

## **A NOTE TO READERS ON QUOTING ONLINE CONTENT**

Expectations about privacy are different in online environments than in public physical spaces. Much of the data I present in this book are publicly accessible—the majority of websites in my study do not require any log-in information or membership. Yet individuals who contribute to websites that deal with unique and sensitive issues, like sex from a Christian perspective, generally do not expect that their comments will be used for anything other than the online dialogue in which they are generated. Although the people I interviewed understood that their posts could be seen by virtually anyone, I believe that posting to an online message board or commenting on a blog is more similar to sharing a story in a semipublic space—like a Bible study or an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting—than in a public space—like a park or busy town center. Even though strangers could plausibly enter these semipublic groups, there is general consensus among qualitative researchers that it is unethical for a researcher to invade these spaces without permission and use what they hear or observe as data. I realize this comparison only goes so far—a stranger would surely be noticed and questioned upon entering a Bible study, for example, whereas people using online spaces must generally expect the undetected presence of strangers, since lurkers can read online content without ever disclosing their presence.

I attempt to find middle ground in understanding the Internet as both public and private. While I did not request permission from website administrators to collect data from online content that is publicly viewable, I take seriously the privacy of website users and have done my best to protect their identities. I have quoted and described content as anonymously as possible,

changing details that may reveal the online identity of the author and using pseudonyms for all website users and names of websites.

I have further edited quotes to make them easier to read by outsiders to this online community by making changes to avoid what I deem to be distracting and excessive jargon of computer-mediated communication. Generally, I have spelled out acronyms and shorthand and added punctuation where appropriate. When referencing scripture that is quoted by website users, I adhere to the translation they themselves used. Typically, this is the New International Version (NIV).