

# PRIVACY

## A Conceptual Analysis

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This paper presents a theoretical analysis of the concept of privacy which emphasizes its role as an interpersonal boundary control process. The paper also analyzes mechanisms and dynamics of privacy, including verbal and paraverbal behavior, personal space, territorial behavior, and culturally based responses. Finally, several functions of privacy are proposed, including regulation of interpersonal interaction, self-other definitional processes, and self-identity.

The concept of privacy appears in the literature of several disciplines—psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, law, architecture, and the design professions. One group of definitions of the term emphasizes seclusion, withdrawal, and avoidance of interaction with others. For example:

Bates (1964): A person's feeling that others should be excluded from something which is of concern to him, and also recognition that others have a right to do this.

Chapin (1951): A value to be by oneself; relief from the pressures of the presence of others.

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Jourard (1966): An outcome of a person's wish to withhold from others certain knowledge as to his past and present experience and action and his intention for the future; a desire to be an enigma to others or to control others' perceptions and beliefs about the self.

A second type of definition puts less emphasis on exclusion, but implies that privacy involves control, opening and closing of the self to others, and freedom of choice. These definitions are compatible with our theoretical framework. For example:

Westin (1970): The right of the individual to decide what information about himself should be communicated to others and under what conditions.

Rapoport (1972): The ability to control interaction, to have options, devices and mechanisms to prevent unwanted interaction and to achieve desired interaction.

Proshansky, Ittelson, and Rivlin (1970): Obtaining freedom of choice or options to achieve goals, control over what, how, and to whom a person communicates information about the self.

For our purposes privacy will be defined as: *selective control of access to the self or to one's group*. This definition sets the stage for our conceptual analysis of privacy and implies a number of properties. First, it allows for a variety of social units in privacy phenomena, e.g., individual-individual, individual-group, and the like. Second, it permits an analysis of privacy as a bidirectional process, i.e., inputs from others to the self and outputs from the self to others. Third, the definition implies selective control, or an active and dynamic regulatory process. Before presenting our theoretical analysis, several other approaches will be described.

#### SOME THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO PRIVACY

Westin (1970) provides a systematic analysis of the concept of privacy in terms of four states and four functions of privacy. The first state of privacy is *solitude*, where a person is alone and free from observation by others. *Intimacy* involves separation of

a small group, e.g., a husband and wife, from others. *Anonymity* occurs when a person is "lost in a crowd," in a public place, but does not expect to be recognized. Finally, *reserve* includes "the creation of a psychological barrier against unwanted intrusion" (p. 32). This analysis is important because it indicates how different sized units (individuals and groups) are involved in privacy phenomena and how settings make a difference, and because it suggests the operation of mechanisms to achieve privacy.

Westin also described four functions of privacy, including *personal autonomy*, which relates to self-independence and self-identity. *Emotional release* is a second function, which permits people to relax from social roles, to be "off stage" and to deviate from rules and customs in a protected fashion. *Self-evaluation* involves the integration of experiences and the opportunity to plan and assess future actions. Finally, the *limited and protected communication* function of privacy provides the opportunity to share confidences with certain people.

Westin's analysis suggests that people seek a balance between openness and closedness, to be with others and to be away from others at different times. He also noted that too much or too little separation from others is an undesirable state of affairs, suggesting a nonmonotonic, dialectic approach to privacy, which is central to our framework. In this regard, he and we draw heavily on the writings of Simmel (1950), a sociologist who emphasized the dialectic quality of social exchange (see Schwartz, 1968 for a Simmel-derived analysis of privacy). According to Simmel, all social processes involve dialectic interplays between various forces—helping and harming, harmony and conflict, openness and closedness to others, intimacies and trivia in social relationships. Without such an interplay, Simmel stated, social existence would not be viable. The dialectic and nonmonotonic approach to privacy is a central aspect of our theoretical approach, to be described later.

Pastalan (1970) extended Westin's analysis to include events which lead to various forms of privacy. These include (1)

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antecedent social events such as role relations and role responsibilities, (2) organismic factors such as motivation to escape identification, (3) mechanisms to achieve privacy, such as physical withdrawal, use of nonverbal behavior and psychological barriers, and (4) environmental factors, such as crowdedness and confinement. This analysis casts the concept of privacy in a broader context and points toward alternative behavioral mechanisms used to achieve different types of privacy.

A related line of analysis is that of Proshansky et al. (1970) and their associates. They proposed that privacy serves to maximize freedom of choice and behavioral options, thereby permitting control by people over their social activities. They also noted that a key vehicle to obtaining behavioral options is to control space, i.e., territory, and to determine what will and will not transpire in territories. From our perspective, Proshansky et al. (1970) stated the case perfectly—"territoriality thus becomes one mechanism whereby [the person] can increase the range of options open to him and maximize his freedom of choice in the given situation" (p. 181). This theoretical orientation views privacy as a central construct concerned with control of interpersonal events, an approach we also subscribe to. Moreover, we shall also propose territoriality as a behavioral mechanism used to satisfy privacy needs.

