust Kevin to coordinate hosting as long as he made sure that the couch had not yet been granted to a visiting friend. These housemates were comfortable forgoing explicit negotiation over particular visits: They all shared a favorable stance toward visitors within the common spaces, and, moreover, even during visits each housemate retained control over access to his own room. This relaxed attitude regarding the home's collective boundary is in stark contrast with the experiences conveyed by some of the interviewed couples. For example, Kate and Jeff stressed their commitment to make hosting decisions together. This may reflect a difference in household types whereby committed romantic partners place emphasis on a collective external boundary of the home, and thus draw fewer personal boundaries within the home than members of communal households, who maintain interior boundaries to sustain autonomy.

During visits, household members sometimes delegated responsibility of handling problems with visitors to the primary host (if identifiable). This practice of delegation was found in both communal households and in those formed by couples. The following example illustrates how a multiperson household negotiates over who is tasked to regulate the household's collective boundary. Kevin, who considered couchsurfers on par with other guests, explained that the preferable way to manage a situation in which a guest is doing something unwanted is to discuss it with the primary host and ask him or her to raise the issue with the guest:

Say it was David's guest. . . . I wouldn't go to David's guest, I'd probably go to David and like, Hey, man, can you talk to your friend about. Whatever the issue is. You know, then David would probably talk to his friend, because that just is more natural.

Similarly, Christina, who was comfortable with being upfront with visitors, sometimes agreed to express her partner's wishes on his behalf, bearing responsibility of regulating the availability of their home:

I have a sense that we've had guests who sort of hung around more than John wanted. . . . So what tends to happen in those situations is John comes to me and sort of grumbles like, "He's still downstairs." . . . I'll say, "Okay would you like me to ask him to please get going so we have the house for the day?"

Turn Taking

Although an individual can be in charge of negotiating access to the household via Couchsurfing and handling conflicts with visitors, responsibility over privacy management cannot necessarily be delegated fully during visits. Once hosting proceeded from online negotiations to face-to-face interaction, privacy management became a more cooperative effort, sometimes involving the practice of turn taking.

The affordances for turn taking that hosting together entails mitigated the risk of being overly burdened by the guest(s). The presence of multiple hosts relieves the pressure to interact with guests that each individual within the household experiences. Jenna argued that hosting with her partner allows her to feel more at ease:

If I have something to do, I can always say "Hey, I cannot be with you tonight, guys. Simon will go have a drink with, you know." . . . It gives you the opportunity, you're not stuck if you're two people.

Since multiple hosts can take turns, individuals in multiperson households can retreat from interaction more politely and comfortably, be it for a need to be left alone or to handle other commitments. In this way, taking turns in spending time with the guests allowed groups to take care of their individual members' needs cooperatively without the guilt of neglecting guests.

Yet, although hosting together alleviated the potential of feeling overwhelmed by attending to guests, it did not fully do away with the risk of hosting turning into a frustrating chore. For instance, despite taking turns with her partner, Jenna expressed having experienced frustration at a time when she was in charge of hosting but would have wanted to retreat and focus on work: "I was having a lot of work to do during the day, and being on the phone, and they were asking me a lot of things. . . . And they were not in a hurry to leave home early."

Third Primary Theme:

Physical and Temporal Structures That Support Privacy Management

Privacy management efforts that hosts undertake online make balancing interaction within the home easier, because many issues have already been settled by the time visitors arrive. It is worth emphasizing that inviting couchsurfers to stay in a domestic space is not a binary choice. Negotiations

over access to domestic spaces range beyond opening the front door to questions over who spends time with visitors, when, and in what spaces. Three secondary themes depict how participants leveraged physical and temporal structures to regulate interaction with guests and to handle privacy turbulence.

Physical Structures in Privacy Management

The domestic space was an important factor in making participants feel they were up to the challenges of hosting. The particulars differed, but some separateness was the baseline for what, in participants' minds, constituted sufficient space for hosting. Most participating households either had an extra bedroom or the hosts had a bedroom separate from the space available for visitors. Mike explained how he always described the spatial arrangements to guests beforehand, ensuring that they would arrive with realistic expectations: "I always tell people that you will have our living room all by yourselves but it has no door. Although me and Daniela have our bedroom." His partner Daniela added: "Which does have a door, thank God." She considered it important to keep some spaces and times within the home inaccessible to visitors, presumably to grant the hosts the opportunity to withdraw from interacting with the guests and to maintain intimacy among household members. Although some domestic spaces remained off-limits to couchsurfers, spatial boundaries were fluid: Many hosts saw no reason for the guests to enter certain areas in the home, but guests could be given permission to use them if they, for instance, needed to make a phone call in private.

