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Dr. Lin

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In Cognito

As children grow up, they are taught not to put any of their information onto the internet. When they get older, however, what they do with their information is their choice, including the decision to never reveal their information, and the choice to do so should be protected. The ethics of allowing people to remain anonymous seems fairly cut and dry, individuals are allowed to make individual choices and if that choice is the decision to not put their name on somethings, then that's a decision that is currently protected by the law. In fact, even before computers and the internet, aliases existed for the sole purpose of maintaining anonymity, and those were not and are not illegal. In fact, anonymity and privacy allow people to take steps they might not make face to face, get the help they need or say something they think needs to be said.

The shield that anonymity gives people makes them bold enough to connect with other people or face problems that they otherwise could not. This can be used in many ways, such as with conversation forums such as Reddit, or VRChat, the VR game that lets someone portray themselves as an avatar of their choosing. Interestingly, people have made a career of hiding their identity and maintaining a persona with Twitch, YouTube, and especially being a Virtual Youtuber. The ability to remain anonymous is the norm of Internet and to reveal anything about someone's online identity is not just a faux pas, but also illegal.

As part of the United States of America's Constitutional Amendments, the right to anonymity is an inherent part of the ability to speak freely. As was stated in the McIntyre Vs Ohio Elections case, "Anonymity is a shield from the tyranny of the majority." (Supreme Court of the US 1995) Anonymity is a guarded privilege that any US citizen has, as it protects them from people who would seek to do them harm for their opinions or idea, especially if those ideas are controversial. Given the very realistic idea of angry mobs, this is a good practice, as it makes it easier for others to share such ideas and oppose beliefs and structures that they believe to be tyrannical. On the internet, having the protection of anonymity grants you that same privilege, a voice to speak up about issues they are having or see in their daily lives, make online petitions, or speak out to others having the same issues.

Anonymity does have its downsides, because it grants courage and a platform to those who wish to antagonize and harass others. Online bullying, stalking, and harassing is a real issue on every forum that exists. The freedom from real consequence it gives people makes it so those who wish to do harm can do so easily. Not only that, but anonymity also can cause issues for those who do not wish to do harm but are bad at communicating or controlling their tone, especially through text. This can cause a fair deal of harm, even if unintentional, but there are criminals who can benefit from anonymity. While online aggression is intolerable, their results are far less tangible than the benefit a black hat hacker or a money launderer. The benefit granted by anonymity makes these threats incredibly dangerous and difficult to track and punish for their crimes.

Regardless of what some vile people would do with it, it's still an important part of our daily lives, integrated as part of internet culture and has become so common that we instruct children how to use it and maintain proper internet etiquette, not revealing your information to

anyone you don't know and to be aware of its dangers. The reason this has happened is because it is ethical for people to maintain their security and privacy by being anonymous. It has been this way for far longer than the internet has been around and will continue to be that way. While there are problems with it, this grants the common citizen freedom in how to interact with others on the internet while feeling safe and secure in the knowledge that their face and voice cannot be traced easily.

Works Cited

Supreme Court of the United States, McIntyre v. Ohio Elections Comm'n (93-986), 514 U.S. 334 (1995).