Transcript for FLO Friday: Navigating Authenticity and Anonymity in Your Online Identity
BCcampus event hosted January 26, 2024
Host: Gwen Nguyen
Facilitator: Taruna Goel

DR. GWEN NGUYEN:
Hi everyone. It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the first FLO Friday of 2024. My name is Gwen and I am a learning and teaching advisor with BCcampus. Before we start, I'd like to go over a few housekeeping items. This whole session will be recorded and you're welcome to keep your camera off. And feel free to rename yourself to "Participant" if you prefer. Live captioning has also been enabled for accessibility. I would like to say a special thank you to my teammate, Paula Gaube, who has been very wonderful support behind the scenes. Before we go into the session, I'm very delighted to start with territorial acknowledgment.

This slide showcases striking images. The very first reflects the winter scenes from places where many of us at BCcampus, including myself, live and work. Especially the unceded territories of the various Indigenous nations in British Columbia. And the second one represents a very dynamic and lively city in Vietnam, Saigon. As we respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action at BCcampus, we are committed to continuous learning and fostering a relationship no matter where we are. Usually I live and work in the territories of the Lekwungen speaking peoples, including the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ people. I'm presently in Saigon, Vietnam, visiting my family and working remotely. It is actually 2:00 a.m. here. And despite the time zone challenges, I'm very grateful for the opportunities to be close to my family as well as still engaging with everyone on the other side of the world in this space. I'm more mindful of the diversity of the world we share. Each of us actually brings a unique and valuable perspective to all the conversations and the community, and this makes everything more enriching and beautiful. Please share the introduction, as well as the territorial acknowledgement in the chat if you wish. Typically, we will share the survey link at the very end of the session. But recognizing that some of you might have very tight schedule and need to pop out before the end of the session, I'd like to mention upfront, we invite you to participate in the short anonymous survey. I will pop the link in the chat here. Thank you, Paula. Please help us with the feedback. This feedback will help us shape the future professional development events at BCcampus.

Turning back to our session focus, we are here to actually dive deep into exploring how to balance authenticity as well as anonymity in digital identities guided by the insightful principles of the B.C. Post-Secondary Digital Literacy Framework. To guide us through this journey, we are very fortunate to have Taruna Goel, a learning development professional with 25 years of experience. Taruna has extensive background in adult education as well as workplace training with her role as an instructor at the University of Victoria. She also offers very valuable and practical insights. Recently, she has written a very insightful blog on how to integrate the Digital Literacy Framework into the curriculum. Please join me in warmly welcoming Taruna Goel as

she leads through the exploring and understanding how to navigate through our online identities. Take it away, Taruna. Thank you.

TARUNA GOEL:
Thank you so much, Gwen. Thank you for joining all of us from Vietnam. It's amazing that you're able to do that. Thank you, Paula, for being in the background but being the real powerhouse. Welcome everyone. Good morning. My name is Taruna Goel. I'd like to acknowledge that I live and work in the ancestral and unceded homelands of the hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓ and Sḵwx̱wú7mesh speaking peoples, also known as Burnaby. Like Gwen mentioned, learning and development is my jam. And I've been working in the fields of adult education, workplace training, and performance improvement for many years now. I have facilitated other FLO courses with BCcampus. And I'm also an instructor with University of Victoria where I teach a course in instructional design as a part of the CACE program. When I'm not learning or teaching or working, you can find me on nature walks along with my mobile camera. Thank you for joining me today and I look forward to our discussions. I will be taking help from Paula to run the slide show and Gwen will help me keep an eye on the chat. If you see googly eyes on the screen, I'm probably trying to look at the chat and my screen, and doing all of that. Please extend your patience and kindness as we do this together. Thank you next.

Well, the session is directly aligned to the goals of the B.C. Post-Secondary Digital Literacy Framework as Gwen described it earlier. The whole objective behind designing this framework is to enhance the digital literacy skills, the underlying knowledge and abilities of post-secondary communities. The framework includes eight competencies and today's session is aligned to share some thoughts and ideas related to the digital well-being competency. In today's session, we have three main objectives. First, we'll explore the diverse aspects of online identity, including how online spaces shape our self-image. Next we'll delve into somewhat of a delicate balance between anonymity and authenticity in online interactions. We'll also hopefully identify scenarios where each is relevant. Lastly, we'll focus on coming up with some strategies and best practices and tips for managing our digital well-being in the context of our online identity. Hopefully by the end of this session, you will have some takeaways to enhance your understanding and your proficiency in creating your online identity and maximizing your digital well-being.