In communal households, the rooms of each housemate tended to be off-limits for guests (and even for other household members) both day and night, and hosting negotiations among household members were focused on making shared spaces accessible to visitors. Kevin and his housemates were congenial about inviting visitors to their shared living room, but housemates' rooms remained, by default, their private territory. Matt and David's comfort in delegating negotiations seemed to rely on knowing that they could always retreat to their rooms if they wanted to be alone.

Kevin crystallized participants' sentiments of preoccupation with offering a hospitable self-presentation and a passable performance of domestic life in answering a question about preparations he wanted to have made before visitors arrived:

It's always, especially with the five people living here, it means it's always in a little state of disorientation. . . . I try to tidy up some, so we don't look like complete slob. I want to be somewhat presentable, make people feel comfortable.

The orderliness of the home is interwoven with not only the image given of the domestic space but that of its inhabitants. Overall, couples tended to be much more invested in performing a presentation of domestic life than were the interviewed housemates who were living together but not committed to leading shared lives. This emphasis was reflected in the couples' accounts of hesitating to host if they felt they could not perform adequately. The felt pressure to prove that one's home has value is sociocultural (Bialski, 2012a) and, as such, is not limited solely to those hosting together. Beyond household composition, cultural conventions have a role in defining what is taken to constitute an adequate performance of hospitality.

Participants' self-imposed requirement of providing *sufficient* space serves the comfort of both the guests and the hosts. Separate spaces allow drawing clear boundaries regarding which spaces guests may use. Amanda and Bob had recently gone from hosting visitors in an extra room to letting them stay in their open living room space. Amanda was slightly troubled by not being able to provide a guest room that she could set up for visitors:

It's easier when we had this extra room, because now it's in the living room, so you can't really prepare [a] bed in the room for someone [in advance]. It will more be something happening when . . . it's sleeping time.

Finally, participants arranged opportunities to have separate discussions among themselves while hosting visitors by retreating to a space guests were not invited to use, such as an office or a bedroom.

Temporal Structures in Privacy Management

Temporal structures were interwoven with these spatial arrangements. As Lynch, Di Domenico, and Sweeney (2007) depict in their account of cultural homestays in commercial homes, the accessibility of different domestic spaces is not only a matter of distinguishing between public spaces that are used by both inhabitants and guests and those used exclusively by the long-term occupants. Spatial boundaries are wrapped together with time, because ownership over different spaces shifts during the course of the day. For example, at times, hosts waited to have private discussions during the day when guests were out or at night, when bedroom doors were closed.

In addition to sleeping space arrangements in which the living room is a shared space for socializing during the day and is visitors' territory by night, guests and hosts negotiated turns in using kitchens and bathrooms. Although hosts welcomed guests to use their kitchen, taking up this offer sometimes introduced coordination challenges and interruptions to household routines. Christina shared a story of couchsurfers who, although respectful, took up more space and time than expected, inadvertently forcing her family to adapt its everyday dinner routines:

I hadn't realized they'd be doing so much cooking and using our space as much. . . . And we don't have a very big downstairs area, so if they were making dinner we couldn't really be making our dinner and eating our dinner. And they were very respectful, but they were still taking up space and time. So that was a little awkward, and it took a little conversation just to say "Are you making dinner tonight also? Okay, so when is that going to be?"

Couchsurfers' eagerness to interact sometimes became problematic late in the evenings as the hosts wanted to retreat to get a good night's sleep before heading to work the next morning. Guests and hosts differ, among other things, in that guests tend to have leisure time while hosts are not removed from the rhythm of work and everyday obligations (Zuev, 2012). Hosts made efforts to manage privacy in

spatially and temporally nuanced ways, in line with their wish to have guests willingly open up to them while retaining control over when such disclosures take place.

Temporal Management of Privacy Turbulence

Accumulating hosting experience helped households and their individual members to figure out how they wanted to engage in hosting and, as a result, regulate their collective and personal privacy boundaries more effectively. It was typical for the hosts to act upon perceived privacy turbulence in a twofold fashion: First, they tried to be tolerant during particular visits. Second, they made efforts to prevent similar discomforts in the future by updating the profile or by resolving to handle CouchRequests differently. Privacy rule renegotiations were typically postponed to a time when household members could engage in them privately.