Extensions of this line of thinking have been proposed by Laufer, Proshansky and Wolfe (1973), who pointed to several dimensions of privacy: (1) a *self-ego dimension*, or the idea that social development involves the growth of autonomy and a person's learning when and how to be with or to be separate from others; (2) an *interaction dimension*, which deals with people coming together with others and being apart from others; (3) a *life cycle dimension*, which implies that privacy is not a static process but shifts over one's life history; (4) a *biography-history dimension*, or differences in personal histories which may make people differentially sensitive to various privacy regulation mechanisms; (5) a *control dimension*, or freedom over interaction with others, to either increase or decrease stimulation from and to others; (6) an *ecology-culture*

*dimension* or how the physical environment is used to achieve control over interaction; (7) a *task orientation dimension* and (8) a *ritual privacy dimension*, refer to tasks and behaviors which are typically accomplished in nonpublic places; (9) a *phenomenological dimension* includes the idea that privacy is not only a behavioral phenomenon, but is also a psychological experience.

Several others have written about privacy, but space does not permit their presentation (Westin, 1970; Pennock and Chapman, 1971; Schwartz, 1968).

#### A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF PRIVACY

Our theoretical analysis emphasizes several features of privacy: units of analysis which vary from individuals to groups, the dialectic nature of privacy, the nonmonotonic nature of privacy, privacy as a boundary regulation process, and privacy as a bidirectional process.

(1) *Units of Privacy.* Privacy is usually conceived of as an interpersonal event, involving some linkage between combinations of persons or groups. For example, a person may seek privacy from another person or from a group, or a group may seek to avoid interaction with a particular other person or group. One dimension of Westin's (1970) states of privacy is the social unit involved, i.e., solitude involves one person seeking privacy from an unspecified number of others; intimacy involves a group of people seeking privacy; anonymity is one person seeking separation from many others; reserve is psychological separation by one person from one or more other persons. Thus, an important area of analysis concerns differences in privacy dynamics for various social units.

(2) *The Dialectic Nature of Privacy.*

We become what we are not only by establishing boundaries around ourselves but also by a periodic opening of these boundaries to nourishment, to learning, and to intimacy. [A. Simmel, 1971: 81]

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As this quotation states, social interaction is a continuing dialectic between forces driving people to come together and to move apart. There are times when people want to be alone, and there are times when others are sought out. Privacy is a continually changing process which reflects a momentary ideal level of interpersonal contact, which can range from wanting to be accessible to others, to wanting to be alone.

This view of privacy as a shifting dialectic process is at variance with conceptions which describe privacy solely as a withdrawal process, in which people seek to avoid stimulus overload (Milgram, 1970), prevent intrusions (Schwartz, 1968), search for freedom from interference (Jourard, 1966). Westin's (1970) states of privacy also emphasize withdrawal or separation, e.g., solitude is freedom from observation; intimacy occurs when groups seclude themselves; anonymity reflects freedom from identification in a crowd; reserve involves psychological barriers.

The idea of privacy as a dialectic process is implicit in other approaches. For example, Proshansky et al. (1970) referred to freedom of choice to use the environment to regulate interaction. And, Simmel (1950) referred to a dialectic between self-revelation and self-reserve even in very close, intimate relationships such as marriage, which involves a delicate balance between mutual knowing and mutual separateness.

(3) *The Nonmonotonic Nature of Privacy.* A corollary of the dialectic idea is that either too much or too little privacy is unsatisfactory, and people seek an optimal level of social interaction. If it can be achieved, the system is in a state of momentary balance, equilibrium, or homeostasis. Most privacy literature addresses only one consequence of imbalance, i.e., when a person or group attempts to seclude themselves from others and is unable to do so, we usually speak of intrusion or "crowding." According to the position presented here, another outcome is an "overachieved" level of privacy, i.e., more seclusion and withdrawal than desired, or "isolation." Thus, "ideal" privacy is a position on a continuum of desired interaction, with deviations in either direction being unsatisfactory.

Several writers have proposed similar ideas, e.g., Proshansky et al. (1970), Schwartz (1968), Bates (1964), Jourard (1966), Rapoport (1972), Westin (1970), and others pointed to the need to maintain some optimum balance between seclusion and interaction. Furthermore, the nonmonotonic quality of reactions to stimulation is also an accepted idea in several areas of psychology. As examples of understimulation, Wohlwill (1974) described deprivation of sensory stimulation (visual, auditory), isolation from social interaction, and confinement. On the other side are hyper-stimulation conditions—sensory overload or excessive stimulus inputs, crowding or high amounts of social inputs.