Let's start with a quick poll first, Warm up ourselves for the next hour or so. On your screen, you should see a poll now which asks you, how many hours do you typically spend on the internet each day? This is the hours that are outside of your work. This is your personal time that you spend on the internet, and there are overlaps in the hour windows, so choose the option that works best for you. If for some reason you're unable to interact with the poll, you can also share responses in the chat. I can see that we have around 36% of people spending 1 to 2 hours on the internet; 2 to 4 hours by 18%, another 18% for 4 to 6, and more than 6 hours by 27% of you. This is not surprising at all.

In fact, if we move to the next slide, you will see that we are actually spending more and more time on the internet. Around the world, we are spending an average of over 6.4 hours. Canada is sitting actually quite close to that average, with 6.5 hours on the internet next.

But where are we spending this time? Well, a third of the time is spent on social media, no surprises there. As the internet has become more central in our day-to-day lives, issues related to online identity have become even more important. The potential impacts on our lives are actually more significant in both positive and negative ways. Next.

Have you noticed any impact on your well-being due to the use of the internet and social media? How about we share our feelings on this digital well-being thermometer? You can annotate the slide with your response. What you should see is in your zoom window, if you see the View Options button right at the top, you will be able to see Annotate as an option. If you click that and then click on the stamp tool, which is the one with the check mark. You can use the heart-shaped stamp to stamp your feelings about your own digital well-being inside of these vertical bars. If for some reason you're unable to use the annotate stamp tool, you can also share your response in the chat. You're looking at a scale of 1 to 6, where 1 indicates a little bit troubled and uncertain about your digital well-being and 6 indicates more of the happy and confident state of your digital well-being. Okay. I can see that people have started annotating. Okay. I can see a few annotations in there. Some hearts, checks, and some stars. Also somebody is typing or writing on the slide saying, line is greater happiness. I agree. Sometimes that's how things are. Yes, others are agreeing with that comment as well. A lot of us are in the middle there in terms of our digital well-being. Let's start and define what digital well-being really is and what it means. Could we move to the next slide?

Thank you. Digital well-being is often defined in terms of the skills and the abilities that we need to successfully make use of digital technology. Essentially, it refers to the state of our mental, emotional, social, and our physical health in the context of our digital and online activities. Now there are different perspectives related to digital well-being. What is considered digital well-being changes when we change that perspective from whether we're looking at it as an individual, as an organization, a society, or a country, or even the entire world. As individuals, we want to be aware of and manage our screen time to avoid the negative impacts on our physical and mental health. We want to maintain healthy and positive online relationships. In terms of an organizational perspective, organizations play a role in promoting digital well-being by encouraging a healthy work-life balance. They have policies that address after our emails or remote work expectations and general workload. They also can implement programs and support employees' mental health by offering counselling or promoting a supportive workplace culture. Now if we look beyond organization at the level of societies and countries, here we have policies and regulations that protect online safety of individuals. They protect our privacy. They can also be regulations that foster trust in our digital interactions, financial interactions online. While we want to make sure that all members have access to technology and they can benefit from digital technology, we also want to encourage responsible and ethical behaviour in those online spaces to have an overall healthier, digital

world. Digital well-being can be understood at individual level through our personal habits and at the organizational level through policies. At the societal or a broader world level, more through regulations and laws about having a safe digital environment. Next.

What's the connection between digital well-being and our online identity? Well, in simple terms, I would say maintaining a positive and secure online identity contributes to a more healthier digital well-being. Like somebody said in the previous slide, less online, more happiness. Similarly, negative experiences and our vulnerabilities in our digital well-being, they impact our online identity. But what is online identity? Is it the email address that you use to sign into applications, or is it your username and password for social media apps? But obviously, it is more than just that. Next.

