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Social Networks, Privacy, and Information Flow

Clarissa Littler

June 22, 2016

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- Outlining problems with privacy and content control

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- Describe how current solutions are lacking

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- Present a different approach to social networks

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- How to make our proposal performant
  - Premature optimization $= \sqrt{evil}$
- How to stop all harassment problems
  - e.g. doxxing

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Safety on the internet

My position

Everyone should have the right to participate in the public internet without fear of harassment either online or off

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The current structure of major social networks enables harassment, abuse, and other malicious behaviours

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The problem

The current structure of major social networks enables harassment, abuse, and other malicious behaviours

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Improving privacy and control in social media will dramatically reduce the amount of harassment online

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Information flow as generalized privacy

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Information flow as generalized privacy

Having control over your content: both who can see it, how they can interact with it, and what happens when its shared

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- Fine grained control over visibility

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- . . . and over allowed interaction
- Sharing respects your preferences

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    - Possession is 9/10 of the law

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- Reviewing privacy features

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- Most flexible

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- Can choose who can see (or can't see) posts

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- Can choose who can see (or can't see) posts
- Can lock down personal information selectively

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- ...
- No, really, that's it

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- Offline privacy is subtle and nuanced

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  - "Don't tell Clarissa but. . ."

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  - "Don't tell Clarissa but..."
  - "Well it's not official yet..."

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  - "Well it's not official yet..."
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You can witness conversations without having expectation of being able to participate or interact with them.

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Unequal interactions

You can witness conversations without having expectation of being able to participate or interact with them.

There's no expectation that all participants are on even footing.

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- Many nuanced situations offline

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- Many nuanced situations offline
- Public but inaccessible

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- Public but inaccessible
- Expectation of how information will flow

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Fine grained social permissions

- Many nuanced situations offline
- Public but inaccessible
- Expectation of how information will flow
- How is this enforced?

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- Social contracts

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- Social not legal consequences

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- Being cut off from friends is meaningful

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- Social not legal consequences
- Being cut off from friends is meaningful
- Public humiliation is a powerful force

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What's different about social media?

Why isn't social media like older forms of communication?

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Scaling and rapidity

POPULAR TEXT POSTS SUPPORT GROUP

RSS
ARCHIVE

11 MONTHS AGO
16283 NOTES

frenchfrycoolguy:

> every single person who has ever made a text post that got 100k+ (or even just like 10k+) notes knows that there is no benefit to making a popular text post at all beyond it being sort of flattering for the first like 10 minutes
>
> - nobody follows u for making it. ever.
> - the notification blocker doesn't really work because theres just too much shit going on
> - people make SUPER annoying commentary on the post that is rly repetitive ("has anyone else pointed out that-" **yes**. i have seen this exact text eight times today. i know you mean well but you are hurting me)
> - it makes it impossible to see notifications for posts ur actually looking for notifications on
> - it causes u to regret being funny
>
> like all u get in return is absolute hellfire for like a week straight followed by 0 benefits and every time somebody revives it so it starts circulating again u rly just want to close ur laptop and punt it into a tree

i'm sorry about your ironically popular text post.

(via belinsky)

Source: shacklefunk

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- Being blocked isn't a disincentive

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- Being blocked isn't a disincentive
- Groups are rapid forming and loose knit

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- Being blocked isn't a disincentive
- Groups are rapid forming and loose knit
- Humiliation, where is thy sting?

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Incentives and social contracts

- Being blocked isn't a disincentive
- Groups are rapid forming and loose knit
- Humiliation, where is thy sting?
- "Stop whinging. It's the internet!"

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My thesis

There should not be a fundamental difference between online and offline interactions in terms of expectations of privacy and information control.

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Current social media

- Mostly all or nothing

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- No equivalent of public but inaccessible

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Current social media

- Mostly all or nothing
- No equivalent of public but inaccessible
- All possible ways of interacting are lumped together

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- Control interaction and flow not just visibility
- Social expectation must be set in policy

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  - Sharing with commentary
  - Sharing and changing tags
- Conversing on a post

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- Policy controls permissions

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- Google+'s circles
- Dreamwidth/LJ custom groups
- Still no disentangling of permissions

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- Massive improvement

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- Make it easier to protect data

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- Not the best though

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- Massive improvement
- Make it easier to protect data
- Not the best though
  - When I share I "own" it

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- A pointer with permissions
- Both a way to access...
- And a way to control access

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  - *Share*

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  - Write
  - Execute
  - *Share*
  - *Change permissions*

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Capabilities aren't policy

Capabilities are issued in *accordance* with policy. The agents must share responsibly.

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Principle of least privilege

Only give the privilege necessary to get the job done

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- Better enforceable policies

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- A post is *already* content and metadata

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- Who retweeted it from whom

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- Who retweeted it from whom
- Reblogs and commentary of reblogs
- Proposal: add permissions as metadata on posts

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Posts as capabilities

The basic idea

Posts with permissions attached should be thought of as capabilities

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Timelines as working sets

- To view a post is to be allowed to "get" the capability

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Timelines as working sets

- To view a post is to be allowed to "get" the capability
- Your timeline becomes the "working set"

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- Sharing gives your followers copies of posts

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Permissions and sharing

- Users "get" a post with certain permissions
- Sharing gives your followers copies of posts
- ...with what permissions?

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- Logged out users shouldn't see anything

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- The most respectful choice

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- The most respectful choice
- But what does this do to indexing?

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- The most respectful choice
- But what does this do to indexing?
- Should we care?

