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# Secrets: an Arts-Based Inquiry

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SECRETS: AN ARTS-BASED INQUIRY

An Interactive Qualifying Project Report  
Submitted to the Faculty of  
WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Bachelor of Science

By

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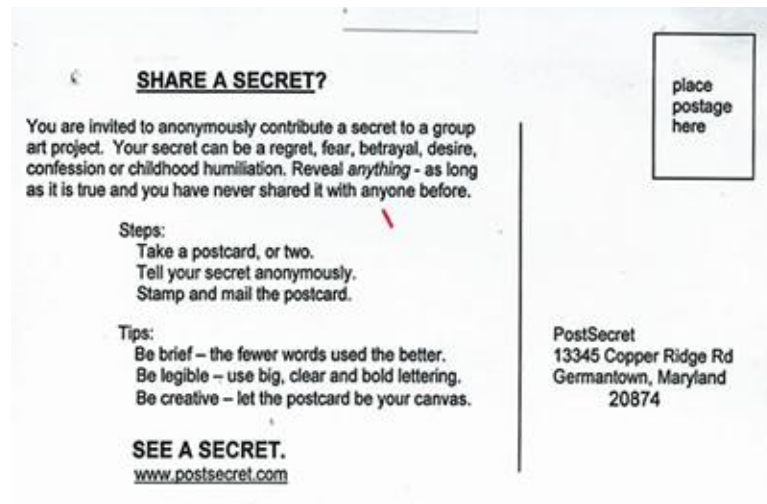
## **Abstract:**

The intent of this project was to learn about the nature of the WPI community by examining the secrets shared by its members. To collect this data, an anonymous survey was distributed electronically to the institute's students, faculty, and staff. With aid from the literature, these results were explored and presented in the form of written analysis as well as three art pieces displayed to the community surveyed.

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## Introduction



**Figure 1** The reverse of the original PostSecret cards from the PostSecret site

PostSecret started as an artistic project by Frank Warren. In 2004, he distributed three thousand self-addressed, blank postcards in the DC area, handing them out to people and hiding them in coffee shops and library books. The writing on the back invited those who found the postcard to share with him their secret. When one hundred of the postcards returned to him, they were put on display as an art exhibit in DC and created a blog to display them online. As time passed, the secrets kept coming in. (Dubner, 2007).

Seven years later and Frank Warren still receives numerous postcards in his mailbox every day. Five books of these secrets have been published with the proceeds frequently going to suicide prevention organizations. The blog is still up and is updated weekly with a new selection of two to three dozen secrets, sometimes themed to reflect current events or holiday. Frank Warren now does tours of college campuses and other locations, giving talks about the project. Numerous schools have done smaller-scaled projects that mimic the structure of PostSecret, tailoring them to their environment. It was PostSecret, and one of these smaller, local presentations of secrets that inspired this project's topic of inquiry. These projects are only

possible because there are people willing to share their own secrets and others who wish to know those of others.

As such, keeping a secret is a relatively universal human experience. The Oxford Dictionary defines a secret as the following:

- “Something that is kept or meant to be kept unknown or unseen by others
- Something that is not properly understood; a mystery
- A valid but not uncommonly known or recognized method of achieving or maintaining something (“Secret, 2010)”

What interests us the most is the first definition outlined, although these hidden things can seem rather mysterious or difficult to fully understand. Secrets exist through a majority of our lives. From an early age, we realize that not everything we know and experience is common to everyone else (Finkenauer, Engels, & Meeus, 2002). From then on, people can consciously hide away emotions, experiences, and information as their own secrets.

There are numerous reasons why one may keep a secret. Frequently, these reasons are involved with shaping others’ perceptions of the secret-keeper by hiding something of perceived importance or value from them. Often, these things kept secret are considered taboo to talk about or be associated with. By looking at these things commonly left unsaid, one can gain some insight into a person or group’s mindset and opinions.

There are also a myriad of reasons why a secret may need to be shared. Hiding away something important can be a source of stress, which in turn can lead to physical problems or harm. Revealing something about another or oneself can make the subject more vulnerable to social pressures or influence. For instance, if someone were to reveal they were gay, this may leave them vulnerable. There is always the possibility that in revealing this little byte of

information, the secret keeper could relieve some of the stress upon him, or feel more accepted within a specific community.

For some, it is easier to reveal these secrets when they know that the secret will not be traced back to them. By revealing their secrets through anonymous means in a public forum, one can find the empathy and understanding of their audience, without the fear of harm to their reputation. The popularity of such sites as Post Secret shows this to be true as so many people send in their secrets to be posted, and many more visit the site to view submitted secrets. In this day and age, sharing secrets anonymously is rather simple. With technology such as the Internet, it is relatively easy to hide behind a pseudonym and release one's secrets into the world.

This project intended to examine the nature of anonymously-disclosed secrets and to answer the two following questions:

1. What are the secrets of the WPI community?
2. What can these secrets tell us about the WPI community?

In addition, we wished to understand the motives behind peoples' decision to hide or to share their secret from their community, and if these motives are changed at all with the prospect of remaining anonymous while doing so. The culmination of this research was the creation of several individual art pieces reflecting the findings of this research and made available for display to the WPI community.

## Prior Research

### ***What is a secret and why would one be kept?***

As stated before, the focus of this inquiry is to discover the things people keep secret from others and why. We would like to begin by defining what a secret is. In addition to the dictionary definitions provided earlier, secrecy has also been defined as the “active inhibition of disclosure”, and to keep a secret is to deliberately hide information from others (Kelly & McKillop, 1996). Any time a conversation turns to a matter related to said secret, the holder of the secret must actively watch what he says and does if he wishes to keep it. That is, the secret-keeper must at the very least be selective with the truth, must constantly edit what he says.

Based on these definitions, a secret requires at least two parties. There is the person or people who are “in the know” and there is the person or people who are not. There is the secret-keeper or keepers and those whom the secret is being kept from (Kelly, 2002). This is of course a simplification, because knowledge is not an on/off state. Different people or groups of people may know different parts or versions of the truth.

We learn to keep secrets early in our childhoods. According to some research, keeping secrets is a key part of the process of self-individualization. Around the age of 5 years, children begin to realize that information they know may not be universally available (Finkenauer, Engels, & Meeus, 2002). This realization, that what the child knows is separate from what others know, helps to build their sense of self and understanding of boundaries. They learn how to keep secrets. They often then go through a manipulative phase, using this new-found ability to control their environment (Kelly & McKillop, 1996). At this point, most parents then attempt to teach their children to tell the truth. While the child may not take this lesson to heart, this at the very least teaches them that dishonesty is viewed as a bad thing, and by extension, that keeping a secret can be as well.



This new-found ability does not go away as the child grows up. It's refined, channeled into white lies and politeness as well as the occasional "the dog ate my homework". Much of social interaction centers around telling the right part of the truth, or the truth seen from the right angle: "of *course* that dress doesn't make you look fat", for example.

## ***Common types of secrets***

A secret is something so inherent to humans we incorporate it in our everyday lives, sometimes without a second thought. This means secrets are everywhere and can be about anything. This leads to the question of what kinds of secrets one can have, and are some secrets more frequently kept.

In 1974, Norton and his colleagues performed a brief survey of 359 undergraduate students at the University of Wisconsin. In it, the students were asked to “anonymously write [their] top secret – the one thing you would be most disinclined to share with the group.” Although his primary interest was in the risks associated with the gathered secrets, he came up with a “content analysis” which grouped the responses into 17 categories: Sex, Violence or destruction, Mental Health, Masking, Failure, Stealing, Loneliness, Defective relationships, Cheating, Alcohol, Drugs, Phobia, Physical health, Ego vanity, Goals and plans, Habits, and Non-secrets, a category used to describe the responses which were “too broad, obviously absurd, or highly positive”. (Norton 1974) A number of these categories represent things which are usually seen negatively by the population at large. Violence, failure, cheating, drugs and alcohol; these and others tend to carry with them a stigma, and are usually seen as a trend for certain types of secrets.

Secrets kept within a family are kept as a means of protecting the family name. However, this secret keeping is not only intended to be hidden from society, but with a focus of keeping it secret from parts of the family (Kelly & McKillop, 1996). Family secrets, such as covered scandals, eloping, or “the bad egg”, are known only to the immediate family and kept from the rest so as not to be ridiculed by other family members. By the rules people make in their own society, they set standards for morals and reputable behaviors. Anything against these regulations

stands out and is often scorned. This can be said for family members with certain medical conditions that are frowned upon with in society as well.

People who have less fortunate medical histories may choose to hide their condition with others so as to avoid pity, alienation, or unfriendly behavior directed at them. (Kelly & McKillop 1996) For instance, someone may hide the fact that they have a disease like AIDS in order to avoid being targeted or labeled. Some people with cancer may feel similarly like they want nothing more than to blend back into society and not stand out for a disease people associate with pain and suffering.

Patients who have painful memories of horrific or traumatic ordeals may avoid sharing for fear of rejection. They might even have told their past therapist about this ordeal and felt that they did not get a helpful response or that they were being judged. (Kelly and McKillop 1996) This is an unfortunate circumstance since their therapist is there to help them alleviate some of the stress built up from holding this secret from others.

In general, personal secrets are secrets held primarily by the person the secret is about. It might be kept to maintain relationships, to avoid ruining friendships, to protect a reputation or any number of other reasons. This can, however, lead to an alienation brought on by being the only person aware of the secrets existence or nature. (Kelly & McKillop 1996) There are many more kinds of secrets which depend on the situation and the reasons for keeping the secret. There are also many reasons why people keep secrets, obvious or not, even if it may be better for them to share it with another.

## ***Why people share secrets***

Certain types of secrets tend to come up more often, possibly because those secrets are more important or because there is a social reason for the person to keep it a secret. In this next section, we will look at the reasons people keep secrets hidden in the dark from society and even from those close to them.

People seem to get different things out of disclosing secrets. Some just want to talk while others are looking for the acceptance of their peers.

## **Five functions of self-disclosure**

Derlega and Grzelak argue in their 1979 piece that there are five fundamental functions which self-disclosure can fulfill. These functions are Self-Clarification, Social Validation, Relationship Development, Social Control and (Self) Expression. A number of these functions can be seen to have arisen from an inability to share specific things with members of his community. As such, these functions seem to serve the purpose of tailoring the perception of this person as a member of this community;

1) *Self-Clarification*: One may feel the need to affirm what it is that they have said, or to clarify motivations for what lies ahead. Essentially, this is appropriate for when one wants to reduce ambiguity or inconsistencies. This form of self-disclosure can also lead to increased self-awareness, such as that garnered through journaling, writing a letter, or other times when one is not directly addressing an audience.

