"Essentially made of information": concepts and implications of informational privacy

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Privacy concepts for LIS

- conceptual understanding of privacy issues
- based on Luciano Floridi's information ethics
- draws from Floridi's ideas of information privacy
- in combination with other frameworks.

- qualitative conceptual analysis of literature

Privacy: a complex and contested concept

The defining issue of our hyperhistorical time (Floridi 2014)

The right to be let alone (Warren and Brandeis, 1890)

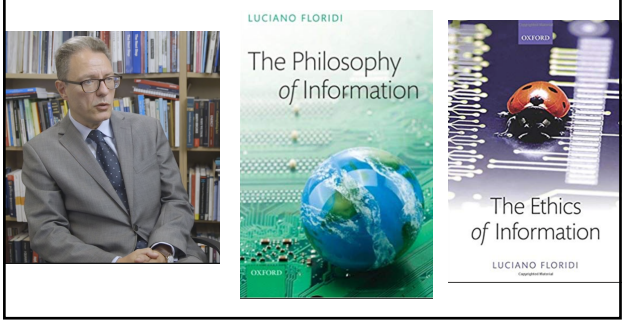
The term "privacy" is used frequently in ordinary language, as well as in philosophical, political and legal discussion, yet there is no single definition or analysis of meaning of the term. (DeCew,2019)

Privacy models and codes

- 400 references to privacy models and frameworks in Web of Science since 1970
- many frameworks, policies, codes for LIS contexts
- few based explicitly on broader ethical principles
- generally pragmatic, and responsive to perceived local pressures and problems

Rationale for this study

It would benefit the LIS discipline and profession to have a clear and rigorous framework for privacy issues, with which to unite the various opinions and perspectives into something which can be readily understood, communicated and carried forward into practice



Why Floridi's PI and ethics?

- broad scope matches the broadest interests of library and information science, and indeed goes beyond them
- addresses directly the concerns of the library/information disciplines and professions: privacy, intellectual property, information access, ethical duties of information providers, etc.
- well adapted to deal with the specific issues raised by new digital technologies and applications.
- concepts such as fourth revolution, infosphere, inforgs, and onlife, provide context and explanation for the disruptive changes being experienced in the information environment.
- rooted in analytical philosophy, so can support formal definitions and analyses for informational entities and processes.
- gives a natural for role library/information professionals as 'custodians of the infosphere'

Five considerations

- informational privacy is fundamental
- protection of privacy based on human dignity
- privacy: individual and group
- effect of digital technologies: on informational friction, anonymity, obscurity
- key to protection of privacy is the control and optimisation of ontological (information and data) friction in the infosphere

Informational privacy is fundamental

Each of us … is a fragile and very pliable entity, whose life is essentially made of information … only within a philosophy of information that sees human nature as constituted by informational patterns do breaches of privacy have an ontological impact (Luciano Floridi)

Informational privacy is fundamental

each person is constituted by their information, so that informational privacy is fundamental, overlaying other privacy types, such as:

- physical
- mental
- decisional

Informational privacy is fundamental

Privacy may then be explained, and preserved, in informational terms, such as:

- information accessibility
- informational gap
- informational friction
- information flow

Protection of privacy should be based on human dignity

Any society in which no informational privacy is possible is one in which no personal identity can be maintained (Luciano Floridi)

Protection of privacy should be based on human dignity

- if we are made of information, then protection of privacy is protection of personal identify – who I am and who I am becoming
- 'my data' is more like 'my hand' rather than 'my car'
- breach of (informational) privacy is an aggression against personal identity and self-development
- protection of privacy should be based directly on the protection of human dignity, rather than of any secondary 'rights'

Privacy: individual and group

- groups may be just as valid an entity as an individual in the sense of being defined by their information (example: groups defined by algorithm)
- hence just as entitled to informational privacy
- explicit protection for group privacy is as important as protection for individual privacy

Effect of digital technologies

Privacy is a function of the informational friction in the infosphere. Any factor increasing or decreasing friction will also affect privacy. (Floridi 2014)

Effect of digital technologies

- digital technologies can both defend and damage privacy
- and can also change our understanding of it

Key concepts: information friction, anonymity, and obscurity

- information friction, anonymity, and obscurity are key, and unique, concepts in a Floridian approach to privacy

Information friction

- *the forces that oppose the information flow within (a region of) the infosphere … to the amount of work and efforts required [to] obtain, filter and/or block information*' (Floridi, 2006
- Examples: limited resources (time, computer power, access speeds), physical conditions (distance, noise), inadequate metadata and poor interfaces, lack of information and digital literacy, regulatory and copyright restrictions
- digital technologies, by altering the nature of informational frictions, can both reinforce and erode informational privacy, depending how they are applied

Anonymity

- the unavailability of personal data, due to the difficulty of collecting and processing it
- absent in pre-urban and non-urban societies
- urbanisation in the nineteenth century brought a considerable degree of anonymity, but digital technologies have the capacity to remove it
- when we lament the decline of privacy, we are often lamenting a late-Victorian anonymity

Obscurity

- the unavailability of personal data which has been collected, due to the difficulty of finding, accessing and using it
- most internet users rely (implicitly) on this for privacy
- digital technology tends to remove obscurity, since it reduces the amount of time and effort to access and analyse personal data

The key to protection of privacy is the control and optimisation of informational friction

the key to protection (by public, active and passive approaches) of privacy is the control and optimisation of ontological (information and data) friction in the infosphere.

The key to protection of privacy is the control and optimisation of informational friction

- not simply adding additional frictions to slow down information flows, in the hope that this may support privacy. Floridi cautions us against any such '*quick and dirty attempts ... to clog the infosphere*',
- rather a thoughtful treatment on personal information, based on a proper analysis of privacy
- perhaps a focus on the idea of 'informational balance', in line with the principles of the Slow movement (Poirier and Robinson)

Other valuable theoretical frameworks (1)

- Mai: datafication model of big data privacy
  processing, as well as collection of data, is a privacy issue
- Primiero: formal theory of ifnormation privacy
  a formal, verifiable assessment of privacy risks and harms
- Koops et al. privacy typology
  a typology of privacy, enhancing Floridi's analsyis

Other valuable theoretical frameworks (2)

- Nissenbaum: framework of contextual integrity
  conceptual entities, relatable to information behavior models
- Mulligan, Koopman and Doty: multidimensional analysis of privacy mapping
  conceptual model must be dynamic enough to cope with changing technological contexts

Next steps

- tempting to create a new conceptual model for Floridean informational privacy
- but there are arguably already too many models
- better to include privacy concepts in existing models for information behaviour and information literacy

Next steps

- detailed formulation of LIS privacy issues in terms of Floridi's ethics
- assessment of the value of this formulation in practice
- introduction of information privacy concepts into models of information behaviour and information literacy
- investigation of quantitative and semi-quantitative privacy modelling, based on a formal analysis of informational frictions.

Conclusions

Floridi's conception of privacy, within his philosophy of information, offers the best basis for developing information privacy as a field of research, study, and practice within the library/information disciplines and professions

- '*in terms of privacy… the respect of each other's personal information does not have to lead to a world of solipsistic lives, it can be the basis of a society that promotes the value of relations as something to which those who are related wilfully and fruitfully contribute* (Floridi, 2016)
- '*Nature's beautiful glitches … stewards of Being [with an] unclear destiny [in their] moral struggle against entropy… a thin red line against the vandalism of time*' (Floridi, 2019)