Online identity basically means all the ways that we present ourselves online and the ways in which we interact with others in the digital world. It's made of what we say, how we say it, when we say it, and where we say it. Most of us have identities distributed across a range of platforms and media. Now, some of us keep those separate and others make them work together. Think about your Facebook identity. How is it different from your LinkedIn identity? For example, do you give out more information on one social media platform and do you withhold some information from another platform? Is your online identity different from your offline identity? How many online identities do you have? Are all of them different from your offline identity? In what ways are they different? How do you want to be perceived based on your online identity? Is it fluid or is it fixed? There are lots of questions when we start talking about the online and the offline identity. To highlight how this all plays out, let's meet Sarah.

Sarah is a teacher who's living in Jasper, Alberta. Her online world is actually quite full. On an education forum she shares her teaching experiences. She wants to really showcase her dedication to the craft of teaching, but she's also a part of a hiking group and she interacts in an online community where she is this adventurous spirit who's like sharing stories about her adventures in the Rockies. And on Instagram, there's a different side of Sarah. She loves arts and crafts. She shares a lot of information about local markets and fairs that are happening around her community. Here's a thing. Now, each platform only captures a piece of Sarah. The education forum sees her as a dedicated teacher. The hiking community looks at her as an adventurer. Instagram sees her as somebody who supports local makers. It's like we're looking at a puzzle, but each platform is just one piece. What about the pieces that we cannot see? Like, for example, Sarah actually has a big collection of family heirlooms, and each of those have their own unique story. She also writes every day, she keeps a private journal where she records her reflections for the day. These aspects of Sarah are actually hidden from the world. Think about it. Every website or social media app sees you differently. Some things about you are fixed, like your date of birth or the university that you attended, but others are more fluid, like your hobbies or your interests. It's this mix that contributes to our online identity being different from our real world identity. Our online identities reflect aspects of our real world identity, but they may not actually give the full picture. Next.

As we saw in Sarah's case, online identity is multifaceted. It includes our social media presence, the online interactions we have, and our professional profiles. Now, each of these components actually plays a role in shaping how we are perceived online. If we want to manage our online identity, we actually have to strategize and manage each of these components. For example, on social media, you can choose to curate content that aligns with your personal and professional goals. You can use privacy settings to make your profile public or private. You can also choose to hide some posts or photos, or even disable and enable messaging with others. In your professional profile, let's say on LinkedIn, you can present content that shapes your reputation. It gives a first good impression if there are potential employers or colleagues, or collaborators who are looking for you. You make sure that you have a professional photo, that you craft a compelling bio, and you showcase your relevant skills and accomplishments to establish that professional online identity. But also, we engage in the digital spaces, our online interactions. So liking something, commenting on posts, using Teams or Slack or other collaborative apps, and engaging in teaching and learning online. All of these interactions contribute to the development of our online persona. And they influence how we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us. When we demonstrate digital etiquette, or when we are respectful in the discussion, especially when we disagree, and when we use language that aligns with our personal and professional values, all of that develops and curates our online identity. Next.

Once you craft an online identity, it influences your sense of self, your personal life, and your professional life. I don't have to tell you, you probably see this already happening with you. But the curated content that we share and the communities that we engage with, the persona that we project, they all contribute to our self-image. Our curated identity online can either align or diverge from our offline self. We can have a feeling of coherence or we can have some dissonance with what we are versus what we are projecting. When we receive feedback and validation, like likes or comments and shares, it directly impacts our self-esteem. All of these positive interactions boost our confidence, but the negative ones tend to lead to self-doubt and insecurity. If we start constantly comparing with others' seemingly perfect lives on social media, we get FOMO or fear of missing out. We also can develop feelings of inadequacy. In terms of personal platforms, they provide means or an opportunity to connect with your friends, with your family, with your acquaintances. But the quality of these connections can actually vary. They can either strengthen the relationships by allowing you to communicate, or they can introduce challenges and misunderstandings and conflicts because of all of the non-verbal cues. I'm sure you've experienced for yourself, our personal life and our online life sometimes gets blurred. There are privacy concerns, but it's also stressful in those times. If we share too much information, then there can be unintended consequences that affect our relationships and sometimes even our personal safety. From the professional life lens, online platforms are excellent tools for networking, for branding. When we want to curate carefully our online presence, it can enhance our career opportunities. It can help us showcase skills and we can develop more professional connections. But there is a requirement to balance the potential challenges, such as inappropriate content or sharing personal opinions and views on public forums, especially on sensitive topics. Those negative online experiences or controversies or

unprofessional behaviour can actually have lasting effects on our career. In that sense, there's a lot of influence of online identity on the self, on our personal lives, and our professional lives.

