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