(4) *Privacy as a Boundary Regulation Process.* The notion of privacy implies a flexible barrier or boundary between the self and nonself. An analogy is the cell membrane, whose boundary properties change in accord with the state of the external and internal environment. As circumstances warrant, the cell membrane becomes more or less permeable, in order to achieve a viable level of functioning. A feature of privacy proposed here is that it is an interpersonal boundary process, whereby the openness-closedness from others shifts with circumstances.

The notion of *boundaries* is not new to the environment and behavior field. For example, territory implies a bounded geographical area which is sometimes defended. Similarly, personal space involves an invisible bubble or boundary around the self, intrusion into which creates tension or discomfort. An important goal of the present framework, however, is to expand the concept of privacy boundaries to include both a “keep out,” exclusion component and an “open up,” intake component.

(5) *Desired and Achieved Privacy.* As a regulatory process, privacy can be viewed from two perspectives: (1) desired privacy, or a subjectively defined ideal state which reflects what a person or group desires regarding social interaction; (2) achieved privacy, or the outcome of social input and output.

Regulation of social inputs and outputs involves relationships between desired and achieved privacy. Where achieved privacy

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equals desired privacy, i.e., the person obtained the level of social input and output desired, optimum control of privacy exists. When achieved privacy is less than desired privacy too little privacy obtains, a situation typically labeled intrusion or invasion of privacy. When achieved privacy is greater than desired privacy one commonly speaks of boredom, loneliness, or social isolation.

(6) *Input and Output Processes.* We hypothesize a two-way privacy process involving control over social inputs and social outputs. First, boundary regulation includes control over *inputs* from persons and stimuli outside the self. Thus, sometimes a person may wish to be alone and not receive communications from others or, on other occasions, may actively accept inputs from others. Privacy can also be viewed from the perspective of *outputs* from the self. For example, a person may wish to include others in an activity, may wish to have them listen to one's problems, may want them to help solve a problem.

(7) *Derivative Regulatory Processes.* Figure 1 presents eight privacy situations based on a combination of some of the preceding dimensions.

P refers to a person or group; E refers to another person or group, or to environmental stimulation. The boundary around P can either be closed (solid line) or permeable (dotted line). Cases 1-4 portray relationships between desired and achieved privacy in regard to inputs from others; Cases 5-8 deal with outputs from the self to others. For simplicity purposes, assume a single individual (P) in relation to another individual (E).

In Cases 1 and 2, P desired a certain level of contact with E and successfully achieved that goal. Desired privacy is equal to achieved privacy, and the individual should be satisfied. In Case 1, P wanted inputs from E, opened the self boundaries, and E entered the self zone of P. The boundary could have been opened by P's action, e.g., opening a door, welcoming E, but it was also necessary that other events allow the boundary to be crossed, e.g., the door was not stuck closed, P was not separated from E by an external force.