Let's look at the case of Professor Gupta, who teaches an online computer science course at a local university. Now he maintains a strong online identity. He has social media profiles. He engages in lots of academic forums. In his personal life, he uses social media to connect with his friends and colleagues and former students, the ones who've done courses and left university and so on. Now he regularly posts photos from his travels, but also his academic achievements. Over time, he starts noticing that a lot of his current students start following him on these platforms. One day he receives a friend request from a current student. He wonders what he should do. Where should he draw the boundaries of his online identity? Now he wants to build a sense of community and be accessible to his students, but he's also concerned about maintaining that healthy separation between his personal life and his professional life. In terms of his professional online identity, he contributes to these academic discussions that happen on Twitter and the debates that happen on LinkedIn, and his online presence is good. It has helped him connect with colleagues globally. He has a good professional network. But recently what he did was he participated in a controversial discussion that caused… it attracted a lot of negative comments and criticism. That online criticism started to affect his confidence and self-esteem. He now thinks that he's spending more time worrying about the potential backlash that is happening based on that one comment that he made, than focusing on the valuable discussions that he actually enjoyed at one point on LinkedIn and Twitter. Some students also started to share with him how his online views don't align with their expectations of him as their instructor and educator. That feedback from students is affecting Professor Gupta quite deeply and emotionally. He's torn between maintaining his authenticity and meeting the expectations of being an instructor. All of this to say that this case scenario is not too different or too far-fetched from some of the feelings and emotions that each one of us has felt in the online world in our interactions. The psychological effects of online identity, they're complex. They influence our sense of self and our personal self and our professional well-being. Next.

Okay, well let's lighten up our mood a little bit. From Professor Gupta's case study to this cartoon. Here's a cartoon that ran in *The New Yorker* back in 1993. This cartoon is about two dogs on a computer surfing the internet. One saying to the other, "On the internet, nobody knows you're a dog." Well, 25 years later, the cartoon has become iconic. But actually it's for the exact opposite reason. The internet does offer many things, but anonymity is not one of them. The cartoon on the right shows that on the internet, everybody knows that you're a dog. In fact, not only that, they know what breed of dog, how old it is, their taste in doggie biscuits, their list of doggie friends, and perhaps even where and how often they go for a walk with their human companions. Anonymity is not something that the internet gives to us now. But what is anonymity?

Anonymity in the context of online identity refers to the ability of individuals to engage in online activities without disclosing their real identities or without sharing personal information. Essentially, we use anonymity to compartmentalize our online and our offline lives. We do this

to maintain a level of separation between our virtual personas and our real world identities. It can also help prevent unauthorized collection and misuse of personal information. For the general public, you and I, anonymity is often associated with online communication, financial transactions, social media platforms where we use pseudonyms or usernames to engage with each other. You can see anonymity at play in internet forums and communities where people discuss various topics without revealing their true identities or their real identities. Now what it allows us to do is to foster an open dialogue, have diverse perspectives, but also anonymity is sought by people who are trying to protect their personal privacy, especially when they're participating in online spaces or expressing opinions on sensitive or controversial issues. Next.

Research actually shows how anonymity in online environments can actually have a positive impact on the learning experience. It removes that sense of perceived risk we have about either unconscious bias or repercussions, or consequences to what we are sharing. Many students feel that anonymity creates a level playing field for them amongst the student group. It enhances the equality in sharing between students and the instructors, especially when you don't have to socially identify yourself and it's not mandatory. The students do feel a sense of empowerment that they can control the amount of self-disclosure that they want to do. All of that enables openness, it enables honesty and trust development. In general, anonymity can foster a comfortable sharing environment. Now while it is beneficial, it can also open the doors for potential misuse, like online harassment, or cyberbullying, or spreading false information without accountability. Next.

