

“Privacy is becoming a thing of the past.” (2015)

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. As a young person of Ireland, it gives me great pleasure to be here with you this evening to discuss the changing nature of privacy in our lives, an issue which not only effects the younger generation, but is having an increasing impact on those of the working world and the older generation as well. It appears that in our modern world, privacy is no longer a right, but a privilege that very few are entitled to. We praise social media and our instant access to the latest news stories, but we need to stop and ask ourselves what price does some poor individual have to pay in order for us to get “the latest scoop”? Is the cost of their privacy a price we are willing to pay? I am not only referring to scandalous stories of celebrities in tabloid newspapers, but also to our own privacy on social media, and even off-line in our own social and family circles. The news is often full of stories about breaches of privacy rights, yet our momentary horror at such disregard of basic human rights is quickly forgotten until the same thing happens again a few weeks later. It is clear that privacy is becoming a thing of the past, but I urge you, the people of Ireland, to take action before we reach the day when privacy no longer exists.

The advances in social media in the last ten to twenty years have been phenomenal. Social media has given regular people a platform from which they can share their lives with the world. With the click of a button, we have the power to give our opinion, share a picture or like a post, to reveal to the nation what exactly is going on in our lives. I am not by any means against social media – I have an Instagram account which I use regularly, and I get plenty of entertainment out of watching other people’s stories on Snapchat – but I must question the power it has given us., or, as some might say, the power it has over us. I believe our initial desire to share some exciting news with friends online has developed into something more. We feel obliged to post every detail of our waking hours online, an obligation which greatly contradicts our right to privacy. Of course, many would argue that what we choose to share online is a personal choice, but I disagree entirely. We have become slaves to the system. We have been brainwashed into thinking that if we don’t post our lives online, then we might as well not exist. This outward pressure on our nation, mainly young people, to expose every

snippet of information about their personal lives online to a network of critics, many of whom they barely know, is having a detrimental effect. I'm sure you will agree that this lack of privacy isn't healthy. It is no secret that there is a direct correlation between the development of social media and the number of people suffering from mental health issues as a result of this constant exposure. These are problems that our parents and grandparents didn't experience, and thus we can conclude that this imminent extinction of privacy in our lives is a modern world issue.

Our lack of privacy online is infiltrating other parts of our lives. The idea of keeping something "just within the family" no longer exists. Friends, peers and colleagues readily take offence if we decide to keep some of our personal lives to ourselves. We live in a society where we are made to feel guilty for not wanting to shout our news from the rooftops for all to hear. In the past, both good and bad news would only be shared with close friends and family, not the entire world via a post on Facebook or an announcement in the staffroom at lunch time. I personally feel vulnerable under this pressure to share my entire life with those around me. There are times when I would like to keep my own successes and downfalls to myself, and that should be okay. While I appreciate the congratulations that others give me in my achievements, and support they give me through my struggles, sometimes I prefer to keep my personal life just that – personal. Many will disagree with me on this point, saying they prefer people who are "open books" and that "a problem shared is a problem halved", and I support their views entirely. However, we must consider the effects that this disregard of privacy is having on our lives today. I'm sure I'm not alone in thinking that by sharing every detail of the romantic date your boyfriend took you on, or the moment your child took their first steps, with a colleague on a Monday morning at work, somewhat devalues these precious moment's significance. It has become our culture to inform every person we encounter of the details of our private lives, yet we fail to realise that by doing so, the most significant moments of our lives are losing their meaning. We are blind to the fact that what makes many of these moments so special is the fact that they are private, intimate affairs, and that by sharing them with any ol' Joe who will listen, we are destroying their very essence.

The lack of privacy in our modern world has been accelerated by the ever-increasing number of tabloid newspapers and scandalous celebrity stories. Actors, popstars and royalty alike are bombarded by paparazzi, tracking their every move. The public's hunger for the latest

scandal has driven reporters to completely disregard privacy boundaries. I do not by any means envy those who are products of the vicious, Hollywood industry. To have your every action photographed and recorded must be a living nightmare. It is no wonder that this horrendous pressure that celebrities are under to reveal every aspect of their private lives has driven many of them over the edge, with many of them turning to drugs and alcohol to escape. But aren't we, the public, the vain fools? We criticise these drug-taking, alcohol-abusing stars, yet fail to realise that we are the ones pushing them to this. By buying the newspapers and following their scandalous lives online, we are fuelling the demand for the latest "hot gossip" story. The concept of privacy doesn't exist in the life of the modern-day celebrity, and we are to blame for this. After the death of singer Dolores O'Riordan, we quickly became impatient when we didn't hear the results of the coroner's report immediately. It appears that even in death, the poor woman isn't entitled to any privacy. Society has acquired a sense of entitlement, a feeling of having a right to know exactly what's going on in the lives of the rich and famous, yet we forget that underneath the glitz and glamour, they are vulnerable humans like ourselves. We must take a step back and look at how immoral our quest for the latest scandal has become. Not only are people's privacy rights being completely ignored, but their health is also suffering. I urge you to put yourself in the shoes of a celebrity and ponder on how you would feel if your entire life was splashed on the front of a newspaper day in, day out. I can guarantee you, it would not be a pleasurable experience.

On a final note, I ask you to consider the recent case of two nine-year-old girls who were pressured into sending revealing photos of themselves to a paedophile two and a half times their age. This case, where the predator acquired photographs of the girls through various social media, is a most horrendous case of infringement of privacy rights. These young girls, who were contacted through devices they presumably bought with their communion money, have experienced the most horrific form of online abuse and undoubtedly will be scarred for life as a result. Not only was their privacy taken from them, but also their innocence. And as a society, what was our reaction? Of course, we were shocked and appalled that someone could do such a thing, but the hype quickly died down and we got on with our lives. Our social media habits and blatant disregard for others', as well as our own privacy didn't change as a result. I'm sure the majority of you had forgotten all about the case until I brought it to your attention just now. Ladies and gentlemen, this is what is wrong with the world which we live in. We are so obsessed with having the most likes and the most followers online, always being the one to tell a funny story, or the one with the latest gossip, that we quickly forget the importance of

privacy. I do not doubt that we were all appalled by the recent case of the two girls who were abused online, but the modern culture of having no privacy has become so entrenched in us that we fail to take any action. We continue to share our lives with others in the way we have become accustomed to, until another story regarding the issue of privacy hits the news, and then once again we will be momentarily distracted before continuing on with our lives. This is not good enough. What is required by us as a nation is that we change our ways, learn to appreciate the importance of privacy, and learn to protect those around us from the horrors of over exposure.

I hope that today can go down in history as a day to remember. That we can look back and say that today was the day that we, the people of Ireland, turned back the clock. The day we rediscovered the importance of privacy in our lives. No major action is required, a change in our ways will suffice. By appreciating the value of privacy, we can prevent more cases like that of the nine-year old girls who were abused online. It is time that we rediscovered the preciousness of our lives, without sharing it with the whole world. By observing our own privacy rights, as well as those of others, we can bring value back to the most important moments of our lives. I urge you all to step away from the computer, throw away the tabloid newspaper, and appreciate the simplicity of your own private life. First and foremost, life is for living, and I urge you to do just that. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your attention this afternoon and I hope that you too, can rediscover the significance of privacy in your lives.