Trust and Privacy

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Trust and Privacy are socially constructed ideals that help us to navigate the risks related social aspects of our physical world. We have developed them over eons of human interaction. There can be no trust without risk, and in a world where trust is absolute there would be lees of a need for privacy. But that is not our world and as we take these social constructs from our physical world and we attempt to apply them to similar interactions in an online world we find trouble asserting them. Trust is much more easy to develop with the people we interact with regularly in our immediate physical vicinity. Those people we share many commonalities with, we cooperatively interact with, are those we find we can trust the most. This process applied to our interactions on the internet are often analogous to forcing a square peg into a round hole. We just do not know who the other person on the other side of the wire is, and that make assuming trustworthiness dangerous to assume. Instead we look for assurances, guarantees from other sources that the person is who they say they are, or that if something goes wrong, accountability can be applied. But assurances do not actually allow us to build trust, the circumvent it. Furthermore, when something goes awry on the internet, because of it complexities, it is often difficult to assign blame, after all technology is just doing what it is made to do. So when something breaks is it the user, the platform designer, or the invisible end user across the line? The difficulty ascertaining who might be responsible leads to a further resistance in establishing traditional trust methods in an increasingly networked world.

As many of the authors for this weeks readings have alluded to we live in different physical world from that our online one but still we reasonably expect to maintain much of the same semblance of our normal lives in our interactions in an online one. We, especially in western culture, have expectations of privacy even when the lines of personal sovereignty over our private information become increasingly blurry. As stated by Danah Boyd, how do I have individual sovereignty over my DNA information when it might implicate member of my family, or how does my family group have sovereignty over that information when it could implicate generations of family members not born yet. Technology has created a new set of difficulties given our traditional heuristics of individuality. For instance, I share a home computer with my fiancé. If she or I were to visit a website and usage of that website would force one of us to download a tracking cookie this cookie would begin tracking not just both of us. This mandates a we establish a new set of guidelines and norms regarding privacy in our 21st century technical world. We must re-establish what is sovereign information and reexamine what it means to be privacy.

For all the ways with which the internet aids our lives, trust, privacy, and our personal security in our line world are not as clearly managed the same way we are used to in our physical world. More and more this is becoming clear to us, for some the solution is to forgo our traditional ideals, give up privacy for convince and seek assurances in leu of establishing trust. But I believe it is possible to establish these ideal in our networked world, but perhaps it will take some more time to do so, like the many eons it took us to establish these norms in our physical world.