- 2) *Social Validation*: Like self-clarification, this can function to heighten one's sense of self-awareness. This is achieved, not through reflection upon one's own words, but through the feedback of others, and it is an aim of social validation to seek this response out.
  - 3) *Relationship Development*: There is a rewarding aspect to the exchange of information. The receptor of the new disclosure may feel closer, having been "selected" to partake in the disclosure. The willingness to share something is often an indicator of closeness or trust, or can be a gesture to reciprocate something already shared. The end goal is to strengthen the relationship between the person disclosing and the person receiving.
  - 4) *Social Control*: The goal of this type of disclosure is to adjust the way the one disclosing the secret is seen by others. Frequently, one may attempt to make themselves seem more desirable or less objectionable to their audience.
  - 5) *Expression*: This frequently refers to a more spontaneous disclosure, seen to be appropriate when it has an "expressive or cathartic" function. Expression is meant to work as a release to pent-up feelings or to relieve the pressures of keeping these emotions contained.
- (Derlega, & Grzelak, 1979) and (Kelly, 2002)

### **A "compelling need" to self-disclose**

The "Expression" function mentioned above has been looked into with some frequency, with some saying that there is a "compelling need" to disclose personal emotional experiences (Kelly 2002). Tait and Silver (1989) wrote on this matter, saying that individuals who had experienced a major, negative event in their lifetime reported feeling a need to talk. Talking through the events with a trusted person could help the individual gain closure. In a supportive environment, a catharsis could be achieved, and the emotions held back could be released, allowing one a relief.

## **Benefits of disclosure**

There are reasons people share their secrets other than a compelling mental “need” to do so. Studies suggest that those who are more likely to conceal personal information are also more likely to suffer physical problems such as headaches, back pain, or nausea, and are more likely to be anxious, shy, or depressed than those who are more open. A number of these symptoms also correspond to those commonly attached to stress, suggesting that that these are a result of the mental and physical stresses placed on the secret-keeper in the process of hiding it (Kelly, 1999)

It is likely that at least some of this stress originates from what is known as the Zeigarnik effect, or the tendency for people to think about and recall unfinished tasks more than finished ones. This suggests that people have a “need for completion or resolution of events”. This can partially explain the stresses placed upon a secret-keeper, as their attentions are directed towards the secret, something which is left out of at least a portion of their life. This incompleteness can be rectified through the telling of the secret to another, or through deliberate attempts at new insights through self-reflection. Either of these methods can serve as the cathartic experience needed to bring this secret to completion within the secret-keeper’s mind (Kelly, 1997).

## ***Secrets within a community***

The need to share a secret can be multiplied by the situation surrounding the person. In some communities, there are certain taboos that make it difficult for people to be individualistic. They may want to keep their secret for fear of being made fun of or for more serious repercussions. The next portion of this paper will explain some dynamics in a community that may lead to encouraging people to keep secrets and how this can help us understand a community by learning their secrets.

A community, as we are using the term, is simply a group of people in contact with each other. By “in contact”, we mean that it is not unreasonable to believe that a secret shared with some of them could eventually become known to all. This could include the community of those who hang out at the same mall, the community of WPI students and faculty, the community of those who post on a single online forum. These are all groups that someone could keep a secret from. In the case of the group of people at the mall, it could be something as simple as who cheated on whom. In the case of an online forum, someone of one gender might post under a pseudonym of another gender. This was done by early female writers to avoid discrimination against women.

This brings us to another property of communities: they, or the people who compose them, may have different standards, taboos, etc. To illustrate, a student at WPI would almost certainly keep academic dishonesty under wraps. However, a kid hanging out with his friends at the mall after class might brag about cheating instead of studying. Another, more dramatic example: In the community of members of a hypothetical street gang, talking to the cops is kept secret and drug use is not. In a hypothetical suburb, assisting the police is seen as a good thing and drug use is taboo.

Communities, as we use the term, are not rigidly defined. Their boundaries are porous. In this case, we are interested in the WPI community. Is a non-student who is a friend of many WPI students part of this community? Is a socially reclusive student a member of the WPI community? We have chosen to define the WPI community as the community composed of approximately five thousand WPI faculty and students. This approximates the WPI community well enough for the purposes of this study.

According to the book *Social Psychology*, the larger a group is, the greater the tendency is to outwardly agree with the ideas of the group. "Conformity increases as the size of the group increases. Larger groups exert both more normative influence (better to be disliked or shunned by a few than by many) and more informational social influence than smaller groups (all things being equal, a position advanced by many is more likely to be correct than a position advanced by a few)." (pp. 285) However, since this trend levels off after a group size has reached about 4 or 5 people, WPI's community of around five thousand is well in the range of a conformed group. (Snively, 2011)

If one person has a secret, something they feel unable to disclose, we cannot say with any degree of confidence that any community he belongs with is not receptive to that secret. A large group of people all belonging to a single community and keeping similar secrets from that community is different. If they all feel unable to share the same type of secret with the people of a community they are part of, it is likely that that community is unreceptive to secrets of that type. We can then begin to make observations on the community based on the types of secrets people choose to keep from it.

If a group of people in the same community all have similar secrets, it can be presumed that they feel unable to share things of this nature within that community. That is to say, the



community isn't receptive to this type of secret. From knowing this, and from exploring the different trends in the secrets we examine, we can begin to explore the character of the community. Here is an example of this idea, applied to one hypothetical trend.

A large group of people all belong to a single community and have this secret: "I like cilantro on my food". From this we can see that they do not wish it known that they like cilantro, from which we can make the assumption that cilantro and those who enjoy it are disliked by the community they all belong to. From this we can then begin to explore the nature of that community - why do they not like cilantro? Do they hate all other spices too? Is cilantro being tarred by association with some ethnicity that members of this community are prejudiced against?

This idea can be seen in Solomon Asch's 1956 experiment. Conducted with a group of eight individuals, the experiment was designed to determine the effectiveness of conformity in a group this size. The eight individuals were given three lines of varying sizes and asked to match a separate line's length to one of the three. In each group, there was a portion of individuals placed to pick an obvious wrong answer. The point of the experiment was to prove that people would point out the obvious wrong answer and choose the correct answer, despite the group's decision, and that conformity does not always apply. However, surprisingly, the majority of the trials conformed even though the individuals knew the answer given was incorrect. The individuals conformed to the idea of the group in order "to avoid standing out, negatively, in the eyes of everyone else" (Snively, 2011). In a community there is a similar likeliness to conform, so as not to be outcast and stay in favor of the group.

Group conformity results in a projected image of the community which unintentionally creates rules to follow. The enforcement comes from people's fear of standing out and receiving negative effects. This in turn affects the things that people keep to themselves in order to avoid that ridicule, which we hope to see reflected in our research project.

## ***Anonymous disclosure***

As mentioned in the previous section, there are a multitude of reasons why one would want to keep certain things secret. The one which seemed to be the most prominent was the secret-keeper's desire to protect their reputation or social standing. In this manner, secrets can be seen almost as a defense mechanism. However, as also mentioned above, there are a number of reasons why one would share such a secret. In some ways, this could lead to a balancing act on the part of the secret-keeper; an internal battle between the want to disclose and the fear of this action's results. To get some of the benefit of the expressive function of self-disclosure, the secret-keeper can tell his secret to a stranger. In this way he or she can vent without worrying about damage to their reputation.

Having decided that we will be collecting the secrets to analyze anonymously, we must now examine how this method of disclosure will color the results we receive. To put it another way, anonymous disclosure is the lens through which we will view the secrets we receive. Before we begin to explore the effects it will have, we must first define some terms.

### ***Anonymity***

Anonymity, derived from the Greek *anonymos*, literally "without a name", can be defined as a state in which any one object within a set is indistinguishable from another (Pfitzmann, & Hansen, 2005). In more formal terms, it refers to the condition in which a person's identity or any of their identifiers are unknown. Rather than looking at systems of communication in a binary way, indicating whether they are anonymous or not, there are varying degrees of anonymity which one can obtain. To some extent, one can obtain relative anonymity by simply being a member of a large enough crowd, becoming little more than a "face in the crowd".

## *Pseudonymity*

A pseudonym is an assumed name. Here a useful analogy: if anonymity is a man wearing a mask, pseudonymity is a man wearing a mask and a name tag on which an assumed name is written. This is by no means a new phenomenon; the use of pseudonyms spans centuries and a variety of mediums. The authors Mark Twain, Lewis Carroll, and Carolyn Keene never existed as people, only as pen-names for Samuel Clemens, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, and a collective of authors respectively. In the newspapers of the second half of the 20th century, people looking for advice wrote in to “Dear Abby” and “Ask Ann Landers”, another two pseudonyms used by a pair of twin advice columnists. It was relatively common for female writers to use the anonymity of a pen name to keep their gender secret in a time when female writers were not published.

In the age of the Internet, it is rather easy to establish an online ‘identity,’ or pseudonym. Messages can be sent from free-to-register email accounts on a variety of websites. Voice and chat links can be made, also free, between individuals who each can only see the other’s chosen pseudonym. It is not uncommon to have to create a user name and account, often tied to an email account, to contribute to or become a member of an online community. This new identity allows others to easily track different user’s contributions over time and across different discussions, even if they may not know the user’s true identity or name. In some online communities, reputation or time registered are tracked for users, allowing helpful or popular posters to accumulate credibility. However, the ease of registering under a new pseudonym allows any negative reputations to be abandoned almost as easily (Friedman, & Resnick, 1999). The most important thing about pseudonyms is this: messages sent under a pseudonym are anonymous - in more formal terms, messages sent with a pseudonym are a subset of the set of all anonymous messages - a pseudonymously sent message is a functionally anonymous message.

## ***Messages***

Another important term is ‘message.’ When we refer to a message in the context of online communication, we are talking about any message sent with a recipient, contents, and a pseudonym identifying the sender - for example, an email. This category also covers forum posts, posts in comment sections, submissions of content to websites and almost every other method of communicating over the Internet. At a fundamental level, the Internet operates by sending packets of data that hold the Internet address of a recipient, the sender’s Internet address, and some amount of content. Because of the way the Internet is structured, all anyone sees of someone using it is the packets they send. In real life it takes work to become anonymous: wearing a mask or moving as part of a large crowd. On the Internet it takes work to not be anonymous: websites don’t know who users are unless they sign in with a username and password. Thus, anonymity or at least pseudonymity is the rule for online communication. Information in these packets can be converted to general locations with some work (town, city, etc.) but connecting a packet to a specific computer requires resources generally only available to law enforcement agencies (Tanenbaum, 1996).

