Intimate data in relationships: Tracking, sharing, surveillance - personal boundaries?

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Abstract— Self-tracking has become commonplace in the century of digitalization. People are tracking themselves or rather personal information. Moreover, they are storing and sharing this data.
The Quantifying Self movement has inspired this trend. Today it is possible to track quantifiable data like heartbeat or sleeping pattern, but also '"not measurable"' data like moods, feelings and behaviors, which have a high intrinsic value. Such tracked data can be highly intimate, e.g. data of sexual and reproductive activities or intimate relationship.
In this work, it is considered why people tracking themselves, and storing and also sharing such intimate data.

Index Terms—self-tracking, self-quantification, personal informatics, intimate data, data ethics, privacy

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the century of digitalization there are many opportunities offered to perceive the self and own life in a different way as before. Tracking and quantifying is commonly used. Nowadays many people are engaged in tracking their data. They are tracking and also sharing this information with other people, like friends or like-minded people.

But there are many different types of data, which can be tracked. Such data like heartbeat or sleeping pattern does not seem to be too intimate when tracking and sharing, but how about data in intimate relationships and sexual behaviors?

In this work, the collecting, tracking, storing and sharing of data in intimate relationships is investigated. Therefore, the following questions will be answered by searching for literature and studies in this scientific field:

1. What data is perceived as intimate? In what circumstances?

2. Why do people track intimate data?

3. What do they do with, e.g. tracking, storing, sharing and discussing and with whom?

   (a) Do they over-trust the tracked data?

   (b) How do they perceive their tracked data?

For answering of the mentioned above questions a research of literature and studies on collecting and tracking data in intimate relationships is carried out. The answering of the first question is not as easy as it seems. Therefore, several definitions from different source are collected.

2 TERMS OF DEFINITION

In this section the term *intimate* is defined. Due to this it is considered what data is perceived as intimate and in what circumstances.

The question can not be answered easily. The perceiving what is intimate depends on several factors. In general it has to be differentiated in the culture, how a human is perceiving the self and what is shaping the sociocultural live [1]. It is not possible to consider all well-known cultures in this work, therefore the focus is limited on the scrutiny of the western civilization.

In the western civilization privacy takes up a lot of space. Nevertheless, the state of a person in the society is defining the personal

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perceiving of privacy and intimate data. And the personal view, as well. These things can not be defined in a few sentences, the topic is to complex and not measurable. Furthermore, it is subjective. For the individual, the perception of intimate data is different.

Due to this, the definition of what is perceived as intimate for people living in the western civilization, will be shown by the following examples. Several work are focused on intimate date in in different contexts. Although, a clear definition of what data is intimate or is what people perceive as intimate is not found. In the following some descriptions are summarized to give a rough outline.

The focus in Danaher et al. [2] is on intimate interpersonal relationships. In this work there is no clear definition to be found. They think a definition for such term is not needed. However, to describing a romantic relationship the authors in this work are writing the following:

> [...] we trust that most readers' intuitive sense of those terms [..] will be adequate for our arguments to make sense". That said, romantic relationship might usefully be thought of as a cluster concept, with paradigmatic examples in the middle, and less paradigmatic examples clustered around it, each one different along various dimensions (e.g., the degree to which sexual interaction is central to the relationship).

So, if it possible to define an intimate or romantic relationship about such a way, this concept will also fit for the term intimate. We can build a cluster of e.g. activities, which are assigned to intimate activities.

The idea to use an cluster concept can be thought of one step further. The sensitivity or level of intimate data could be arranged in some sort of data hierarchy. Form IT-Security Management it is known to evaluate risks by assigning a probability and to classify accordingly (see documentation of Federal Office for Information Security (BSI) [3]). In this table I want to classify the data summarized above based on their sensibility.

To give give another understanding of what is meant with *intimate* in this paper I want to quote a paragraph form Lupton [5], which describes an Application for mobile phones:

> The Glow app brings male partners into the equation by sending them a digital message when their partner is in her fertile period and reminding them to bring her flowers [...]. This app also tracks menstrual and ovulation indicators, as well as asking women to enter details of their sexual encounters, including sexual positions used, whether or not they had an orgasm and whether they experienced emotional or physical discomfort during sex. It employs the aggregated data from other users to refine predictions of ovulation and fertility for the individual user. [...]