Over time, hosts' privacy management efforts during visits and those they made online served, as a dynamic whole, households' attempts to achieve contextually appropriate amounts of interaction. Online profiles were used to convey expectations and restrictions, thus drawing a baseline for negotiating individual visits. Hosting experiences, for their part, informed how profiles should be updated to facilitate future negotiations. Based on participants' accounts, profiles were not updated frequently, but when they were, changes were often prompted by privacy turbulence, such as an overwhelming hosting experience. For instance, hosting four college students at once had led Jenna and Simon to decrease the number of visitors they proposed to welcome:

When we had the four kids, like the four college people, and it was a mess, [we] said "okay, no more four people at the same time. Three's the max." . . . Just like, we're both tired, and we said, "Okay, four is too much."

Learning from uncomfortable experiences allowed participants to pursue hosting as smoothly as possible. Discussions after visits were an important site of negotiating hosting among household members. These moments of reflection allowed the household members to express concerns, determine whether and how to continue hosting, and figure out how to communicate such preferences in the profile.

Discussion

This study contributes to communication privacy management theory by applying it to the study of network hospitality, as practiced by multiperson households via Couchsurfing. The findings constitute an example of privacy management in a networked setting where peer-to-peer exchange necessitates activities both online and off-line. Practicing network hospitality cooperatively can provide sought-after social encounters, but realizing this objective requires efforts both online, where networked technologies are used to manage privacy in a preventive and corrective fashion, and off-line, where privacy is managed in person and in physical spaces during and between visits.

First, this study reveals how household members establish privacy rules for hosting, seeking consensus and allowing each household member a right to veto particular visits. Another important

feature is establishing privacy rules so that levels of participation can be adjusted dynamically. Networked technology facilitates implementing such privacy rules. For instance, hosts can regulate the number of requests they receive with the help of profile settings.

Second, the findings illustrate how household members cooperate as they control interior and exterior privacy boundaries. This happens specifically with the help of delegating hosting responsibilities to more enthusiastic household members and by taking turns in shouldering hosting responsibilities. These cooperative acts of privacy management ease the task of achieving a level of interaction that suits all group members, even while their desire and availability for interaction may differ and fluctuate. They are remarkably similar to what we might expect to observe in other cases of groups managing shared space as they accommodate visitors.

Third, an important contribution of this study is in its findings concerning privacy management with the help of physical and temporal boundaries as these begin to expand CPM toward applications regarding space and territoriality. Because hosting activities involve both online coordination and face-to-face encounters, spatial and temporal boundaries are leveraged to support privacy management. For instance, separate spaces are used to maintain interior boundaries within the home and to have discrete conversations among household members during visits. An example of how networked technology facilitates privacy management is the way in which privacy turbulence was handled by avoiding conflict during visits and preventing future discomforts afterward by updating the online profile or resolving to handle CouchRequests differently.

This study provides a rich depiction of how participants experience hosting and how they cooperate to manage privacy in terms of access to physical spaces and social interaction. Yet caution is necessary in interpreting the findings: First, the sample was comprised of people living in multiperson households in urban metropolitan settings in the United States. This limits the scope of cultural variation that the study captures. Although Couchsurfing is an international network with cross-cultural and cosmopolitan ambitions, cultural differences may shape hosting practices and related privacy management in significant ways. Second, those who host alone were not included. A systematic comparison of solo versus group hosts remains a topic for future study, and it would deepen our understanding of what is particular about managing privacy as a multiperson household. Third, the point of view of guests is represented only insofar as participants had experiences of acting in the role of a couchsurfer.

Fourth, multiperson households are particular types of groups, not a monolithic category. This study was not devised to analyze how the size, cohesion, levels of autonomy, or quality of relationships shape negotiations over hosting. For example, the ties that bind self-defined domestic partnerships and communal households may provide drastically different starting points for managing a household's exterior boundaries. Going forward, the field would benefit from a systematic analysis of how household type affects privacy management in the context of network hospitality. Future work should consider and compare systematically the practices of different types of shared and single households, in varied hosting locations as well as societal and cultural contexts. Additionally, it would be fruitful to examine communication privacy management through practices of *group guessting*. Finally, as a particular case of nonmonetary hospitality exchange, couchsurfing is not broadly representative of network hospitality. An

open question for future study is whether and how privacy management differs where network hospitality is monetized, such as via Airbnb.

This article describes how some multiperson households cooperate to regulate their collective privacy boundaries and the personal boundaries of their members as they engage in nonmonetary peer-to-peer exchange. Although aspects of the cooperative practices that were identified here are continuous with the past, it is noteworthy that network hospitality involves novel social encounters and that platforms afford managing privacy with the help of technological features such as profile settings. This article has identified Couchsurfing, and the so-called sharing economy more broadly, as a new domain for studying how individuals and groups manage privacy boundaries as they engage in social interaction and exchange activities with previously unfamiliar interlocutors whom they have encountered via a networked platform.

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