## **Anonymity on Internet forums**

In a 1995 study researchers analyzed a selection of messages sent to Swedish USENET newsgroups. They grouped messages into categories by theme and calculated the percentage of messages per newsgroup and the percentage of messages by subject. The two most popular subjects were sex and partner search ads. Also present, in smaller numbers, were questions about drugs, pharmaceutical and not, discussions of religion, race and politics. Another, smaller,

portion of the messages related to computer hardware, software, or various technical work and hobby issues (Palme, & Berglund, 2004). Technical discussions are expected because (more so in 1995) the part of the population that posted online was much more likely to be technically inclined than random people on the street. People posting online then, in the infancy of the Internet, were very likely to be technically inclined - programmers, engineers, and so on.

This study only looked at Swedish forums, but it is not unreasonable to expect similar results, perhaps adjusted for local taboos, in different parts of the world. Online communities such as those that make up Usenet often end up forming from groups of people with similar interests.

In July 2010, the popular gaming company Blizzard tried to implement their “Real ID” system, a system which would tie forum posts (messages to the forum from the players) from players of their popular online game World of Warcraft (WoW) to the actual identities of those players. It would also have provided users with social-networking features and cross-game chat functions. This system, as it was originally conceived, would not have been mandatory. However, it would be required to use the community forums. A community used to running in near anonymity, using various pseudonyms and their adopted online identities, would now have their real-life names identities tied to their posts.

There was a massive reaction to this announcement, spurring over 40,000 responses to the initial forum posting announcing the planned changes. Some voiced concerns that female gamers could be singled out for harassment, stalking victims could be found by their online postings, or that employers could then use this information to pass judgment on potential employees. Many more simply didn't want information about their online hobby affecting their public image. WoW and video games in general are still seen by many as a child's hobby. As a

response to this large-scale outcry, Blizzard made the Real ID system opt-in, allowing the members of their online community to continue to use their pseudonymous identities unless they chose otherwise. (Molina, 2010)

### ***Anonymity and politics***

It can also be observed that many authoritarian governments such as China are cracking down on online anonymity. In many authoritarian states, what is and is not taboo is motivated by politics; any views or ideas that could bring down the hammer of state repression are kept secret out of necessity. Whatever the reason people feel unable to share such secrets, the anonymity of the Internet is still an effective shield. For this reason, many authoritarian governments such as China are cracking down on online anonymity. The government of the PRC has recently begun putting measures into effect that would require that online postings be tied to real identities. They are also putting a similar registration program into place for cell phones. The stated goal of these measures is to halt “improper use” of the web according to Fang Weeping, Deputy Secretary General, and Zhengzhou Municipal Government.

“We want to encourage people to speak freely. But we also want to ensure that the information that circulates on the Internet is reliable, safe, and accurate ... We want to encourage people to speak freely. But we also want to ensure that the information that circulates on the Internet is reliable, safe, and accurate” (Hicks, 2010).

However, the government of China currently censors politically sensitive speech and suppresses politically sensitive news stories, so it is unknown what their definition of “reliable, safe, and accurate” is (Wines, 2010). These moves have outraged many politically active

Chinese citizens, causing them to publish an open letter against state censorship (Lam, 2009). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also monitors and controls Internet use, blocking anything deemed immoral or seditious. They too go to lengths to suppress anonymity, blocking access to tools such as anonymous proxy servers that can be used to hide the originator of Internet traffic (OpenNet, 2009).

Both these states actively suppress dissent. Viewed from another angle, secret-keepers in those states whose secrets are 'politically incorrect' have a very good reason to keep their secrets and to avoid having their dissent become publicly known. Prison terms and executions can be much more powerful motivators than social rejection.

There is a reason that many of the secrets disclosed anonymously are things that are not accepted by the community they are kept from. The risks of disclosing a secret are erased when the secret cannot be connected to the identity of the one disclosing it. From this, one can assume that the secrets shared via anonymous, public means would be more representative of riskier, or more stigmatized ones than those shared via other public ones.



## Methodology

Our objective for this project was to explore the nature of secrets, as well as the effect that anonymity can have on the sharing of secrets. From this, we wanted to explore the secrets held by the WPI community. We were curious to see what types of secrets the students here shared. More specifically, we wanted to explore whether the secrets of the WPI community have any reflection on the institute itself. From looking at sites that are specific to certain universities and comparing them, we can see that the posts often reflect unique characteristics of that specific community.

To accomplish this, we decided to distribute a survey through the WPI mailing list. We decided that this would be the best method to ensure that the participants in our survey would remain anonymous. We had considered alternate methods, such as distributing our survey via mail or in a public area such as the Campus Center. Although with the latter two methods we would not know exactly who had contributed which responses, we would have some idea of who had submitted during any particular time frame. More importantly, potential participants might feel less inclined to share or be uncomfortable responding, because they still might be seen submitting an anonymous secret even if the content of that secret is unknown. By using an online form that only marks each response with a timestamp and nothing more, we have no idea just who participated and can make no attempts to attribute a response to an individual.

We then had to decide what segment of the WPI community we would distribute the survey to. After looking into past surveys, we found that many of them had emailed the faculty as well as the student body. This satisfied one of our problems with the idea, that emailing our survey to the faculty would be a breach of protocol. Having found a more casual list of the staff

and faculty, we decided to include their responses as well, as it is not only the students that comprise the WPI community.

Obtaining informed consent is difficult with an anonymous survey hosted online. Normally, a team would require signed forms from all the participants in a study. However, this would compromise the anonymity necessary to our project and require that it be done in person. We eventually settled on requiring users to read a disclaimer and then confirm that they had read and agreed with it, before being allowed to continue with the survey. This method is used to confirm that users have read and agreed with disclaimers and terms of service on many popular websites. Besides the necessity of obtaining informed consent, this also helps the participant understand that the survey is completely anonymous and the aims of our project.

One of our first issues was finding a way to prompt participants to think of a secret. We did not want to prompt people in any way that could bias them towards one category of secret. We believed that if we started our survey with an example secret that was medical in nature, or if we asked for a secret being withheld specifically from family, that would bias our participants. This would make them more likely to think of something regarding medical secrets, or something that was a family secret. However, not prompting users at all could also impact our results because they would either not take it seriously, or share something trivial.

Our solution to this problem was to use questions to get the participants thinking about secrets without mentioning specific categories. These questions would be generic, without examples, and were designed to make the participant reflect on a current secret. One variation we considered was to have them answer the questions with one secret in mind, and at the end share a second secret. In the end, we decided it made more sense to simply ask for the secret they

had been thinking about during the survey.

### ***Structural organization of secret-telling***

We attempted to echo the more natural process of sharing a secret in order to encourage the participants to share theirs with us. Rodriguez and Ryave (1992) outlined a four-part structure to the divulging of a secret, which they gathered through multiple casual exchanges with acquaintances. Outlined below are the four steps they described in their paper.

1. The secret-frame or announcement of a secret's existence
2. The acceptance/rejection of the secret contract
3. The presentation of the secret
4. The response to the secret

This first part involves the annunciation of the secret. This includes not only the announcement of something to be shared, but also this information's existence as a secret. By invoking this tidbit as something secret, the person sharing it implies a trust in the other, creating an almost-contract between the two as this secret will be theirs, and there is frequently a mutual understanding that the secret has limits to its spread. The literature review from before works almost as the secret frame, acknowledging and announcing the existence of secrets. More relevantly, the survey worked in a similar manner, announcing our knowledge that the participants had secrets. We invited them into this contract, to share with us this precious information.

Secondly, the person who is invited to share in the secret must decide whether or not they want to accept the secret contract. In the multiple instances studied in their article, not once was a secret-frame rejected. For this contract, the person with the secret must be willing to share it,

and frequently, the person hearing it agrees to not share it with others. For the survey, we accepted the secret contract, acting in this manner as the person willing to listen. Although we were willing to listen to and accept the secrets of all those included in the mailings, we could not guarantee that the secrets would go no further than that online database, and it is likely for this, and many other reasons, that not many felt they could share their secrets with us.

The third step outlined by Rodriguez and Ryave is the simplest, and the portion they devoted the least attention to. This portion is simply the teller's revelation of the secret information, or in our case, the responses to the section of the survey marked "Anonymously share your secret!".

Finally, they examined the responses to the secret's disclosure. Before this point, a majority of the process' burden rested on the person initially holding the secret. At this stage however, this is shifted to the shoulders of the secret's recipient. The recipient of the secret is expected to respond in a manner that confirms they understand the secret and its implications as one. Once this is done, a balance is restored as both involved now share this secret, forming an implicit bond. In a manner, we were unable to provide the expected direct response to the secret shared with us. After completing the survey, the participants were thanked and invited to contact our team with any questions or comments. Less directly, each of this project's members implemented their own response to the collection of secrets shared with us. These were to be shared with the WPI community, available to the anonymous members of which who contributed their secrets to our project. More detail on these three responses can be found in the *Artists' Statements* section of this paper.

## Using an arts-based method for analysis

Quantitative analysis can only tell so much about a topic as subjective as secrets. For this reason, we made use of more qualitative methods to get a better understanding of the underlying themes and trends in the data. In this manner, quantitative methods for analyzing the data can only go so far. For this type of inquiry, we made use of a more qualitative analysis. Typically qualitative methods and analysis seek to answer some question, whether to try to make sense of a phenomenon, or to better gauge the subtleties and attitudes surrounding an experience. There are two methods of qualitative research that we combined for this project, phenomenology and ethnography. Phenomenology looks at the “core or essence of phenomena or experiences”, while ethnography is used to ask more descriptive questions about “values, beliefs, and practices of a cultural group.” (Richards, 2007)

We looked into the phenomena of keeping and sharing secrets with known and unknown others, trying to establish a base understanding of motivations and objectives. One cannot easily reduce a person’s motivation to hide or disclose information to a number, nor can a scale accurately represent these findings. This method made up a majority of the research that went into answering the first question, “What are the secrets of the WPI community?”.

Ethnography is usually practiced by an outsider to the culture being studied, with the culture being defined as the, “beliefs, behaviors, norms, attitudes, social arrangements, and forms of expression that form describable patterns in the lives of members of a community or institution” (Richards, 2007). We wanted to look at what the secrets we gathered could tell us about these qualities, based off the gathered results of our survey and our own personal experiences at the institution. As members of the community being examined, we were able to

make better-educated theories as to the nature of the community and the relationships between the observed and the gathered.