Now, anonymity by itself is not desirable or undesirable. It is actually a choice. In your experience of teaching courses or even as an online learner, can you think of some situations where anonymity is preferred? Where would you want it? What kind of situations would you have to be anonymous, either as a student or as an online instructor, or anybody who's actually participating in the online world? Why don't you share some responses in the chat and we can have a short discussion on this one. Where is anonymity preferred? Okay, I can get you started. Anonymity can be preferred where I have a comment here. "In chat boards." Yes. In online courses that involve kind of discussions, especially when those are related to sensitive personal topics. Okay, we also have a comment, "We see how in learning and teaching is an open activity and anonymity is not preferred." Yes, there are specific situations where you would want no anonymity. The next comment is, "As a learner, I have a strong preference for anonymity in any space that is not password protected." That makes sense. Security concerns and anonymity go hand in hand if you're more concerned about that sense of security and how the information can be used or misused, you want to be anonymous. Okay. Next one is, "Anonymity is important when vulnerable students are involved." Great point. "Some students don't want to share their identity online if they're hiding from abusive partners." Absolutely. As you can see, there are specific cases where anonymity may be preferred and where anonymity may not be okay. Let's reveal some more information on this slide. Like many of you said, if the course involves discussions or assignments related to sensitive personal topics like mental health or trauma, or your own personal experiences or challenging life situations, we want to allow ourselves or our students to remain anonymous to encourage that open and honest sharing.

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But also wherever there are emotionally charged topics or controversial topics, providing that option to stay anonymous can help people express more diverse perspectives. Another place where you want to use anonymity is feedback on peer assessments or participating in peer reviews. And I found that some students actually feel more comfortable giving constructive feedback if they are anonymous. Similarly, for students to ask questions about the course content without feeling that self-conscious or embarrassment feeling. Then for assignments that involve deep personal reflections, where we want more candid and introspective responses, we can allow for anonymity. But there are specific cases where anonymity may not be okay. The number one aspect of that is academic integrity. When you want to maintain academic integrity, when you want to make sure that students are accountable for their own work, actually having them anonymous hinders their ability to... hinders your ability to assess their contributions, let's say on group projects or on collaborative assignments. The transparency of their identity is actually crucial if you want to uphold your academic standards and you want to ensure that they receive credit for their work. Also, sometimes anonymity can be used as a shield for disruptive behaviour. Like I said previously, things like trolling or harassment or violations of academic integrity, none of this is okay. The course and the online environment should have some mechanisms to address and prevent these behaviours. There are specific cases where we are not okay with people being anonymous. And that's in the context of either professional development or in networking, where we want to maintain transparency, where we want to have an open environment, and where using our real names, our real information is crucial for trust building and building that community. If our anonymity leads to lack of participation or engagement, then it's less preferable. If you want to actually build a community, that open environment is required. And finally, assessment and evaluation. It's not appropriate when we want to grade and provide personal feedback, because as instructors, we need to assess individual performance, and anonymity can complicate the process. When you're considering the use of anonymity in an online course, instructors have to clearly communicate both their expectations and some guidelines. At the end of the day, creating a supportive and respectful online community involves striking a balance between respecting students' privacy and ensuring a more positive and accountable learning environment. Let's now move on to authenticity.

What does the word "authentic" mean to you? How would you describe an authentic online presence? I invite you to share your perspectives in the chat about what authenticity means to you. But in terms of the Merriam Webster Online Dictionary, authenticity includes phrases and words like "real" or "worthy of acceptance, worthy of belief, true to one's own personality and character." Being authentic online involves presenting ourselves more genuinely. It does mean aligning our online presence with our real-life identity, our values, and our beliefs. But in the online context, it goes one step further. It's more than just our self-presentation. It also reflects attributes like our sincerity, our honesty, and the consistency in our online interactions.

