Privacy

Lecture 5-1

Computers & Society (CPSC 430)

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Getting Started with Privacy

• What is Privacy?
  – Work in a group.
  – Come up with the best definition of the term you can.
  – Try to think of
    ▪ The example least like privacy that is still captured by your definition
    ▪ The example most like privacy that fails your definition
  – (We’re not worried at this point about whether privacy ought to be a right; that’s our next topic)
Defining Privacy

• Privacy is related to the notion of access
  – Physical proximity to you
  – Knowledge about you

• Byrne: Privacy is a “zone of inaccessibility”
  – your ability to deny others access to you

• Bloustein: Privacy violations are an affront to human dignity

• Too much individual privacy can harm society
  – Can you think of examples?

• Key question: Where to draw the line?
Benefits and Harms

• Harms of Privacy
  – Cover for illegal or immoral activities
  – Burden on the nuclear family
    ▪ With less privacy comes more broadly shared responsibility
    ▪ Relatedly, allows dysfunctional families to remain hidden
  – Ignored people on society’s fringes
    ▪ cursed with too much privacy

• Benefits of Privacy
  – Individual growth & responsibility
    ▪ Individuation, a key psychological stage, requires privacy
    ▪ Without privacy, you can’t be considered free, hence held responsible
  – Freedom to be yourself
    ▪ not having to act as though others are watching, maintain a public persona
    ▪ Focus your thoughts on a creative (or religious) task without interruption
  – Development of loving, trusting, caring, intimate relationships
    ▪ inconceivable without the “moral capital” of privacy
Is There a Natural Right to Privacy?

- Morton Levine: Privacy rights stem from property rights
  - “a man’s home is his castle”

- Warren and Brandeis: An explicit “right to be let alone”
  - Noted that libel and slander laws don’t prevent people from saying mean, true things about you

- Thomsson: violations of “Privacy rights” are also violations of other rights
  - So, we don’t need to treat privacy separately

- Benn and Reiman: Some amount of privacy is necessary for people to be autonomous, moral agents, to develop healthy relationships, and to act as free citizens.

- Is privacy a right?
- Is it a “prudential right”?
  - worth recognizing for the good of society, though not a natural right
- Or do we have no such right at all?
Privacy and Trust

• Modern life more private
• Challenge: living among strangers
• Remedy: establishing reputations
  – Ordeal, such as lie detector test or drug test
  – Credential, such as driver’s license, key, ID card, college degree
• Establishing reputation is done at the cost of reducing privacy