

Privacy in the Modern Age, Part 2

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2 Wrong Attitudes Regarding Privacy

There are some very dangerous popular misconceptions that have served to weaken our overall privacy. This essay will address four of them, and how, if you've fallen prey to one of these, you should consider re-calibrating your thinking on the subject.

I suppose the most common one is "I have nothing to hide, so why should I care what anyone knows?" That is patently false. As a matter of principle, you, the citizen, have everything to hide on the grounds that the details of your life are no one else's business. They are by definition, only your business, and only those close to you whom you trust to know. Knowledge regarding you and your family depends on their "need to know", and you decide who "needs to know". Mark "Junior High" Zuckerberg does not need to know how many children you have, or if any of them are toddlers. Your local sheriff does not need to know where you work or where you live or your occupation. The members of your local government do not need to know how anything about your income, or how you vote, or if you vote. Jeff "I own that too" Bezos does not need to know what kind of car you drive, or your opinion on the man-made climate change hoax, or any other opinions you hold. Your business is yours, and theirs is theirs, and the two should never meet. What do you know about Mark "Junior High" Zuckerberg, or Jeff "I own that too" Bezos, or your local sheriff, or your mayor? You know virtually nothing about them, other than what they choose to release to the public. Note the key words: "what they choose to release to the public". You should apply the same criteria to yourself and your family: you choose, not them.

Another common falsehood is "I am not a crook, so it doesn't matter who knows what." There are two problems with this one. First is, given the large mass of confusing and contradictory legislation, court rulings, and bureaucratic edicts, how do you know you're not a crook? The truth is, in this modern age, you are a crook if any penny-ante bureaucrat decides to make you a crook, even if you haven't actually violated any law. It is not even necessary to charge you with anything; all they have to do is put you "under investigation", or spread a few rumors. Enough innocuous information about you can be pieced together in such a way that you appear to be a crook. The second problem is that even innocuous information can make you a target for blackmail, if it is construed "in the right way". Remember, the government already assumes you are a crook, since you are required to sign your tax forms under penalty of perjury.

The third common fallacy is "no one is interested in me". The fact is that everyone is interested in you, albeit for different reasons. The commercial world is interested so they can send you advertisements and sell your data to other advertisers and "interested parties", although you do not know who the "interested parties" are. The government is interested because it wants to know who holds what political opinions, which is to say, whether you are a friend or an enemy of the political establishment. It is worse than that: now that "political correctness" has reached extreme levels, one post on an obscure social media site can get you fired from your job, and it is possible that you could have difficulty finding work. You can be denied the ability to provide for your family because some screeching moron with political or media connections was offended (or pretends to be offended) by some comment you made. The lesson here is: if you tell them something, the commercial world will try to sell you something, and the political world will try to regulate you. Both are equally bad because you, the citizen, have allowed yourself to become a commodity to be used and abused as the powerful see fit. Since you are the commodity, there is always an interest in you.

The last one I'll consider is "the government cannot do anything they want." How do you know? Can your mayor call the IRS and get copies of all your tax returns? Can the local school board access a database and find out if you are opposed to "Core Math"? There is no way for us, the common citizen, to know if any of these are happening. Certainly government employees are not going to admit to doing anything that violates their oaths, or that openly violates your rights. But it would be short-sighted to assume that governments and corporations are not cooperating; a government can hire a private corporation to do indirectly what the government cannot do directly. No one is going to tell us anything about what the government and corporations are actually doing with any data about us. There is no reason to assume that corporations or the government are keeping their "privacy" promises. Therefore, there is no reason for you, the citizen, to tell them anything of value.

There are no doubt a great many other common fallacies about privacy, but I think you get the idea. Privacy is exactly what it says it means: it is private until you say otherwise.