Let's look at a case where sometimes being fake is actually being authentic. Like we discussed earlier, we can have multiple online identities, and some of you may already know this on Instagram, some people actually have two different identities. They are called Rinsta and Finsta

with an R and with an F. Some people also call it their real account and spam account. Rinsta is the real account and Finsta is the fake Instagram account. A Rinsta account is for someone who is wanting to look you up online. It's generally your real name or some version of it, and the account is searchable, it's very curated. Let's say an employer or recruiter is looking you up, a Rinsta account is the one that would show up. A Finsta account, on the other hand, has a username that's usually your nickname or some characteristics that only your friends or close family would know. A Finsta account is only known by that trusted close group of people. But the irony is that people's Finsta accounts tend to be more real or authentic because they are intended just for close friends. Whereas the Rinstas, or the real accounts. are highly curated for public view. I hear that Instagram is actually working to make Finsta a real option by adding a feature called Flipside. Basically, you click a button to flip your curated Instagram and create another Instagram view for your close friends and your family. That way you don't have to manage two Instagram accounts. You just change the view of who you are based on who's looking at you. Now, is that more authentic presentation of who you are? One wonders. Well, all of this to say that the definition and expression of authenticity is changing. This distinction between our Rinsta and Finsta reflects that complexity of online identity management.

Let's take a quick poll. Another one. Is it possible to be authentic when teaching online? Your options are yes, no, and partially. Okay. A lot of answers are coming in. 56% of you say that yes, it's possible to be authentic online and 44% of you say only partially. Well, I'm glad none of us chose the no because some authenticity is required online. Thank you, Paula. The reason why many of us chose partially

The reason is because of what's called the online authenticity paradox. Now to be truly authentic means sharing both positive and negative experiences. Now people aim for online authenticity, but because it involves being open about our ups and our downs, it becomes challenging or nearly impossible to achieve. You can imagine how this challenge is heightened for people with marginalized identities or difficult life experiences because they actually face additional barriers or even personal costs when they share those aspects of their lives online. Despite our desire for authenticity, many of us find ourselves navigating this complex balance between what do we want to share online and what kind of challenges will we face in maintaining that positive and consistent image? That is the online authenticity paradox. Another way to say how the definition and expression of authenticity is changing.

What we've seen is that authenticity in online teaching enhances the overall learning experience. It fosters trust, engagement, positive learning environment. I'm sure in your own experiences you've seen how authentic communication helps in more clear and transparent expression for our students. And as educators, we want to cultivate those things. We want to be genuine. We want to allow our students to trust us and feel comfortable asking our questions, especially because online environments can sometimes feel that impersonal. and authenticity helps to bridge that gap. But is there a limit to our authenticity? Can we be too authentic? And when does sharing turn into over-sharing?

Okay. In your own experience of teaching or as an online learner, how do you establish or nurture authenticity? How do you build genuine connections and design a supportive learning environment? Let's see some of your responses in the chat. And I love that statement. "Authenticity is the currency of genuine connections in online teaching." Well said. "Be vulnerable and honest about" what I don't know. Fantastic, yes, it's a beautiful expression. "Be me, not someone else." Absolutely, yes. Here's another lens. We can be authentic about our professional experience. We don't need to share personal info. In fact, it could be harmful to share or ask students to share personal information. Paula, let's reveal some more information on this slide. Authenticity. A lot of it is about creating that welcoming online presence. Where you introduce yourself, you share your background, you establish that sense of community from the beginning. But you take specific steps to encourage the active participation of students. You want them to share their perspectives and ask questions and engage in discussions. You create those opportunities. Someone said that it's not important to share personal info. And I agree, you set your own boundaries about what is personal information. But it's crucial to say, share personal insights, so anecdotes, or your experiences or examples related to the course content. That humanizes the learning experience. It helps students connect with you as a person. But I think in all of this, the most important one is sharing more mindfully. There were some questions in the chat about drawing those boundaries between our personal life and our professional life. Many years ago, for some of us still it holds true, personal information like a health diagnosis, things like depression or ADD, or even challenging situations like separation or trauma or divorce. They were all kept private. But today's world is different. At times these kinds of pieces of information help us become more authentic in our online persona and help build those personal connections. But sometimes they can also be like trauma dumping. The difference between sharing and oversharing actually comes down to aligning your digital identity to your goals and to your values. It's about the boundaries that you set for yourself and the context in which your online digital identity comes to play. In terms of the supportive environment that you want to create in your courses, a lot of it is about clearly sharing your expectations, providing good and timely feedback, using a range of instructional strategies that address diverse learning needs, and they are more inclusive. But also using authentic assessment methods. You're not only authentic as a person, but you're also being authentic in your design of instruction. A lot of the supportive environment that brings out the authenticity of you as a professional online is about using good instructional theories, best practices, strategies, and also being responsive to the needs of who's in the classroom, acknowledging their challenge and making adjustments. You show up authentically online by having these genuine connections and creating a positive and supportive online community.

