

The New York Times

Room for Debate: A Running Commentary on the News

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You're Mad! You're on YouTube!

Will the inability to remain invisible stop people from losing their tempers and inhibitions in public?

Promoting Repression

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Recent news about digital misdoings and their offline consequences should have us asking ourselves an important societal question: How big a role do we want our personal lives (as revealed via the Internet) playing in our work lives?

I argued last week, for example, that [Representative Anthony Weiner's resignation was bad for America](#), mainly because his staying in office would have set a precedent that the “naughty” things we do in our personal time need not derail our careers. It's much easier for our bosses and employees to encounter the details of our non-work lives without our sharing it consciously, thanks to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs galore and the “growing publicness” of the Internet in general.

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The digital intersection of our professional and private lives is getting busier thanks to a new start-up, Social Intelligence, which [mines the Web for information about job applicants](#) and [performs social media monitoring of employees](#) to confirm that they are complying with their employers' social media policies. How are we going to start drawing the line on what's relevant to work as more and more of our personal lives and private moments migrate into the public sphere online?

Some people think employers need to be doing more mining of prospective employees' information. After a teacher in Nebraska slept with a 14-year-old student in 2009, the girl's parents [sued the school](#) claiming it should not have hired the teacher because his MySpace page revealed that he was obsessed with sex. Should anyone who works with children be screened for sexual innuendos on his or her social networking page?

Meanwhile, Social Intelligence flagged a job applicant as “racist” for joining a Facebook group that suggests all people who live in the U.S. should be required to speak English. It flagged another for potential illicit drug use, in part because of the applicant's support on Craigslist for the legalization of cannabis in 2012. Is that a fair incorporation of political views in the hiring evaluation process?

With our personal lives increasingly running into our professional ones online, we either need to increase our social tolerance for what people do in their off-hours or resign ourselves to a society that rewards only those who live repressed and boring lives.

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