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The Anonymous Privacy of a Society

For many people, privacy of each individual in a society is a very important aspect, as without privacy, there would not be conflicting ideas and only what the public agrees on would be the only answer. After the exposure of the invasion of privacy Snowden revealed in 2013, people in America have been paranoid of the government and other malicious actors that could be watching them at any time. Ever since then, privacy has been a high concern for many companies, business, and individuals. Whether malicious or not, watching a person at any time when they are not aware is scary, but in some circumstances may be a necessary evil. Privacy and anonymity create a sense of security and safety in the age of computer technology, but in certain situations, a lack of privacy and anonymity could benefit the society around them.

For the sake of privacy, computers have many options and features to help the users to feel safer, which giving the user these options are an important part of computer ethics. In the IEEE Code of Ethics at section 1.1, companies and programmers of software that users will be using need to “strive to comply with ethical design” in order to “to protect the privacy of others” (IEEE Code of Ethics). If a user were to figure out a piece of technology did not strive to protect their privacy, people would turn against the company that created the technology. In the ACM Code of Ethics at section 1.7, creators of technology are “often entrusted with confidential information” that many users do not want others to have (ACM Code of Ethics). If a user is notified that their information may be taken or has already been taken, the ethical standards of

privacy and security has been broken in their eyes. In certain areas, like grocery stores and other public spaces, the privacy of the individuals around are stripped, as cameras are on the people at every moment. The technology of a security camera would breach peoples' privacy, but these cameras are placed for the safety of others. There are sections of cities that have a lack of camera and people have full privacy, such as the bathrooms, but these places are where a lot of crime and endangerment of people may happen. In these situations, having cameras in those areas would be unethical in the sense of privacy, but may keep people safer, even if not moral or ethical. For a more online example, many chat rooms and texting spaces on the internet may seem like they are private, but the company has the right to look at individual's messages for safety reasons due to possible investigations. The access of these private messages by a company may be a breach of privacy, but are important for the safety of others. To create an ethical online environment, the privacy of user's information, whether personal or not, should be an important aspect, but if the privacy is allowing harm to happen, there may need to be a breach of ethics.

To many people, having an option of anonymity is attractive, whether the use of the anonymity is used for malicious reasons or not. In the IEEE Code of Ethics at section 1.2, computer professionals need "to improve the understanding by individuals and society" to create technology more needed to benefit the public good (IEEE Code of Ethics). To be able to state your thoughts and opinions in an anonymous way allows for companies and professionals to understand the true needs of a society without the individuals feeling pressured by others around them. A major downside to having anonymity is that the idea of being able to say whatever and post whatever an individual wants online without repercussions allows for malicious users to take advantage. With many online spaces, individuals can create as many accounts as they want and not have any information about them posted, which allows for havoc to occur under many

topics. In the ACM Code of Ethics at section 1.3, to create “deliberately false or misleading claims, fabricating or falsifying data” is a major break of ethics, and if a computer professional creates a feature that allows users to do such, they are in part breaking their own code of ethics as well with anonymity (ACM Code of Ethics). The exploitation anonymous users use can undermine the positive effects of anonymity that is used on the internet constantly, but the bad actors create mischief on the internet that many people do not enjoy. The internet is a dangerous place full of malicious actors and events, but anonymity provides a sense of protection for every user to not easily be targeted by these actors and events.

The most important factor of creating technology is safety, as if the public may be potential hurt by the technology, outrage will occur. Privacy and anonymity fall under the category of safety, and I would say are very important not only online, but in real life too in many situations. To breach someone’s safety is a clear violation of any ethic code, but I believe there are potential areas where a lack of privacy and anonymity may benefit all. If the safety of other individuals is threatened by the privacy and anonymity of another individual, this is where the ethic code is able to be broken. To benefit society or not, the safety of everyone in a society should be upheld with the utter most importance, but to create such safety, a government or society should not control the lives of a society to ensure such safety.

Works Cited

“ACM Code of Ethics.” *Code of Ethics*, <https://www.acm.org/code-of-ethics>.

“IEEE Code of Ethics.” *IEEE*, <https://www.ieee.org/about/corporate/governance/p7-8.html>.