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- Sharing forms a tree

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- Sharing information is already tracked

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- Sharing forms a tree
- Sharing information is already tracked
- The tree should be prunable at specific points

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- A user blocks another users

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- Global block from interaction

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Traditional blocking

- A user blocks another users
- Global block from interaction
- Doesn't have clear sharing semantics

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- Per post blocking

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- Per post blocking
- Posts accumulate blocks as they're shared

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- Posts accumulate blocks as they're shared
- Different sharing paths accumulate different blocks

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Per-post block lists

- Per post blocking
- Posts accumulate blocks as they're shared
- Different sharing paths accumulate different blocks
- . . . but is that bad?

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New kinds of control

Post-centered thinking leads to new kinds of control over your posts.

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- Preventing the ability to toggle searchability

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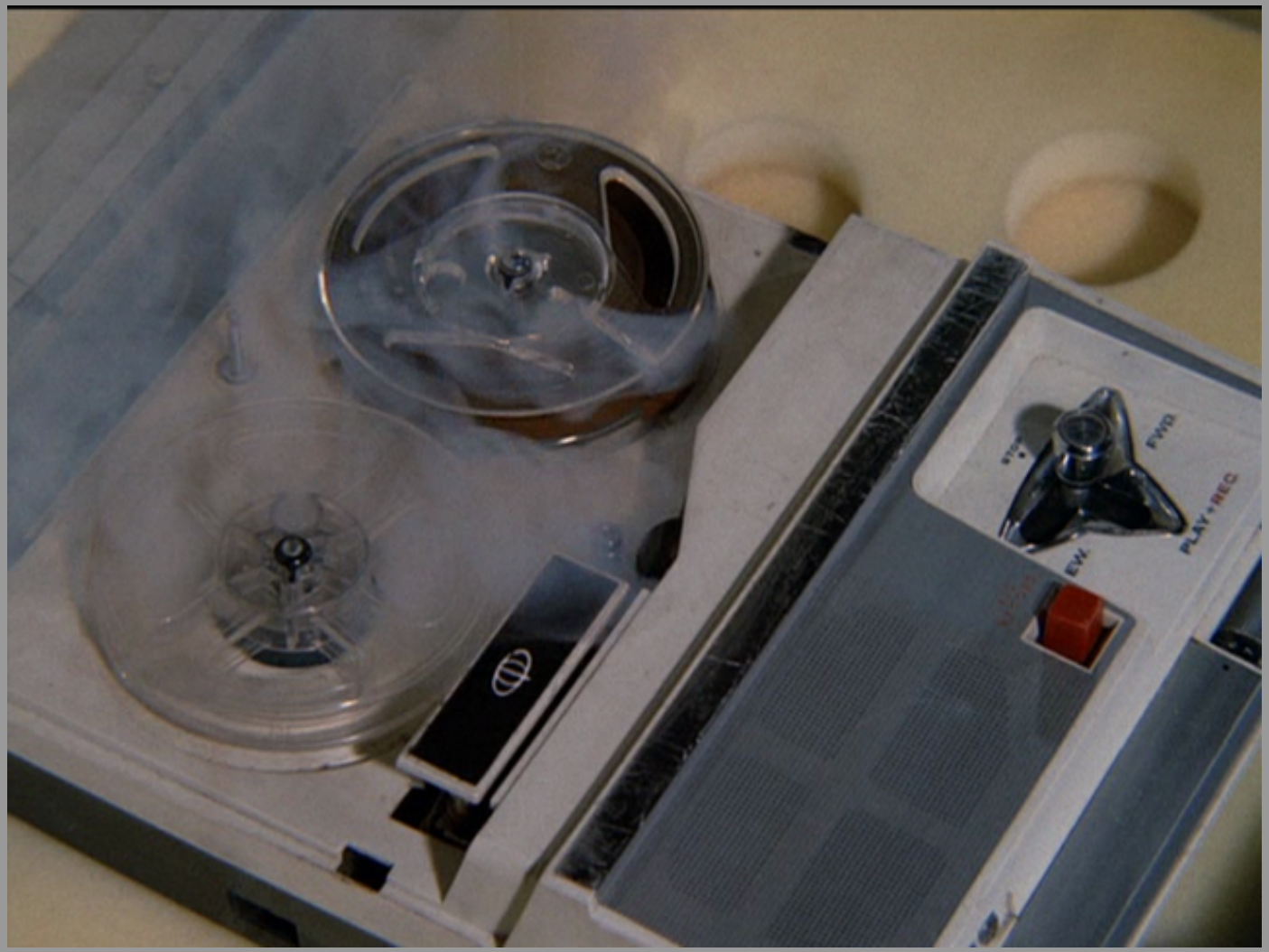
Self-destructing messages



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Message depth

Controlling the depth of the sharing tree: beyond a certain point no more sharing can happen

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Making policy

With this fine-grained customization, we need a good user interface and sensible defaults

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- Can override roles whenever needed

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- Can override roles whenever needed
- Setting permissions defaults by tag
- Most uses are simple

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Announcements

You have a professional account for your business, and you want to make an announcement that can be shared but don't want anyone to comment or reply to it.

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Preventing pile-on

Someone says something that you think was inappropriate, and you want to comment but I don't want to encourage your followers to pile on

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Preventing harassment

You want to talk about a topic that has been targeted for harassment and you still want to be able to use relevant tags

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Tweet streams

A series of posts where you don't want replies interrupting you

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