DESIGN FOR RELATIONSHIP BREAK UPS: CURATION OF DIGITAL POSSESSIONS

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy* at the University of Dundee and the University of Technology Sydney

CANDIDATE DECLARATION: UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

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I, Daniel Herron, hereby declare that I am the author of this thesis; that I have consulted all references cited within; that I carried out the work recorded in this thesis; and that it has not been previously accepted for a degree.

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I, Daniel Herron, declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Engineering & IT at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree at any other academic institution except as fully acknowledged within the text. This thesis is the result of a Collaborative Doctoral Research Degree program with the University of Dundee.

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As I have studied at two universities, been assessed by two universities, and submitted this thesis to two universities, it seems only fitting that I make two dedications in this thesis.

For Shauna

My person.

In this, as in most things, I couldn't have done it without you.

Nor would I have.

--

For Mum, Dad, Aideen, John, Katie, James, Ellen, Niall, and of course, Rupert

You've all put up with me talking about this for five years, so I think a dedication is only fair.

ABSTRACT

Individuals in a romantic relationship will typically have a substantial number of digital possessions associated with that relationship. With online dating services becoming a more mainstream way of meeting a potential partner, sometimes individuals begin creating digital possessions connected to their relationship before even meeting in real life. These digital possessions connect partners by contributing to their digital identities as 'individuals in a relationship'; they are an important part of a digital connection between partners, and actively contribute to the maintenance of that connection.

If a romantic relationship ends in a break up, separation, or divorce, the digital possessions that once connected partners in a positive way become responsible for maintaining a connection that no longer accurately reflects the ex-partners' relationship status. The persistence of digital possessions means that until they are managed or curated in some way, those digital possessions will continue to connect ex-partners in a digital context. The tools and options available to ex-partners when it comes to managing and curating their digital possessions in the context of a relationship break up are limited, and often do not support the specific intent of the individual.

In this doctoral thesis, I investigated the ways in which technology could support individuals in managing and curating their digital possessions associated with a past relationship, after that relationship has ended. Through four qualitative studies, this research made the following contributions to knowledge:

1. The introduction and evaluation of eight prototype grammars of action, which can be used to better support individuals in managing and curating their digital possessions in the context of a relationship break up;
2. Documentation of a reproducible method for identifying contextually relevant design dimensions to guide the development of grammars of

action for the curation and management of digital possessions across different life transitions (including romantic relationship break up);

3. Findings from 8 semi-structured interviews with individuals who had experienced a romantic relationship break up. These findings demonstrate an understanding of the ways in which an individuals' attitude towards digital possessions change after a relationship break up, including the identification of 'tainted' digital possessions;
4. Findings from 10 semi-structured interviews with individuals who had experienced a romantic relationship break up. These findings demonstrate an understanding of the current technological limitations that individuals are confronted with when attempting to curate and manage their digital possessions after a relationship break up.

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PUBLICATIONS BY DANIEL HERRON

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Moncur W., Gibson L., **Herron D.** (2016). The Role of Digital Technologies During Relationship Breakdowns. In *Proceedings of Computer Supported Cooperative Work*. California, USA. CSCW'16[6].
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Honourable Mention Award

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