

Hello everyone! My name is Lyd Wyble, I am a junior Mathematical Sciences student at Binghamton University, and this is a brief commentary on my submission for the "Beyond the Panopticon" student showcase. My project focuses on popular language-learning platform Duolingo, specifically in regards to the transparency of its Privacy Policy. I chose Duolingo because it's certainly a very unique social media- it almost feels like you can't call it that. While it has every function of a social media- a friend network, posts, shareables- these features aren't the focus of the platform. I was curious to see if Duolingo's Privacy Policy would give this content the same protections as posts on more traditional platforms. On the other hand, Duolingo has lots of nontraditional user-generated content. During lessons, for example, users may submit voice recordings and short written responses. Unlike Tweets or Instagram posts, there's no expectation for this content to be shared or stored. We assume that our responses are recorded, assessed, and then... tossed into the void, maybe? While the reality of this content management system is available via the Privacy Policy, it's not common knowledge among users. In my project, I hope to break down how Duolingo treats this user-generated content, and discuss avenues for making this information more widely known.

The original audience for this project was certainly not a professional showcase. I had created it for myself and my roommates, most of whom are avid Duolingo users- my 500 day streak milestone just passed last week. To be honest, this started as an excuse to be informal and make jokes throughout the presentation. But to an extent, normalizing casual talks about data privacy is a great solution to the crisis of data obstruction. Sure, stopping your roommate in the kitchen and saying "Hey, did you know it's actually Amazon that analyzes our Duolingo speaking exercises?" isn't going to fix any of the huge issues with unethical data collection. But it's a place to start. In a world where corporations will go to ridiculous lengths to avoid telling us what happens to our data, talking about it is one of the only actions we can take. Universal demystification of surveillance is perhaps the most important step towards a more just and transparent digital world.

This matter of obscurity is something that I wanted to emphasize throughout my presentation, particularly in its relation to omission. Corporations, including Duolingo, are generally not omitting information from their Privacy Policies- or at least, they aren't doing so legally. But such policies are often hidden deep within an app's Settings or in miniscule font at the bottom of a webpage. We have grown accustomed to account creation pages that assume we've read the Privacy Policy. We tick boxes and move on. On the rare occasions when we are actually presented with a policy, it's so common to scroll blindly through it that the process is almost a meme. And even if a user had the opportunity and

interest to read them, Privacy Policies are often so stuffed with tech jargon and meaningless fluff that they become incomprehensible. Despite my presentation being largely critical of Duolingo, its Privacy Policy is actually very readable and well-explained. It is written in plain English, and concepts that may be foreign to users (such as hash encryption) are explained thoroughly. The policy is also fairly short. Where I found Duolingo had failed its users was instead in the difficulty of finding and interacting with the policy. It is not presented to users upon account creation, and seems deliberately hidden when engaging with the app or webpage. This is especially true for the mobile version, where users have to click through multiple pages to access the policy. And on this mobile version, many of the links within the Policy led to pages that were unoptimized for mobile devices. Some of these links, such as the opt-out for Google Analytics, did not work at all. This is a serious problem, as a vast majority of users solely interact with Duolingo via its mobile app. Avenues for improvement are discussed in more depth in the report, but this consideration for mobile users and increased accessibility for opt-outs are two crucial changes Duolingo needs to implement.

This concludes my little audio commentary. I hope you enjoy the corresponding report, other Beyond the Panopticon presentations, and the rest of DRPC Privacy Week. I want to give a special thank you to Dr. Noah Wason for inspiring my interest in data privacy ethics and giving me the opportunity to present here today. And thank you as well for listening.