The use of art as interpretation can be seen as an extent of this qualitative analysis. Some believe that the arts exist to express that which cannot be put into words, although this is not to say that the written word cannot be art. As this project was inspired by what originated as an art exhibition, it seemed only appropriate to use the arts as a vehicle for the data gathered.

Each student investigator was tasked with creating an interpretation of the research, using the media of their choice. These pieces were then assembled, and displayed to the WPI community in the campus center, allowing anyone interested to take a look and ask questions about the project and the pieces themselves. The following section contains images of the three pieces, as well as a brief statement from each student about the work and project in general.

## Results and Analysis

The survey remained open for a week, a majority of the responses arriving within the first two days and only one or two coming in daily after this point. *Google forms* has a built-in “Summary of Responses” feature, with which the figures in the following section were generated.

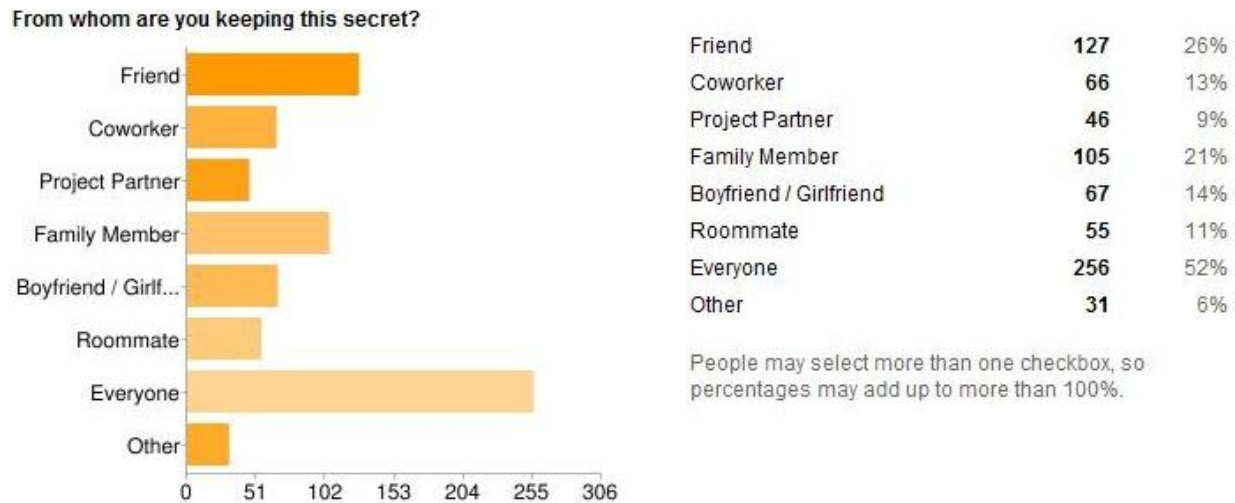
### ***The survey questions***

For the purpose of the survey, the participants were asked to think of a single secret that they were currently keeping, regardless of its nature. Included below are the questions from the survey, as well as brief summary of the results gathered from each. A version mimicking that which the user would find at the site linked to can also be found in the Appendix.

### **Keeping your secret**

#### ***1. From whom are you keeping this a secret?***

This question aims to gauge the severity of the secret, as well as to determine how widely they are keeping this information secret. It gave the user multiple options for relationships they have with this person or people; ‘friend’, ‘coworker’, ‘family’, ‘everyone’, as well as the option to fill in their own response under “Other”.



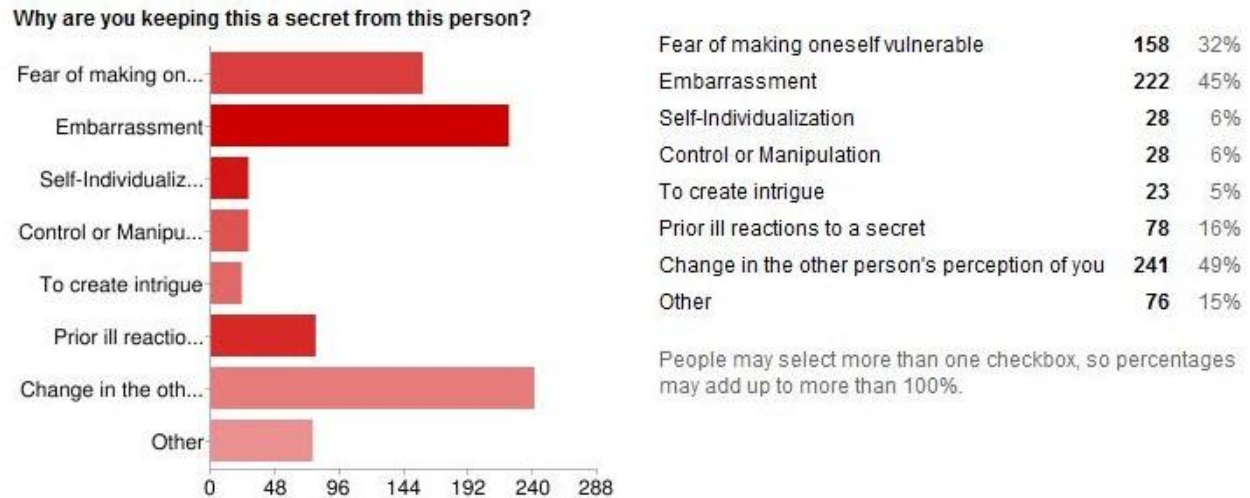
**Figure 2 From whom are you keeping this secret?**

A majority of the secrets people were keeping were broad ones, ones that they were keeping from not just one individual, but frequently everyone. In some cases, the responses to this question were directly relevant to the nature of the secret. For example, a secret about an affair was more likely to be kept hidden from the significant other cheated on, in addition to the more general population at large.

## ***2. Why are you keeping this a secret from this person?***

This question seeks to reaffirm the multiple reasons that in our research have been cited as common reasons why one would conceal something. Again, this gives several examples such as, ‘embarrassment’, ‘fear of making oneself vulnerable’, ‘control’, and again gives the user the chance to create their own appropriate response.





**Figure 3 Why are you keeping this a secret from this person?**

The answers to this question seemed to reaffirm some of the research we had found previously. A major reason why people keep things a secret is because they do not want others’ perceptions of themselves to change based on this secret. Secrets can be shameful, embarrassing, or just a quirk.

There was a bit of variety when it came to the “Other” designation, some people citing their desire to stay out of trouble, to avoid creating drama, or even simply saying, “I don’t really know why.” When the secret involved people other than the participant, the reasons given indicated a desire to protect others who may be affected by the secret’s reveal or to maintain the other’s confidence, in some cases simply stating, “It’s not my secret to tell.”

## Sharing your secret

### *1. Is there a person with whom you have shared this secret?*

This is to gauge whether there is another person or group with whom the user is comfortable enough to share this secret.

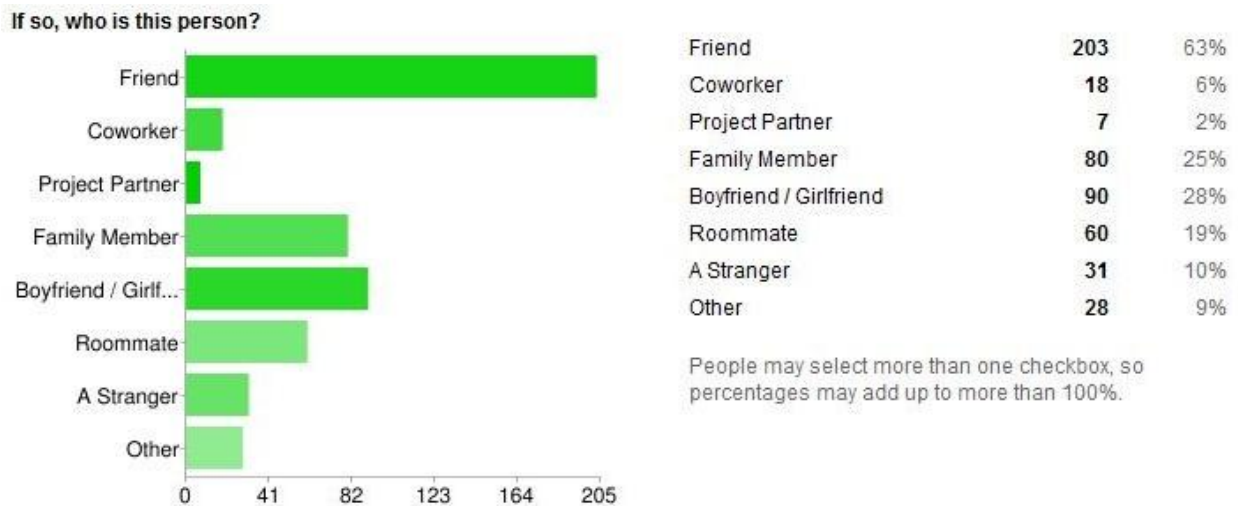


**Figure 4** Is there a person with whom you've shared this secret?

Nearly two-thirds of the people who responded to this survey had previously told someone else the secret they were asked to think about. This means that a majority of people had had some need to share the secret with another, for any number of reasons not explored. This could be evidence of the “compelling need to disclose”, or merely the result of seeking advice. Without further questioning, the motives are unclear.

## 2. *If so, who is this person?*

A continuation of question three, this is to see what sort of relationships one frequently feels comfortable sharing their secrets with. Like question two, this gives the user a list of possible people and a custom “Other” option to select.



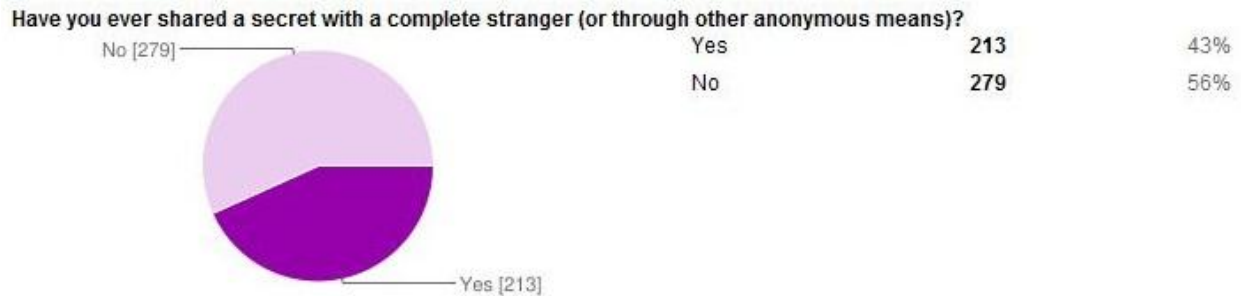
**Figure 5** If so, who is this person?

