

UNFINISHED

July 1, 2022

Welcome back to the Unfinished newsletter, where we explore the intersection of tech, ethics, and social impact.

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What we're thinking about

Data privacy in the post-*Roe v. Wade* era.

The Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* has major ramifications for people who track their reproductive health or search for information about family planning using online services. Privacy experts have long warned that personal data could be used to prosecute people seeking abortions in states where it's outlawed. And the tech companies with the power to set the terms for how this data is collected, stored, and accessed have been [silent about data privacy so far](#). The *Verge* [published a great piece](#) exploring the possible surveillance risks to individuals — there are too many to enumerate here — as did [Engadget](#) and the [Center for Security and Emerging Technology](#) at Georgetown University, one of our partner organizations.

The issue is less about personal politics and more about the out-of-control surveillance economy that allows companies like Meta, Google, and TikTok to reap vast profits from your private information. Oftentimes, the exchange of this data is hidden well below the surface; although you might think to be cautious about using a [period-tracking app](#), you might not realize you're being tracked while navigating the web. The [Washington Post reported earlier this week](#) that Planned Parenthood uses marketing trackers on its website that can feed information about an individual's location and abortion procedures to companies including Google, Facebook, and TikTok, all of which could be used in their lucrative ad-targeting businesses.

"Only the companies would know for sure how they use our data, but any data sitting on servers is vulnerable to potential cyberattacks or government subpoenas," Tatum Hunter, the *Post* reporter, wrote. "In a criminal abortion case,

an IP address would be pertinent because with the help of internet service providers, law enforcement can trace IP addresses back to individuals.”

(Following the report, [Planned Parenthood said it was suspending the use of these trackers.](#))

So, as the *New York Times* journalist [Shira Ovide wrote in a column on Thursday](#), “Whatever your views about abortion, this is a moment to reflect on what we have given up to the hungry maw of America’s unfettered data collection economy.” The current tech paradigm removes agency from the average user and forces you to agree to invasive tracking to use basic services. The Supreme Court’s decision directly impacts Americans, but it also shines a spotlight on an issue that affects people around the world — without significant data privacy protections or a new model for social networking, our digital interactions can and will be used against us.

💡 *As part of our new **Unfinished Conversations** series on Twitter Spaces, we’ll convene a panel on data privacy in this new era on Thursday, July 7 at 1pm ET. [Tap here to set a reminder to join us.](#)*

👐 Speaking of Unfinished Conversations...

We held the inaugural session of Unfinished Conversations on Thursday with some of our friends from [New_Public](#), an Unfinished Network partner. Angelica Quicksey, Head of New_Public’s Public Spaces Incubator, and Eli Pariser, Co-Director of New_Public, joined our editor-in-chief Damon Beres for a conversation about taking inspiration from urban planning to build better digital spaces.

One example: “Early in my academic career, I did a lot of work around the way that coffee shops changed neighborhoods,” Quicksey said. “The emergence of the coffee shop in the U.S. in the late ’80s and early ’90s [created] spaces in neighborhoods that were not focused on drinking [alcohol]. As opposed to going out to a bar, there was suddenly a space in the neighborhood where women, where families, where community groups could go to meet — in a non-sexualized space where alcohol wasn’t part of the program — and interact in a very different way... What’s the version of that that you can apply to online space?”

[Listen to the full conversation here.](#)



Redefining social media

At the Aspen Ideas Festival this week, the social psychologist [Jonathan Haidt spoke with Frank McCourt](#), Chairman and CEO of Unfinished and founder of [Project Liberty](#), about building a better internet. (Haidt is the author of a [recent viral essay for the Atlantic](#) that associates social media with the erosion of American democracy.)

Project Liberty and its [decentralized social networking protocol](#), a new approach to digital engagement that will empower users to set the terms for how their own data is accessed. If you care about the data privacy issues we discussed above, this is a conversation for you.

“What if there was another protocol that decentralized the social graph?” McCourt said. “The social graph is just our data and how we communicate with others. Right now, it’s atomized. We each have billions of these social graphs sucked up by a few entities. What if the social graph was the universal graph, a public resource — part of the public part of the internet. [What if] we all had ownership and control of our data within that public resource, and rather than click on these absurd cookies giving permissions to these apps to have our data and do whatever they want with it, it was reversed, and the new apps created in web3 had to agree to our terms for how the data is used, for what purpose, on what terms?”

He underscored that engagement from a broad spectrum of people outside the tech sphere is crucial to getting this right.

“Social shift needs to happen from all of us,” McCourt said. “We can’t let technologists solve the problem they’ve created. *We* have to solve the problem.”

Happy Fourth of July

Our U.S. readers are celebrating Independence Day this weekend. We’d like to make two recommendations for the occasion. First, our partners at Citizen University have a [framework for a “DIY Fourth of July”](#) that will help you have meaningful conversations with the folks you’re gathering with this weekend.

And Baratunde Thurston, our amazing MC for [Unfinished Live](#), has a new show debuting on PBS Tuesday. [America Outdoors](#) is all about drawing meaning from the country’s diverse landscapes and learning about how they impact our interactions with one another. If you like Thurston on the show — and you will! — make sure to [come see him at Unfinished Live this September](#).

 **Join our next Unfinished Salon**

UNFINISHED SALONS

#003

*How can we reimagine digital
tech to build a thriving
multiracial democracy?*

Wednesday, July 13 • 2-3 PM ET



We'd like to leave you with an invitation today. Join us on Wednesday, July 13 at 2pm ET for a conversation exploring the intersection of community building and digital technology with Claudia Peña, Executive Director of For Freedoms, Prakash Janakiraman, Co-Founder and Chief Architect of Nextdoor, Pia Mancini, Co-Founder and CEO of Open Collective, and Deepti Doshi, Co-Director of New_Public.

[Register here.](#)

Thank you for reading.

Follow Unfinished ([@byUnfinished](#)) on Twitter for ongoing chitchat on the changing web.

Have a great, restful weekend.

The Unfinished team

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