This paragraph describes a sort of tracking which also called *intimate tracking* (defined by [2]).

At this point I will close with definitions of what is perceived as intimate by people. We can also find intimate data in other contexts, e.g. as mentioned above in health care. But the focus in this paper is on intimate data in relationships, therefore I refer to the Figure above. This should give a general understanding of the context.

3 LIFE COURSE OF INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Levy [4] has defined a so called *life course of intimate relationships*. This course includes four conditions of romantic relationships (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The life course of intimate surveillance

In each of these conditions (potential) partners can use technologies for different purposes.

Condition **A** stands for the beginning of a potential relationship. The partners know each other or would like to know each other. At this point, there is an interest from one or both sides. The aim is to learn more about the other person, to check their identity and social life.

In condition **B** the partners are already in a relationship or something appropriate. At this point I will notice that this condition will include all relationships that are understandable as this. For a concretely definition what a (romantic) relationship means see Danaher et al. [2] or 2. The partners know each other better, have an increased (mutual) interest. There were other forms of contact, possibly sexual contact.

In condition **C** there is usually an established relationship (but that does not have to be the case, there maybe exceptions). The couple exercises sexual activities, deals with contraceptive measures (together) or plans to start a family.

Condition **D** contains the surveillance of the partner, also abuse (of data) and revenge. Describing this condition is complicate. It can be a relationship that has already ended. The partners therefore have a relationship to each other based on their previous history. This can be different (as in the other states). More generally, this condition maybe arise from problem in the relationship, due to interpersonal conflicts oder something else. But it may also be a state or point in the relationship which is fine for both partner (at this point I mean surveillance). This will be discussed later on.

The different conditions are not connected to each other because this is not possible to give sense at any time. Relationships are complex and individual [7]. Also this is not the focus of this work. The descriptions above only should give an idea what the conditions mean for the following section 4.

4 CONSIDERATION OF EACH CONDITION IN LIFE COURSE

TODO: For each state, the results from the individual papers are collected. Further individual distinctions can be derived from this (for instance in B it is is to be distinguished between intimate tracking and intimate gamification). The types of possible data collection, tracking and also sharing is to be reported for each condition in life course.

4.1 Condition A: Dating: Scoping out potential intimates

At the beginning of a potential relationship we want to know more about the person of our interest. Due to this, we so called collect data about this person. A good way the get relevant information is using a standard social network like Facebook [1] or using Google search.

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[1] www.facebook.com

Monitoring a person on Facebook is known as Facebook stalking [4]. To stalk another person on Facebook undiscovered, much articles has been written about [8]. With the Website stalkscan.com [2] it is possible to get all public entries from a persons Facebook profile site which is public by only one mouse click. Surley, it can only shows what is already set public, still it make it more easily to talk another person very quickly. Within this website as tool is also avoided to give an involuntary like by clicking through the photographs, for instance. The Google search mentioned at first is known as *google someone*. With this method is it possible to get information from every source which is findable for the search machine [6]. Also for this topic there are many article how to google someone. For instance, the search on images is of high interest [3].

A *Data collection at the beginning of a relationship, Facebook stalking, potential partner googling, Tinder. In the following: why is this used or why are these data collected, recorded etc. Subsequently, how do people perceive this, influence of data on perception*

B *Categorization in intimate tracking and intimate gamification from Quantified Relationship: example of these apps and tracking devices. What added value do they have in the relationship? What's in it? How do people perceive that (Quantifying, over-trust in numbers).*

C *Drafting the role of women at this stage of a relationship: many apps and devices for tracking women (cycle, fertility, etc.).*

D *Category intimate surveillance from Quantified Relationship: main emphasis: Tracking the partners in a relationship: acceptable or not by mutual agreement? Does that affect the relationship, or the mutual trust? There is no investigation until now (continue at the end (conclusion, further work)).*

5 RISKS

1. *Quantification (perception and rating of the self and the relationship)*

2. *Trust (unknowingly tracking by intimate partner, over-trust in data only)*

3. *Privacy (risks, current news, data gaps, etc.)*

6 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

7 ACHIEVEMENTS

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