Based off this, we can see that the WPI community places a value on friends. Over 60% of the respondents had confided their secrets in a friend. No other category given even came close to the level of confidence shown in friends, with the Boyfriend/Girlfriend coming in second with only 28% of the responses. It was interesting to see that 10% of the respondents had previously shared their secret with a stranger, confiding (frequently personal information) in someone they did not know.

## Secrets, strangers, and anonymity

### *1. Have you ever shared a secret with a complete stranger (or through other anonymous means)?*

As we found little literature on peoples' tendencies to share intimate details with unknown others, we wished to see if this was common to the members of our community.



**Figure 6** Have you ever shared a secret with a complete stranger or through other anonymous means?

A surprising 43% of the respondents had shared their secrets in some anonymous manner on a previous occasion, and by the end of the survey, this number increased to at least 48% from those who shared their secrets with us.

### *2. Is there a difference between sharing a secret with someone you know and sharing it with a stranger?*

Again, this is to reaffirm some of the assumed reasons stated in the literature review above. This question gives the user the chance to elaborate on the difference if they perceive one to exist. A majority of the responses reflected a similar line of thought, that the difference between someone familiar and a stranger was that the stranger did not know the secret-sharer, and therefore could not tailor a response to the secret-sharer's situation. This was seen in both a positive and negative light, split about equally in the responses.

## Anonymously share your secret

At this point, we asked the user to share with us the secret they had been using for the first portion of the survey, while reminding them that any responses to this survey are collected anonymously and cannot be attributed back to them. This question, although listed last is the one which we hoped to gather the most data from.

Of the 494 responses to this survey, 247 people did not provide us with a secret at all, although some gave a justification for not doing so such as, “I don’t feel comfortable doing so” or questioning the level of anonymity attached to the survey and responses. Of the remaining responses, 10 were deemed to be beyond the realms of plausibility or were interpreted as participants taking advantage of the survey’s anonymous nature to joke around without penalty. The remaining 237 responses contained a vast variety of secrets, ranging in topics from confessions of past and present troubles, future dreams, and questions of identity, just to name a few. A full list of the secrets we gathered can be found in the Appendix.

As other studies had sorted their secrets into separate categories, we devised a similar method to get a more broad view of the responses. Rather than sort each secret into a single, narrowly-defined category as Norton did in his 1974 paper, we created tags for similarly-themed secrets as they recurred. These tags did not always line up with the ones that Norton used as some of his categories had little to no presence in our sample, or they did not always seem specific enough for our situations.

<b>Theme</b>	<b># of Secrets</b>	<b>% of Secrets</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b># of Secrets</b>	<b>% of Secrets</b>
<i>Sex</i>	49	20.68	<i>Mental Health</i>	20	8.44
<i>Miscellaneous</i>	45	18.99	<i>Medical</i>	16	6.75
<i>Relationship</i>	26	10.97	<i>Drugs</i>	10	4.22
<i>LGBT</i>	24	10.13	<i>Academics</i>	9	3.8
<i>About another</i>	24	10.13	<i>Work</i>	9	3.8

<i>Crush</i>	23	9.7	<i>Fetish</i>	6	2.53
<i>Cheating</i>	20	8.44	<i>Family</i>	5	2.11
*The percentages add up to more than 100% as the secrets could be tagged with multiple themes.					

**Table 1 Breakdown of each theme within the secrets collected**

The tags or themes which we used to classify all the secrets are outlined below.

- *Sex*. This category was a rather broad one, containing secrets regarding the act itself, doing do with other people, virginal status, as well as actions that could be seen as sexual or intimate.
- *Miscellaneous*. This is where the secrets that had no other place to go were sorted. These were mostly ones that were unique or told of a single past experience.
- *Relationship*. Related to an already-existing relationship or the formation thereof. This does not include secrets about cheating.
- *LGBT*. Having to do with matters typically associated with identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.
- *About another*. These were secrets where the person sharing with us was not the subject or was keeping the secret for another
- *Crush*. These secrets were confessions of feelings for another person which they had yet to reveal.
- *Cheating*. Infidelity within a relationship or tales of almost doing so.
- *Mental Health*. Mental disorders, depression, anxiety, feelings of isolation and other deviations from what is considered to be mentally healthy were included in this category.
- *Medical*. Secrets involving physical conditions, diseases, injuries, and prescription drugs.
- *Drugs*. Concerning the consumption or use of alcohol and other drugs of the non-prescription variety.
- *Academics*. Having to do with past or present academic performance or stresses.

- *Work*. Related to occurrences in the workplace
- *Fetish*. Secrets regarding sexual fetishes.
- *Family*. Secrets regarding happenings or tensions within a family.

## **Artist Statements**

### **Storm of Secrets - Paul Kinsky**



One of the main themes running through the secrets collected was victimless secrets - almost 1/3 of recipients who shared a secret had what can be termed identity-based secrets. That is, their secret was that they were gay or lesbian, that they had an issue for which they were prescribed medication, that they were depressed and suicidal. The common thread is that these secrets are not based on actions but on who the secret-keepers are. Most people with this type of secret chose 'Everyone' when asked who they were keeping it secret from. The majority of the reasons given for keeping this type of secret were embarrassment, fear of making oneself



vulnerable, prior ill reactions to a secret, and change in the other person's perception of you. This seems to suggest a feeling of isolation or alienation among people with such secrets.

For these reasons, I chose to use the secrets we received to depict a storm. This storm is over a dark ocean, at night, to enforce the sense of isolation. The storm is generated procedurally from the secrets we have received. The shape and color of each cloud, gust of wind and bolt of lightning is determined by code written in Java. The visual effect of this is very interesting. When watching the storm, the viewer is constantly picking out words and phrases, all of which reinforce the point that this is a storm made of secrets. The effect of a sentence here, a phrase there, from people's secrets is a sense of isolation. The secrets are trapped in a storm at night, flying past each other endlessly, never disclosed.

The second part of my artist's response is physical. It is a large clear plastic head, assembled from laser-cut triangles and connectors. It is placed over a laptop running the program that generates the storm of secrets, such that the storm of secrets is under its forehead. Put another way, inside the head is a storm of secrets. The head is made to look like a computer monitor. It is a physical object pretending to be a digital one. For this reason it is evocative of the online avatars that are, effectively, masks worn to anonymize Internet users. The combined effect of the storm, made of text and shown on a screen, and the cold angles of the head is very digital. This also contributes to the sense of isolation and alienation, of lack of connection.

After all, the secrets we received were given to us over the digital medium of the Internet. If we had instead heard them in person, they would have been analog, the opposite of digital. Instead of a short string of text, we would have been able to read facial cues, tone of voice, and so on to get a more complete understanding. We would be involved in a dialogue with the secret-

keeper. Instead we have a computer screen between us, reducing our exchange to a something like reading a message in a bottle.

However, it is arguable that instead of cutting people off from each other, computers and the Internet let them share secrets when before they would have kept their secrets bottled up inside. The head is evocative of the online avatars that are, effectively, masks worn to anonymize Internet users.

## Don't you want to know? - Lauren Pehnke



My interest in this project was a partly voyeuristic one, meant in the non-sexually-charged way. In the past, my role in social circles was mostly that of a confidante, one who many would trust with their secrets. I was always intrigued to hear what my friends, and others were willing to share with me, so for the initial research for this project's literature review, I spread out into the online world of secret-sharing with a gusto.

There are many communities that have established their own means to share secrets. DeviantART, ([www.deviantart.com](http://www.deviantart.com)) a site dedicated to artists and art lovers, has at least one account dedicated to the anonymous sharing of dA members' secrets (DeviantArtSecret, 2011). As of my last visit, there were over 10,000 pieces submitted to their gallery. A member of the Second Life community set up a confession box in the online world, inviting residents to leave

their secrets and other private thoughts, collecting these pieces in a book titled *Virtual Confessions* (Owens, 2011). Postsecret remains a large force in the secret-sharing and telling community, having published five books of secrets sent in since 2005, and more than 960,000 followers on facebook.com.

I hoped to reflect this desire to know others' secrets in the implementation of my piece. As we intended to look at the WPI community as a whole, I took reference photos of campus locales where a number of people can be found: classrooms, the fountain, DAKA (the dining facility), etc. and rendered these in graphite, leaving the people populating these places as simple vacant outlines. To each empty person was later added a number of secrets from those gathered in our survey. In some cases, I attempted to include secrets that reflected on the locations, placing academic-related ones in the classroom scene and weight-related ones in the dining hall.

On top of this sheet, I overlaid a sheet of translucent tracing paper. Over the outlined secrets, I rendered in sketchy details for each figure, giving them enough form and definition to be recognized as people, but not enough to make them identifiable as the models. My intent with these simplified figures was to reflect the anonymity through which these secrets were accrued, as well as to partially obscure from immediate view the secrets below. This is to reflect that these secrets are by nature, that which we are keeping from others. However, I have given the viewer of the piece the option to take a closer look at the people around them. By lifting the top sheet, the secrets are revealed, secrets which belong to other members of the WPI community.

Initially, I had intended to include in the composition of these pieces a large number of people and a wider view of their environment, rendered in a more detailed manner. I had intended to give each silhouette their own secret, helping to illustrate that there are a number of people out there with the same secret, although they may never know it. In testing this style

however, the composition became too cluttered and the focus of the piece was shifting from the individual secrets more to the environment.



The use of mirrors on the mobile shows that the projections of individuals in a community are reflected to outsiders, and show unity and commutative views of the community. As referenced earlier in this paper, Asch's experiment on conformity showed that people kept their true choice on which line was the correct length a secret so they did not stand out, in a negative light, in the group. The participants reflected the collective decision of the group, despite their true feelings. This is also seen in the WPI community, where most of the community has a silent agreement not to speak of sexual matters.

The mirrors were painted to outline a silhouetted portion which symbolizes public of the community. This is used to symbolize anonymity of the identity of the person sharing their secret. On the backs of the mirrors, hidden from the community, are the secrets that people are hiding about themselves that may make them stand out or become a target for ridicule. As for which secrets went on the mirrors, I first wanted to determine how many secrets were in each category. I estimated which secrets stood out the most out of all the secrets given, and then approximated how many mirrors this turned out to be. The secrets were chosen mostly by hand picking ones I felt gave the best impression of that category, although I was unable to use the longer secrets because they would not have fit on the back of the mirrors. Of the nearly five hundred responses that came in, about half of them did not include secrets. This I attempted to show with the blank circle mirrors that have no secrets on them. This response was not unexpected, but we certainly expected more people to reveal their secrets anonymously.