Next, here's an important thing I wanted to highlight. Anonymity and authenticity are sometimes conceived as these opposite concepts. And I want to urge you to rethink this relationship, notice "and" instead of the "vs." Because anonymity can actually act both as a threat to authenticity and a condition that enables its emergence. It's not a binary choice about being completely anonymous or fully authentic. Rather it's more about a nuanced understanding of the different ways we can manage our online presence and our online identity.

Let's share a little bit more outside of the chat. I'm curious to hear more about your tips and best practices and how you currently navigate anonymity and authenticity. Or if you picked some specific tip or strategy along the way through our session, perhaps I said something that rang a bell or maybe a peer something in the chat. I've set up two Padlets for us to contribute and collaborate on. These are like whiteboards, where I'm asking you to add sticky notes. You can click on the hyperlink, there's a password. It's the same for both the hyperlinks. There's one Padlet for anonymity and one for authenticity. You don't have to contribute to both Padlets, but if you do, that'd be great. Let's give ourselves a few minutes to contribute and then we can come back and wrap this all up.

Okay, I'm going to go into the Padlets and see what has been shared. And you can continue to type if you are in the process of sharing your tip. I'm in Anonymity here. The first one that I see is that " For assignments that require personal reflections steeped in real-life context I'll allow participants to use company names, fake names, or department specific role holders to encourage more candid and introspective responses." The next one that I see is "I'm careful what I share about and how much I share. Often less is more to reduce possible friction." That's a good one for Anonymity. We have quite a few for Authenticity. "In online course discussion forums, I respond to participant comments with genuine interest and enthusiasm and incorporate personal anecdotes and experiences related to the subject matter." Then there's one on storytelling. "I tell stories as an instructor and encourage the same of students, that's a great way actually to establish a more trusting and open environment." The next one is on humour. I love that. "Careful humour is really important in building authentic relationships." I think so too. It's good to know that you can be silly in some professional way, I guess. "Nurturing a trusting classroom to enable students to be authentic. I, as a teacher, would need to nurture a trusting classroom over time." That's true, it's just like we actually cultivate our online identity. We have to nurture the online environment. "I foster authenticity by sharing my positionality, white heterosexual settler. That's another great way to build those bridges and connections." "Change names where needed. But be honest in the story and exchange." Yes, that's quite similar to the one at the start about letting people change the names to be anonymous, but allowing them to present themselves fully. There's another one in Anonymity. "If it's something that I wouldn't share with an acquaintance, the next circle beyond a friend, it needs to be anonymous." Thank you for sharing all of those tips and best practices. I'm sure that more will come as you're thinking about it and mulling on this topic. Paula, could we move to the next slide? Thank you.

As we wrap up this session, I just have two more slides for you. This one is more about the takeaways that I wanted to leave you with when navigating anonymity and authenticity. It's first and foremost about being intentional. What do we want to achieve with our online process and how do we align our actions accordingly? Also, consistency. To stay consistent, it's best that we ensure our online identity aligns with our real-life identity. Then we want to engage responsibility, we want to respect other people's right and privacy, but also review our own digital footprint and make sure that we make the necessary adjustments and maintain that

positive online consistent presence. Check what information is available about you online. Do a cleanup. Remove any outdated information or inappropriate content associated with your name. And make sure that you're aware of your own privacy settings on different platforms and you know how to control them and who can see your content. But beyond all of that, you have to be selective. Think before you post or share any information online. Consider the potential implications, especially around sharing personal information. I read somewhere that the difference between being authentic and oversharing actually stems from our intentions. Before you share information with other people, think about why you're doing it, and what consequences might it have on you as well as on others? Will you end up alienating yourself or maybe the other person? Or will you put yourself or someone else in danger by sharing something you shouldn't? Or maybe somebody else can take advantage of your situation because they know too much. Knowing your intentions is what helps us find that boundary between sharing and oversharing. Finally, anonymity is a choice. It's preferred in some situations and not so desirable in other situations. The way we saw with Rinsta and Finsta, the whole definition and expression of authenticity and how you want to be authentic online is changing over time. And how authenticity can be paradoxical. Be kind to yourself as you try and pursue and navigate this balance between anonymity and authenticity.

