

The possibilities of privacy in the 21st century



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Privacy is perhaps one of the most personal issues in today's society. Privacy is an intensely personal issue, and perhaps not only to the right of the individual to dress the way he or she desires, worship in any way he chooses, but also to expect that those rights be protected by the government that upholds them.

At one point or another, every individual in our society has asked the question, " Is privacy in the 21st Century possible? " The answer lies in the exploration of what privacy really means, and what privacy issues society faces in today's modern, informational, and digital age of what we call the 21st Century. Individuals should have the right to privacy, and the right to expect the government to uphold that right. The government should hold no explicit view on privacy as a separate issue, but uphold for each individual person, such as the right to freedom of speech, the right to vote, the right to hold assembly, the right to bear arms, and the right to worship in the way in which he chooses imply, and demand that each individuals privacy be upheld and respected. Protecting your personal information both on your personal computer and in other places such as your bank, or your job, has become more difficult with the massive growth of the internet and the expertise of some unsavory characters called hackers, crackers, and phreakers. Whatever they choose to call themselves, they are all thieves, plain and simple.

Some people still question whether or not hacking should be illegal. It's obvious that what hackers do is illegal. A personal computer is personal, and the information on it private. When a hacker invades that privacy, he is

trespassing, and when they take your personal information, their committing a form of thievery.

In addition to hackers, we now have marketers invading our privacy through the use of cookies. There are many issues involving personal privacy in today's world, and protecting it is the main concern. This is the Information Age, the Information Age of gathering information. Computers have become so entrenched in people's lives, that they have come to take computers for granted, and usually stop to complain on occasions, when these computers fail them. Computers collect our paychecks, pay our bills, dispense our cash, send our orders, and save our data. While computers contain only bits and pieces of our personal information, collectively computers know us better than some of our friends and relatives.

The use of law enforcement agencies, the media, financial and educational institutions, to collect and compile personal information is making many consumer advocates, and privacy experts uneasy. However, many Americans, even though concerned about privacy invasions, simply accept consequences of the Information Age, and are not willing to give up the benefits and conveniences which information technology has given them. Along with its many benefits, technology makes an encompassing surveillance networks seem almost inevitable. Much of the privacy we have enjoyed from the past comes from information technology, and insufficient manpower to monitor us. But these protective insufficiencies are giving way to efficient technologies of data processing, and digital surveillance that threaten to eliminate our privacy. Already, we are tracked by our credit card

transactions, our passes through the fast lanes at toll booths, and our cell phone calls.

Hearing the word private, one could think of infinite meanings and uses. Some people think for their own safety, certain people should not be private. Others believe it is their human right to have privacy, because it defines oneself. The dictionary defined term has had subtle changes through the past 300 years. In the past 3 years, the definition of privacy in the United States has changes to very little meaning, granting an even more important reason to find the true definition.

In Webster's 1913 Dictionary, the definition of privacy is, " The state of being in retirement from the company or observation of others; seclusion. " In order to stand up for what you believe in, it is crucial to know the true meaning and implications of the word. Privacy may be something only certain groups can have, or possibly a universal right. It's really up to the individual of today and tomorrow to decide, by recognizing the true definition of what privacy really means. The 1st Amendment right states; Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and the petition the government for a redress of grievances.

As a country, we pride ourselves on the existence of the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights. We are especially proud of our 1st Amendment right; the freedom to express ourselves and to speak freely. We

are free to say what we think, even in the face of controversy. We are especially free to criticize the government.

Our job as citizens is to make sure that we are responsible in what we say when we exercise our 1st Amendment rights. The 4th Amendment states; The rights of the people to be secure in their persona, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized. Americans, say often enough, “ I am entitled to privacy”, but in fact, privacy is a funny thing. No where in the United States Constitution is the word privacy used. The government of the United States has provided for our privacy without actually saying the word privacy in the Constitution.

United State Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandel explained a persons right to privacy as; the right to be left alone. As American, we believe our own personal business should remain just that, our own personal business. When you begin to think about privacy, what information about yourself is actually private? You might find that there is more available information about you out there than you think. Do you believe everyone has an equal right to privacy? The answer is, no. People who are considered public figures, or newsmakers, including politicians, movie stars, or just people who made the news in some way, are not entitled to the same privacy as an ordinary citizen. In other words, they do not have the same reasonable expectation to privacy.

Citizens must remember that just because a company or someone asks for personal information, doesn't mean you have to give it up. Some Internet users, when asked for personal information, give the name Ima Nonymous. Many adults over the age of 50 have been only 35 years old for a long time. Lying is not encouraged, but it might be a good rule to follow when companies ask for more information than they really need to know. Recommendations have been that the Internet be self regulated.

This means that the people using the Internet would use their discretion when posting material, voicing their opinions, and collecting data about people or other things. I'm sure most would agree that complete self regulation on the Internet is nice in theory, but unfortunately not pragmatic. The legal system and society need to balance our 1st and 4th Amendment while still protecting our privacy. The legal system has a very difficult task in front of them.

Unfortunately, having privacy in today's society can be a little difficult. With an open society like the one we have, remaining private can be construed as being antisocial. At the present time, your ability to keep information about yourself, what you do, and your preferences may no longer be possible. Your personal information is shared and sold by businesses and used on the Internet in many different ways.

Privacy as we come to know it, and a reasonable expectation to it, seems to be waning.