In the process of making the artwork, I got a better sense of what the WPI community looks like and some of the complexities of these ideas. These ideas and sense of deeper meaning are very difficult to express in words and really require a visual interpretation to grasp even a feeling of the depth. For instance, when I was working on it, I would get a feeling of a

superficial, shiny, and delicate appearance (which could be interpreted like a first impression of the school), but yet there was also a sense of complicated and hidden things that made you curious and want to learn more (interacting with the students). Indeed this project is intended to spark curiosity and entice people to look closer, dig deeper, turn the mirrors around to read them, and interact with the piece. (Although, it would probably be best to keep it out of reach of my cat.) The mirrors were painted on to give the feeling of a mask.

It was also rather difficult to make the balance of the mobile correctly. At first I thought of making the balance of the mobile using tools and a ruler and such, but then I ended up doing it by trial and error. This made me wonder if you can really mathematically calculate how people are going to react to a secret. Secrets are much more of an unquantifiable topic, meaning it's something you figure out by trial and error. This is part of what makes revealing secrets so difficult, the uncertainty of what the outcome will be. I felt this way with my piece in a way because feeling my way around the balance of the structure and hanging the mirrors on made me a little nervous. What if it falls?

This can also be said for the mirrors themselves. They are held on by a thread, a metaphor for how little cover a secret has; just the will of the secret keeper to not reveal it. If the secret is revealed, you could say that either the reaction from the confidante is positive (the mirror is caught) or the person is alienated from the confidante (the mirror drops to the floor). These insights exemplify that artwork can express many deep ideas, both in the process of making the art and the final product, which can either create a feeling of understanding, or just a sense of deep meaning which is hard to identify.



## Group Conclusions

With this project, we had two questions that we wanted to ask and get responses for. The first question that we had was, “What are the secrets of the WPI community?” Through our survey, we gathered 237 secrets to give us an idea of what the community’s secrets could be. They ranged in topic from the mundane, to the extraordinary, and even the occasional disturbing.

The second question we wanted to ask was “What do these secrets tell us about the WPI community?” In just looking at the list of themes that was used for separating the secrets, one can see a number of topics that were frequently mentioned in regards to what people keep secret. Sex, cheating, failure, drugs and alcohol, many of these are a taboo or carry some negative connotation in today’s society. It is no surprise to see these recurring in the gathered secrets.

The first conclusion that we came to was that WPI is a socially awkward community. A large number of the secrets that we gathered seemed to stem from peoples’ inability to communicate and interact with others in a ‘normal’ fashion, to be able to express one’s feelings or commit to another.

Similar to the numbers from the USENET survey and Norton’s collection of secrets, sex ranked in as the top category in our secrets. Although our numbers were in the middle of those reported in the other two pieces (18.8% and 27% respectively), this difference can mostly be attributed to the fact that we excluded some secrets from this category in favor of tagging them in another fashion. Initially, we had intentions to include sexual infidelity within the *Sex* category of secrets, but with such large numbers of people confessing their cheating-related secrets, it had to be noted as a theme of its own.

Crushes made up over 9% of the received secrets. This could be seen as the population not being ready or comfortable enough to approach another person with their feelings. There is

quite a bit of crushing from afar on the campus, as reflected in the popularity of the website LikeALittle, a website that allows users to anonymously comment and flirt with others on their campus. The WPI thread for this website receives several posts a day with people anonymously confessing their affection for others on and about the campus (Reas, 2011).

In comparison to the Norton study, the WPI secrets showed a comparable percentage centered around drugs and alcohol, (4% versus their 4% and 2% respectively). We could attribute these differences to multiple causes. One could hypothesize that there are fewer secrets related to drugs and alcohol because there is relatively less usage of these substances. This could also be attributed to an atmosphere that is more accepting of the usage of these, making their consumption less needed to be kept secret. Conversely, the lower rate could be attributed to the use becoming more taboo and unacceptable, forcing these secrets to remain unsaid, even in an anonymous setting.

Another question arose from the fact that more than half of the respondents to the survey refused to share with us their secret. There were some people who cited reasons for this, feeling that the survey was not as anonymous as it had been declared to be, that they did not feel comfortable doing so, or that in some cases, it was not their secret to share with us.

To be able to make any real firm conclusions about what these secrets can tell us about a community, it would be necessary to expand the research. As it was, out of an audience of approximately five thousand, we received approximately five hundred responses, of which, only about half contained a secret. Out of these, we had no way of knowing whether a person submitted multiple responses or if each submission represented a single member of the community. To give us a better idea of what characterizes the community, it may be necessary to gather more responses, although this would likely be a tricky matter. It is a tricky matter to

accrue more participation without offering some sort of incentive, and even trickier when one does not want to compromise the anonymity of the survey by collecting personal information from the participants.

Secondly, it would be beneficial to expand this research to other schools of a similar level. It would be interesting to see if some of these same conclusions could be applied to other technically-inclined schools. To see if this were so, we could extend the survey to what are considered rival schools such as MIT and RPI to compare the results. It would then also be interesting to compare the data from these three schools to other, less technical schools in the region. Currently, one can look at anonymous confession sites tailored to each school and see differences in the worries and attitudes of the posters. It would be interesting to see if there are any trends in these sites and the secrets one would gather from these schools.

There seem to be two main viewpoints in the reasons given for or against anonymously sharing secrets with a stranger. The first is support of sharing secrets with strangers. Essentially, it said that sharing with a stranger was a good way to vent, because any secret shared could not be traced back to its originator. The second view was against sharing with strangers. Essentially, it said that since a stranger would not know you or your circumstances, what was the point? The people holding this view seemed to want not just to vent, but to know the reactions of their peers to their secret.

The people in the first category are fulfilling one of Derlega and Grzelak's functions of self-disclosure, Expression. This function of self-disclosure is described by them as "expressive or cathartic", and is discussed elsewhere in this paper. They are relieving some pent-up need to tell their secret in a way that they believe will not stain their reputation

The people in the second category seemed to want to fulfill another of Derlega and Grzelak's functions of self-disclosure, Social Validation. This is achieved through the validation of peers, and from the responses of this group it seems they need not just the acceptance and validation of a stranger but the acceptance of their peer group. They may believe at some level that if their secret becomes known to their peers they could be ostracized.

# Appendix

## ***Complete list of collected secrets***

- Cheating
- cheated on wife when we were dating
- In a former job, a friend in a director position confided in me that my department would be going through a structural shake-up. She asked that I not share this with my peer co-workers (who were also close friends).
- When my uncle died 5 years ago my cousin removed himself from the family and has not contacted us since because he was upset he did not get my uncle's house in the will. I recently found out (via facebook) that my cousin got married and had a baby without any of us knowing. I e-mailed him and he did recently e-mail me back. I have not told my grandparents yet because I know it would hurt them to know they have a great-granddaughter they would never get to meet. Our whole family has kept it from them until we know if my cousin is willing to see us again.
- Fuckin Wpi bitch gave me herpes
- an affair
- Having sex with stranger!
- my farts smell like fish heads
- A co-worker and friend is having plastic surgery TODAY!
- I am cheating.
- I have a serious medical problem which most people instantly associate with fatality. Therefore, I have shared this with a small number of confidantes.
- I am a closet smoker.
- A coworker is leaving her position, was kind of a jerk about it, and hurt my feelings.
- Has to do with a change in my job status
- "I took this survey! (I suppose that isn't really a secret, but I won't tell anyone I did!)  
For the record, that wasn't the secret I had in mind when I took the survey. I just thought it sounded funny, and I hope you get a good laugh.
- drank too much on an out of town trip and almost went "outside" my relationship.
- Me and my cousin touched wieners.
- Cheated on my boyfriend with a few different people.
- I have feelings for a friend of mine
- Getting married
- [] You really hurt me late in senior year, and you don't know it but thats why we don't hang out any more.
- I like white girls.
- I'm in love with my best friend.
- I had sex with my ex-girlfriend's sister.
- i slept with my friend and my roommate (who i'm keeping the secret from) doesn't know
- I am uncircumcised
- When my cousin was raped by her boyfriend, I sneaked into his house, broke his arm, leg, and ribs, then smashed his TV and car before the cops arrived.
- I went to my high school prom senior year.
- pissed myself in seventh grade.
- Placed and evaluated adult toys in array formation on friend's couch
- I drove my mom's car into the wheel barrow in the garage because I put the car into drive instead of reverse.
- I'm bisexual.

- My parents bought me a brand new car on top of basically paying for all college expenses. I tell people that I bought it for fear they would think I was spoiled or jealous when they know nothing about the background of why I got it.
- I think I am falling for my best guy friend and I don't know how he feels about me
- I have a diaper fetish. I can't seem to stop it. I have done very well to keep it to myself while at college, but when I am at home during breaks, I'll do stuff like drawing my favorite anime characters in diapers and even wearing them myself.
- I was a community advisor and I want to date one of my Insight Group kids
- I am afraid of oompaloompas
- I am diagnosed with depression and take anti-depressants daily.
- I near love a girl from three years ago but care enough about my girl not to tell her.
- My boyfriend dealt weed through high school.
- I was raped when I was 13.
- I'm gay.
- I'm getting my daughter a car for her birthday!
- I'm in love with my best friend
- I kissed my best friend.
- Anywhere between three and nine times a year since my sophomore year of high school, I've gone through bouts with suicide. Clearly having never followed through, I've been eerily close three times. One time I was saved by my best friend who ran to my house from his at 3 AM. I was probably another minute or two away from killing myself when he climbed in my window and talked me down. To this day, he is the only one that knows I'm at all the way I am. I don't know why things are the way they are with me. It's strange, usually, something snaps, I wallow in my own self-pity, I hate myself, I see nothing good in myself, and I feel the pressures of my life bearing down on me. But I refuse to let anyone I don't trust know at all. I won't even tell my parents because they'll make me get help and it'll be forever recorded that I'm emotionally unstable.
- I love my girlfriend, feel that she may be the one, and envision a future together, despite the fact she adamantly claims that our situations in life preclude this possibility.
- I am still in love with my first boyfriend, even though I am happily married.
- I am gay.
- I cheated on the SATs to get around 100 points higher than I would have without cheating.
- I wish I had an eating disorder.
- kiss a guy that is not my boyfriend
- I let slip a racial insult when I thought a black girl had racially insulted me. I misunderstood though. While she had tastelessly responded to my own mockery of myself, she was not referring to my race.
- I fucking hate this motherfucking school fuck off you fucks why at a basketball game would you make fun of my bald spot on my head yell [] my teammates girlfriend and then harass my mom and my girlfriend fuck off you fucks
- I was sleeping with my fraternity brother's ex girlfriend immediately after she broke up and hid it from pretty much everyone who would care.
- A close friend of mine was hurt severely in an accident years ago. In that accident someone very close to him was killed. This accident was neither of their faults. There are details that I know from local authority connections that would be very difficult for him to know if made aware.
- Had an affair
- I hate the way I look. If I was 30 lbs lighter I would have confidence and actually like talking to people. I have seriously thought about suicide because I feel as if I can never get a break...
- My boyfriend was demoted at work.
- I got a 42 on two tests in a class. ): thankfully I passed so I never had to tell my parents