What I want to leave you with is that managing your digital well-being and your online identity is not like a one-size-fits-all solution. It's more like a continuum. I see this continuum more like a spectrum. There are various degrees to which an individual can navigate this balance by revealing their true self and maintaining that level of privacy. You could be 100% anonymous and 0% authentic. Or you could adopt a more balanced approach and reveal some aspects of your identity while protecting others. Or you could choose to be 0% anonymous and 100% authentic. Now, all of these percentages would differ based on the online spaces that you occupy, the context, your own idea of yourself, and the boundaries that you want to put on yourself, and your goals and values. A very good example I find in terms of the spectrum is usernames. For complete anonymity, I have a creative username that has nothing to do with my real name, Bluebird2024. But if I want to sprinkle a little bit of myself in the mix, I can use a more balanced approach. I can use a nickname or a part of my real name. For example, my Twitter handle is Write2tg. TG are the initials of my real name. But for a fully authentic experience, 100% authentic, 0% anonymous, I use my full name, Taruna Goel for LinkedIn, for my professional work groups and Slack and on my blog. You have to navigate this continuum based on your own personal preferences and context and nature. But also that our positions on this spectrum can change and should change based on what spaces we are occupying. Our online identity in that context is fluid. And therefore, our digital well-being is also fluid because it's related to how we project our online identity. You can move along the spectrum depending on all of the factors and the so-called tension between anonymity and authenticity is natural and it varies for each person. We have to find the right balance for our digital well-being. It's a personal journey that's shaped by our need for self-expression and our need for privacy and the nature of online interactions.

Well, that brings us to the end of the session today. I did a lot of talking, but before we leave, we have 1 or 2 minutes. Are there any questions? You can type your question in the chat. There was one question that I received ahead of the session and I wanted to address that. It was about the overall lack of awareness about how some students and faculty must remain anonymous for safety reasons. What do we do for this overall lack of awareness? My response to that question would be twofold. First is, of course, implement strategies to raise awareness. Training and workshops for both students as well as faculty. But I think it needs to go beyond just that. I think we need to incorporate elements of digital literacy into the curriculum. That's what the B.C. Post-Secondary Digital Literacy Framework can help us do. We have to integrate those guidelines around online safety and digital anonymity and privacy into the relevant courses, attached to the discussion on academic integrity and expectations and rubrics for our assignments. That's how it implements raising awareness. The second strategy that I wanted to suggest for that question is to have confidential channels for people to seek information and to seek support regarding their online safety. You could have a dedicated email address or even an anonymous reporting mechanism. If people are experiencing stigma or bullying because of what they shared online, they need to be able to ask for help, and without over-exposing themselves to more stigma. There's a delicate balance of confidentiality and privacy that needs to be managed when we're trying to ensure that information is shared and handled with care. Anyway, I wanted to answer that question and I'm now looking at the chat. Wow, thank you so much for all that lovely feedback. I hope you enjoyed that session and you have some takeaways from this. I'm going to throw it back to Gwen and Paula. And thank you, both of you, for facilitating this with me today.

GWEN:
Wow, thank you very much, Taruna. Such a very comprehensive and insightful session. As you can see lots of great feedback in the chat. Taruna actually shared her contact, so if you have further questions, please don't hesitate to contact Taruna or email us as well. We really look forward to seeing you in our upcoming events. As you can see, we have a FLO MicroCourse at the end of this month. We have another FLO MicroCourse at the end of February as well. And stay tuned with our next Sandbox session right on Valentine's and on the Research Speaker Series at the end of February. If you want, please check our event site. Paula, actually popped the link in the chat already. Again, thank you very much for staying with us till now. Everyone have a great day. Thank you. Thanks.