Sam Bowdler

CSE 262 B

4 October 2014

New Privacy: Technology vs. User

Privacy isn’t just about the seclusion of one’s own home anymore. When society allows and even encourages each person to willfully post personal information for the entire world to see, privacy changes form. Ethics in society is now on a virtual level. As technology becomes more accessible, lines begin to fade and rules begin to break a lot easier. One man with one computer can copy and distribute explicit photos to the masses in a single day. This, in fact, has happened very recently to an expansive list of female celebrities including Jennifer Lawrence and Kate Upton. Some blamed Apple, the company behind iCloud (the hacked software), while others looked to Reddit and 4chan, the sites which spread the photos to the masses within minutes. Unfortunately for those readying their pitchforks, these are not the people to blame in this instance. Sufficient security measures have been put in place, and one simply cannot expect social media to not pass around hot topic issues. Technology companies and social media aren’t ethically or lawfully at fault for privacy scandals such as leaks like these; only the user is at fault.

Consider the lead security consultant of the Apple iCloud. A brand name like Apple wouldn’t put their security mechanics in the hands of just anyone. It goes without saying that technology giants such as Apple would take every possible precaution and safety measure to protect their customers’ privacy, or at least to the extent of the law. Apple is currently dealing with 5-6 lawsuits on average (“Who’s Suing…”). They know the law down to each individual loophole, which is easily seen by registering any Apple product and scrolling through the “Terms & Conditions”. The user will find an actual novel’s length of legal jargon which virtually no one has ever read. This contract’s purpose is essentially to cover Apple’s back in case the user does something that may put Apple at fault otherwise. They know the exact extent of security they need to provide to prevent any legal fault on their part.

The scandal at hand is a good example of Apple covering their backs. Like all tech industry giants, Apple looks for a good medium in their privacy settings to allow the user to have as much or as little privacy as they want. They set up enough security so that if a breach such as this happened, they could not possibly be at fault. Secrecy and safety from exposure of private information (in this case, explicit pictures) is the responsibility of the user.

This massive leak of private photographs was brought on by a single hacker. This hacker, however, did not break through the walls of security lain by Apple. Sure enough, they made those walls virtually impregnable. The actual problem in this scandal was user error. Each of the women who were hacked did not set up enough security around their iCloud accounts. The hacker bypassed their lacking defenses easily and accessed their cloud pictures, then shared them on 4chan. Once there, like all memes, fads, and leaked information does on 4chan, it spread like wildfire. 4chan is not the most popular of websites compared to other social media and message board sites, but when something like leaked nude pictures rolls through, word gets out fast. If something stays on 4chan it might not be that bad, but not much good content really does. Once the pictures were leaked onto Reddit, all hope was lost.

Reddit, the so-called “Front Page of the Internet”, is a virtual melting pot of information from all around the globe. Much of the content is funny and recreational, while some subreddits feature world news events and happenings. Any story that is newsworthy will show up on Reddit before long, and once it’s there, it spreads like wildfire until everyone with access to the web knows. The leaked pictures were featured on Reddit soon after release. Excitement surged through the website. In fact, a subreddit was actually made to honor the day of leaks: /r/theFappening. Here users could post pictures or host discussions about the leaks whenever new information came in. It blew up, gaining over 100,000 followers in one day (2014 celebrity…). However, after only a single day of existence, the subreddit was shut down due to Reddit owners’ andi-doxing (document tracing) rule. Reddit administrators made a site-wide announcement explaining their actions and why they had to remove the subreddit and ban any posts pertaining to the Fappening. This is the action they took, and this is all they had to do.

The media, even social media, will do anything they can to publicize hot new information like scandals quickly so they can get viewers or (upvotes). This is the condition of news reporting and social media. Hot gossip and racy, exciting content reels in the views. This is the only goal of reporters nowadays, so it is to be expected that when news like an expansive gallery of nude celebrity photographs hits the scene, it spreads faster than it ever could before. With sites like Reddit and 4chan, news move from exclusive to public knowledge in literally minutes. Millions of people are browsing social media sites at any given moment, just waiting for juicy headlines to catch up on the newest buzz. When private information like this gets released, it shoots out instantly to the eyes of millions of people before anything can be done to stop it. This is what a social media site is designed to do. It is not the fault of the site what their users post. If something illegal is done using their site, it is their responsibility to remove such content as soon as possible. They did this, and therefore cannot be at fault for the publication of these photographs.

In a perfect world, these pictures would have never surfaced, because there would be no hackers and no malicious doings on the Internet. However, this world is far from perfect. Yes, Reddit was responsible for removing the images, and they did that. In the eyes of the law, they are perfectly fine within their course of action. As for the breach of privacy, it is not the fault of the company. Apple has done everything in their power to keep their customers safe from intrusion, but there are some things they cannot prevent on their own. Therefore, it is entirely the fault of the users that these pictures were leaked. Their own security system was breached, not that of the iCloud. Most people these days aren’t that worried about security and would also most likely be susceptible to such a breach, but most people don’t have to worry about hackers. These celebrities were all caught photographing themselves nude, which is an entirely legal action, but if one does such a thing, I would imagine precautions should be taken. Explicit photographs are something to keep private. A good number of people, whether they admit it or not, do share explicit information to others willfully. This is not a smart decision in the first place, but even if they are on one’s computer, especially saved onto a virtual data cloud, they can be stolen unless adequate security is in place.

The user is the only true defense against a skilled hacker. Defenses must be raised when potential attackers could retrieve sensitive information. It is not the job of the technology or the social media masses to prevent such an occurrence. An individual is a master of his or her own privacy. One’s control over one’s security and secrecy is an essential trait when living in this society. If a person feels they are at risk of an attack for any reason, they should set up defenses, or at least contact a professional to help guard their private information. In this scenario, all of these celebrities are attractive female actresses and/or models. It goes without saying that many Internet users would like to get their hands on sensitive information such as explicit images, so they would all be at risk for breaches. Their negligence in security is the sole cause of their intrusion of privacy. This massive leak of private information is due only to their own lack of protection.

Bibliography

“2014 celebrity photo leaks” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014\_celebrity\_photo\_leaks

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/03/technology/trove-of-nude-photos-sparks-debate-over-online-behavior.html?\_r=1

http://www.interfacedigital.co.uk/labs/dataviz/01.html