- I have Hirsutism.
- I am into extreme BDSM. Meaning I like to be tied up and tie other people up
- I used to think I was in love with my best friend.
- My boyfriend and I broke up because he found out about a lie I had told someone about when the two of us broke up back in a term. He thinks I hooked up with another guy two days after we broke up but the truth is that nothing happened, that's my secret. But I couldn't reveal it to anyone without admitting that I had originally lied.
- I NRed one of my major classes C-term.
- sexual deviancy
- My secret is...I don't have a secret.
- In spite of specific warning against it from my boss and also in spite of the fact that she is (for good reason) currently emotionally and romantically unavailable, I am completely infatuated with a co-worker.
- I have been keeping it from my boyfriend that I absolutely hate Valentines Day.
- I'm afraid I'll lose my parents before they can be proud of me. I'm scared they'll never see me get married or have children. I'm scared of what I'll do if I lose them.
- My ex-boyfriend makes my life a living hell because he's convinced I cheated on him with my current fiance. The truth is, I did cheat on him, but with the boy he made me break up with freshman year, not my fiance.
- My father is an alcoholic and drug addict.
- The girl whom I would like to be dating.
- One of my friends kissed another guy while in another country, even though she had a boyfriend back home.
- I am in love with my best friend who already has a boyfriend.
- I had an eating disorder
- have a romantic interest in someone in particular
- Person is being railroaded at work.
- I was sexually assaulted by a family member on thanksgiving.
- Nothing special, I like a girl from one of my classes in C term...and I drew a picture of her already. No one's seen it yet.
- I kissed my current boyfriend while my ex and I were still together, which I feel badly about even though I had been intending to break up with him for about a month (but couldn't because we were long-distance at the time and I wanted to wait to see him).
- I am a furry.
- I am saving myself until marriage.
- I like girls and boys.
- I like to lie about many aspects of my life which does not necessarily hurt anyone or put anyone down, but I do it just to see the person would believe me, how long I can keep it up, and if I could remember it for a long time. It is more enjoyable if the people I tell the lie too remembers it and would bring it up during conversations with other people. That would give me a motive to remember the lie as if it was truth.
- I don't think I'm gay, but I think I would enjoy experimenting with girls. Sober.
- I derive sexual pleasure from witnessing pain, suffering, or even death in other human beings.
- I love him. I want to be with him forever. Travel the world with him. Have kids with him. Do everything with him. But all of that is very far off and I don't want to scare him by talking about things that far into the future.
- I have "experimented" homosexually on one brief, strange occasion. "Third base."
- Two of my good friends fell in love with the same girl, they knew each other, but they didn't realize the other liked the same girl. They all came to me for help, and I helped both of them.
- That I'm still in love with her.
- A friend of mine had an unexpected pregnancy (plan B didn't work) and then a miscarriage.
- I had an affair.
- I couldn't ride a bike until I was 12 years old.

- I was born a boy.
- infidelity
- [My Professor] has a nice bum.
- I had a dream about marrying my girlfriend.
- I am queer..
- I love her.
- I masterbate.
- I'm in love with another student, with whom I currently share multiple classes. It's not reciprocated and I am determined (having considered the issue rationally) never to act on it, but I think she might suspect it.
- My girlfriend and I are engaged.
- I enjoy furry porn.
- My sister died when she was really little. I don't really tell people that, ever.
- "In Cancun on spring break,[] one of the people I was traveling with chose to find a Mexican hooker on her period and pay her \$55 to have sex on the beach. His white shorts have a nice red souvenir on them and his tests from the doc are yet to come back to show if he was lucky enough to bring back any other lifelong souvenirs. "
- I had drunken sexual relations with my ex-girlfriend while away for IQP.
- Someone that know keeps a diary/ journal online that I know about, although they think it is secret.
- I currently run a club of sorts and I keep telling my friend that I have gotten all the way to a national tournament, but that's only half-true: I was invited, but I never participated. My friend and others in this club look up to me as someone with tons of experience, which is true to some regard, but I fear that they'll think of me differently if I tell them the truth.
- I'm so flaming gay, it hurts.
- I have had three abortions, two of which were legal
- My friend wants to break up with his girlfriend.
- sneaking into a forbidden location
- I like to mix small amounts of semen in with my heroin before shooting up
- I smothered my little sister to death with a pillow. I was only a small child, but they never found out.
- I sucked my dog's dick just to see what semen tasted like when I was eight years old.
- I once let my pet goat have sex with my asshole in my formative years
- I still have a crush on my project partner and really want to date him. I am in a relationship and happy in that relationship. In addition, I want to finish this project without drama, so I've been keeping our relationship a friendship until I have time to sort things out when we're not partners
- sometimes i rub my menstration under my nose for the scent
- I murdered a guy who tried to mugged me. He hit me from behind, then commanded me to give me my things. Out of rage I drew a knife I carry on me and thrust it at his neck, without thinking. It was self defense, but as soon as a I saw how much blood there was, I ran away.
- I have three balls
- I have hemeroids.
- Sometimes I watch Law and Order: SVU and masturbate furiously to the child rape scenes.
- I have had "sex" with every piece of furniture in my apt
- I forced myself on a girl when we were in middle school. I was very horny and didn't really know what I was doing, but I knew it was wrong. I guess she didn't know me back then, or never saw me clearly, because years later in high school she agreed to go on a date with me. I'm still dating her. She's confided in me about that traumatic time in her past, but I've never told her that it was me.
- I have feelings for my girlfriends 10 year old sister
- I play WoW



- I hurt my acl in an accident 5 years ago and have developed a severe pain killer addiction since. i am still able to function in society and do not see this as a problem yet my coworkers often seem concerned.
- I sometimes feel like people just pretend to be my friends.
- During clinicals I gave a patient an orgasm during a pelvic exam. I can only refer to patients 'private areas' using non-medical terms as a result. The dean of medicine has been taunting me constantly since.
- My brother ended up in severe debt to a bookie at the racetrack near my house. I loaned him the 2000 he needed but made him suck me off and swear to never tell a soul. This has haunted me to this day.
- I am on an online dating site. I haven't told really anyone because I feel they would poke fun at me for it.
- Hooked up with my roommate's friend from when they were in high school together.
- From age 10 to 12 my father would rape me nightly. I took this out on my dog in order to cope. one night i stabbed her in the eye with a steak knife so that she would feel the pain i felt. I told my mother she lost it by running into a coffee table. I have few regrets.
- I am afraid that I am worthless. I try hard in school and other things so it looks like I am smart but really I think I am stupid. I am afraid that no one will hire me. If people know how long I take to do easy everyday things and homework, they will judge me. I am also very paranoid and tend to be very self-deprecating.
- Kids at an apartment dont like one of my friends, and they told me because they dont want him or her to come over anymore, but dont want to be mean by telling him or her not to come over.
- I don't really like college.
- i'm secretly trying to take over the world
- It is who my little is for the new sorrority I recently joined. And thankfully, I don't have to keep it for long, since we reveal ourselves on Thursday.
- Three times I have played a game where I steal a cell phone, go to a random front porch, and call 911. After I call I take a bunch of painkillers. I am gambling on whether the responders can get to me in time to save me. The only person I ever told about this died his first time playing. I find it easiest to live on the edge of death, but now I have lost the only person who felt the same.
- My secret is that I used to self-injure over a year ago and that I recently relapsed. In my relapse I did more than cut, including scratching, snapping rubber bands and hitting. I have been harm free for several weeks but I still struggle with it.
- That I'm gay.
- I have OCD
- "I'm bigender, I believe. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bigender>"
- I read online fanfiction.
- Drunken night, cheated on significant other
- I'm going to break up with her because I don't want to be with her
- I'm thinking she's the one I want to spend the rest of my life with, but because she's the only one I've been with it's crazy.
- I am a closet crossdresser. I don't have any girl clothes, but I do have a lot of makeup hidden. I told my girlfriend, and she helped me buy a lot of the makeup, but nobody else knows, even my family.
- I am depressed and embarrassed about my ability's as an engineer, i am afraid of graduating and not being able to find a job. I fear that my family will be disappointed with me and that i deserve there disappointment.
- Homosexual
- stereotypical
- I had an abortion
- Family issue .
- I have a journal which I write in to figure my life out.
- I find my roommates annoying.
- I love girls!

- When I was 10 I saw my mom having sex with another woman in the same room that I was in.
- My roommate (male) freshman year gave a guy a blow job at a [FRATERNITY] party.
- I am bisexual but am currently pledging a fraternity. I have told a few of the brothers I feel comfortable with knowing, but the majority don't know. I feel that I will be able to come out when I am initiated, but right now it will have to wait.
- I'm gay.
- Almost three years ago I was beaten to near death by someone I had considered to be one of my best friends (I am obviously no longer friends with him). I never told anyone about it until more than a year after the incident when I accidentally mentioned something about it to a close friend of mine on Facebook chat, and he managed to figure out the rest on his own. To this day, I have not told anyone my secret face to face.
- I own a vibrator.
- Gay
- I am being harassed at work by an older man. This man is more like a mentor who has taught me a lot about the job, but has started to harass me via text message on my work phone.
- I am playing assassins and my assassins target is my girlfriend. I'm not going to tell her even though she's asked who my target is. I'm also not going to kill her right away so that she can have fun and play the game for a while. She is also going to be killing people that I would otherwise have to kill. So I feel like it is a win-win situation.
- my friend cheated on her boyfriend and doesn't want anyone to find out.
- I'm a straight girl in a relationship with a guy, and have had two dreams about another girl at this school.
- "I lost my virginity to my best friend []. I am madly in love with him, and am currently still sleeping with him, even though his girlfriend and him have been back together since the end of December.
- The worst part is, what matters most to me isn't whether or not his girlfriend finds out, or is hurt by our actions, but that my friend and I are happy. "
- I haven't kissed a boy yet
- I used to cut myself.
- Every month when I menstruate, I celebrate a little, because it means that although I've made mistakes, I haven't completely messed up my life.
- my brother tried to hang himself with a rope in my grandparent's basement like 5 years ago. i was the only one around, and since i knew he only wanted attention, i treated it more like a joke, told him he wouldn't do it, but he kept up the threats. so i went upstairs and called my dad. he calmed down and everything was ok, but looking back on it, i feel bad that i didn't take it more seriously than i did.
- My boyfriend got arrested
- I've been on the borderline of academic warning for the past year and a half, NRing two classes a semester.
- My dream is to ride a giraffe
- At the end of C-Term a bunch of friends and I made tentative plans to go out Friday night, the last day of classes, to have dinner and see a Sharks hockey game at the DCU Center. It turned out that only three of us could make it, due to finalized departure plans, etc. We agreed that we would go to an Irish pub downtown to try out their fairs, and we specifically agreed that we wouldn't go to Uno Chicago Grill because one of our friends who couldn't make it wanted to go to Uno with us, but obviously couldn't and didn't want us to go without him. So we went down to the pub only to find out that their kitchen was closed. In the end we decided to go to Uno and not tell our friend about the change in dinner plans, so he wouldn't feel left out or disappointed. If anyone asked, the Irish pub was excellent :)
- I hate women
- I take prescribed medication for ADHD. I have to lock and hide it in my room because I'm afraid that someone will steal it and abuse it, leaving me in trouble academically, financially, and legally. I don't tell anyone about it, and sometimes I have to stop myself from giving away too much information. Whenever someone gets too close to asking "What's that medication for?" I tell them it's something else. I also try to lead people away from any

possible outward symptoms of ADHD, because that in of itself is embarrassing and it would reflect very badly on me in clubs/activities. I have purposefully not gotten accommodations for this as a learning disability because that could draw attention to it, though I have considered it often.

- A friend of mine ordered a t-shirt and I lied and said that the shirt was backordered and was taking forever to get in when really her boyfriend was planning on buying it for her as a b-day present
- I don't believe in god. I'm not spiritual, or searching, or confused. All that exists is reality; the natural world. I'm not depressed or feeling like I'm missing anything in my life. I sometimes feel alone because many people who know from back home will not speak to me anymore.
- I'm bi.
- The kid I had that thing with was the same one I spent all term complaining about. I guess I did like him!
- I never told my project partner how frustrated I am that when I would offer help using Word styles, he would decline it saying he could figure out and didn't need help, when, three iterations later, it was clear that he didn't know how to use them and did need help.
- I'm a bisexual male and am really fucking confused about my sexuality and potential relationships.
- the fact that my mother's cancer is terminal scares me not because I will be losing her (although it will kill me) but the fact my father will also die with her means I will be left struggling to deal with my life alone.
- I am afraid that my weight gets in the way of my relationships with people and once I finish losing it how my friends look at me will change.
- I fell in love with my boyfriend's roommate
- I have an injury that if people around me find out (especially my coach) I will most likely lose my position on the team
- My greatest fear is that I won't be able to help save him from himself.
- I was sexually assaulted.
- I like to lick my finger after sticking it in my ass.
- I'm still a virgin
- particular someone was having a crush on me while that person knows that I'm already in a long distance relationship. Having been enjoying the enormous attention from that someone, I fell a bit for that person although I already have someone else.
- Hooked up with an ex numerous times during freshman year
- My neighbour's roommate has herpes
- I'm depressed, take an SSRI and have been seriously suicidal and have occasional thoughts about it now and again. Many people look down upon this and so it's hard to be open. I once had a friend say "suicidal people are lazy and don't care to make anything of their life." This is a very difficult topic to discuss with anyone unless they are very close, i.e. close friends, family and with my ex-girlfriend when we were dating. Don't know what she's doing with this secret now...
- I'm suffering from clinical depression and want, more than anything, to quit school and curl up in my bed forever.
- A co worker is gay
- I think I might legitimately have an STD.
- I had an abortion when I was younger and my religion expressly forbids such a choice.
- My girlfriend and I are no longer virgins.
- I know someone who got a UTI from unprotected sex.
- beastie
- "I am not me I use a fake identity"
- I'm not a virgin.
- I am a recovering pornography addict.
- For 11 years I have been struggling with an eating disorder. I have finally admitted that I need help and have started getting it. I am afraid that if my fellow students found out they would think I was weak.

- I've engaged in same-sex affairs several times.
- A friend of mine has been in love with another friend of mine since she met him. They had been friends for almost six years and she has had boyfriends as well as he through the time they have been friends. They are both from the same country and graduated from WPI at the same year. Both returned to work in their native country and she finally told him how she felt about him. None of all the friends they both have at WPI ever imagined she would have feelings for him since they were always friends and lived together.
- "i still think (and sometimes have dreams) about my ex boyfriend. It is not a wish that we get back together or necessarily romantic, but feel like I am still hung up on our relationship that ended several years ago.
- Another secret- I still have remnants of an infatuation with a person i knew in college (many years ago!) even though i have a boyfriend of about 2 years."
- I'm in love with my best friend, and she doesn't know.
- "I tell everyone that I don't want to have kids and that I want to grow up independent and by myself. This used to be true and I was very adamant that I would make my own way in life. People would think I was very weird and bitter for a young woman, but truly I just didn't want to be tied down. Now, the guy I'm currently attracted to thinks this is cool and has started saying things like, ""I hate kids"" when he's around me, even though previously he was very definite on wanting to have kids.  
However, the big twist is, ever since I've been attracted to him, I now want to get married and have kids..."
- I accompanied a friend of mine to the abortion clinic after she had a one night stand with some guy in New York. She didn't want anyone to know and was sad for a while about it.
- "If i find this was leaked i will sue.....Hooked up with my best friend/Big Sister's (now ex) boyfriend, and multiple times. Including while I was/still am dating one of his (the ex-boyfriend's) roommates. Sometimes I was afraid he was my soulmate and i basically committed the ultimate betrayal and violation of girl code. sooo yeahh....."
- i knew i was failing a class for weeks. there was nothing i could do to fix it. i tried and failed, was too embarrassed to seek help from other people when i could have, and for personal reasons was unable to succeed.
- I'm polyamorous - I believe individual people can have individual relationships with other individuals, and have them all be separate and distinct. I think it's possible to love multiple people at once, and not just be sleeping around.
- Everyone thinks that I was sexually assaulted by my best friend's older brother, but in reality it was consensual. I only went along with it because I knew they would believe me and I wouldn't be considered a slut.
- bi-sexual
- Religious status
- I have gotten really good at pretending to be happy. Some days I am miserable and self loathing and I can't figure out why.
- I'm fairly queer... pansexual, and I don't subscribe to a gender (although I happen to fit in as an unconventional-but-not-worth-questioning man). This is something I would openly admit to anyone who asks, so it's only kind of a secret, but generally I won't tell anyone unprompted. Some people aren't mature enough to handle these things, so not making this known makes my life easier. My current suite mates are some of these people. It's not that they're hateful, or that I think anything too terrible would happen if they knew... but when 21-year-olds throw around gay/fag/homo as insults it's clear they'd see me differently and our interactions would be weird and uncomfortable.
- I know how many licks it takes to get to the center of a tootsie pop. I don't tell people so I can have control.
- Someone stuck a cucumber covered in olive oil up my butt in my sleep and I liked it because pooping instantly became easier.
- That a friend's girlfriend wants him to have sex with a pie. Yes, exactly like in American Pie. Weird I know, but I tend not to keep secrets myself, so this is the best I could come up with. Plus I just had to share it with someone, and sharing it anonymously almost makes it as though I am not sharing it.
- One time while staying with my girlfriend, her mother began getting very touchy and closer, which inevitably led to having sex with her.

- I spit in my coworkers coffee cup every Monday morning.
- one time i made my girlfriend's little sister give me head. she was twelve
- I smoke weed
- [Someone's] gf gave me a hummer in the scholarship closet.
- I like drugs.
- I think my IQP project partner is a huge asshole
- I binged on M4.
- I know that I am beautiful. Inside and out.
- "My secret is that I am transgender. I am always hesitant to let anyone know this regardless of whether or not they are a friend or a stranger because I am afraid of how they will react. My hesitation to let anyone know my secret stems from several events throughout my life.

I have known that I am transgender since I was 10 years old. Throughout elementary and middle school I was bullied, and thus I hid this realization from my family and peers. I first told my mom that I was transgender when I was 16 years old. She broke down into tears and emailed my therapist. When I next saw my therapist, I acknowledged my statement to my mom but decided that I made it to get a rise out of her because I was afraid of how else she would react. From then on until I was 19, I kept trying to come out to my mom again but would always back down due to fear of her reaction. Finally, at age 19 and during Christmas break, we were in the car and I was stumbling over my words, trying to tell her my secret. My mom guessed it and said something to the affect of, ""If you are trying to say that you want to be a girl, I cannot accept that"". I vehemently denied that I was trying to tell her that and was extremely hurt. Towards the end of the school year, I had a breakdown due to hiding my secret from everyone and feeling like no one who knew it would ever love or even accept me. I told my therapist my secret and he recommended that I tell my parents and sort of pushed me into telling them right then and there. Although my dad acted supportive, stating that he would love me no matter what, his words seemed empty to me, as if what he meant was something to the affect of ""I love you even if you are a freak"". It took me weeks to recover from what looked to me like disgust on my mom's face. My parents still seem to be unaccepting to me and when ever we have a discussion about my gender identity at family therapy, my dad seems to find it necessary to state that he doesn't care what my gender identity is as long as I do well and to follow up with ""but I'm not paying for your sex change"". While I don't expect my parents to pay for treatment, it is hurtful for my dad to add that unnecessary qualifier. It hurts me in a way similar to the way it would hurt someone if their father told them that they don't care if they marry someone of another race, but then qualifying that they (the father) are not paying for the wedding (even though funding has not been requested nor expected).

In one of my previous summer jobs (in an office environment), a coworker who I had to work closely with as part of my job ranted about trans-people during a lunch break and accused us of being bathroom predators. He did not know I was trans (and still doesn't). His comments greatly hurt me and not only made me feel unsafe in that environment, but caused me to contemplate suicide. Although I wanted to quit my job after this event and find a new one, I was strongly discouraged from this route by my parents who stated that I will always encounter situations like that and that I had to either suck it up or report it to HR. I didn't report the incident to HR because I was afraid of rejection by my other coworkers, who did not disagree with my offending coworkers statements, if my offending coworker were to get punished."

- My best friend is gay.
- A long time ago, two people I know told me that they had secretly gotten married earlier that day. They were very excited but knew that their families would not be, so they asked me to keep it a secret. I have never told anyone who is connected to them. There, did I tell you the secret? Yes and no.

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