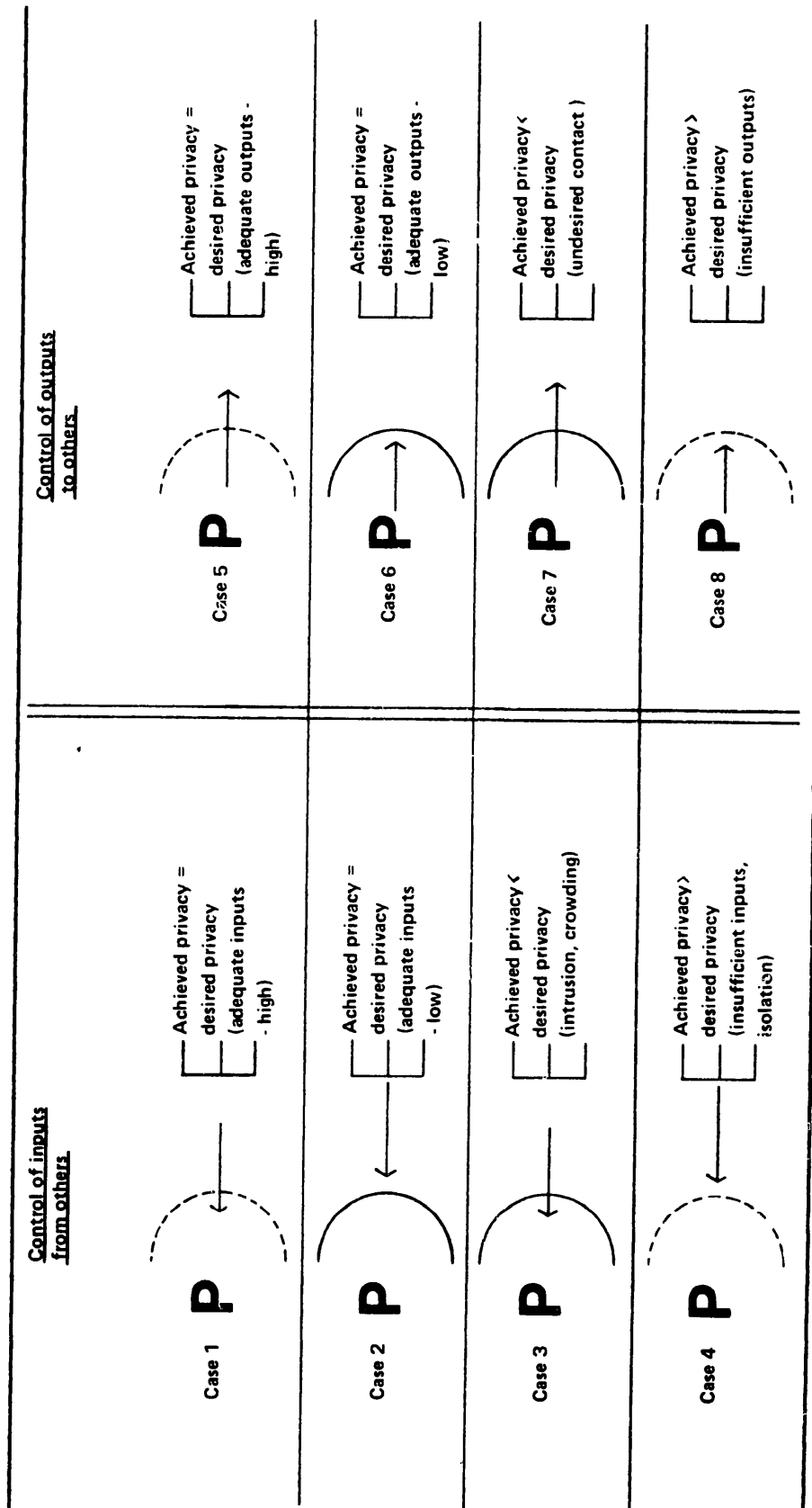


Figure 1

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Case 2 reflects the traditional successful privacy situation, where P viewed E's inputs as undesirable; P laid down a boundary designed to be impermeable to E and succeeded in keeping E away. Again, desired privacy equals achieved privacy.

In the next two cases P was unsuccessful. In Case 3, P was intruded upon by E, and in Case 4, P was unable to achieve a desired level of contact with E. In Case 3, P closed the self boundary, but E crossed the boundary against P's wishes, e.g., P may have closed the door, but E came through the door. Such situations are commonly labeled as invasions or intrusions.

Case 4 is a different type of failure. Here E is a positive source of stimulation but P did not achieve the desired degree of contact. P may have tried to become accessible, e.g., opened the door, invited E to make inputs, but E may not have heard, may have been prevented from interacting with P, or may not have wanted to deal with P. From P's perspective the achieved level of privacy is greater than the desired level of privacy, often labelled as loneliness, boredom, or isolation. In summary, Cases 1 and 2 reflect satisfactory privacy processes, and Cases 3 and 4 are instances in which P was unsuccessful in regulating boundaries around the self.

Cases 5-8 parallel the first four situations, but emphasize P's desire to direct outputs to E. Case 5 involves instances in which P successfully initiated contact with another person, either learning something about that person or having that person learn something about the self. In Case 6, P successfully arranged the boundary regulation system to prevent self movement toward E. Cases 5 and 6 are direct parallels to Cases 1 and 2, respectively, with the emphasis on the direction of outputs from the self to others.

In Case 7, P hoped to avoid contact with E, but failed, e.g., P mistakenly opened E's door, had an unplanned and undesired meeting, was unable to avoid E, or unintentionally revealed information. Case 7's counterpart, Case 3, involved E's actively breaking through P's boundaries, not moving toward E. But, both have the same result, intrusion beyond P's self boundary. Finally, Case 8 parallels Case 4, where desired contact was not

achieved. In Case 8, P actively solicited contact with E but failed; in Case 4, P was ready to accept E's contact but it never materialized. Both situations result in less achieved than desired contact. Thus, Cases 1, 2, 5 and 6 are different examples of successful privacy regulation; Cases 3, 4, 7 and 8 are instances of unsuccessful privacy management.

One can also analyze social exchange as some combination of Cases 1-8. For example, optimum exclusion exists where P is able to arrange a boundary situation such that E's inputs are excluded (Case 2) and P is able to control his own output to E (Case 6). One type of intrusion occurs where P is able to control outputs to a negative E (Case 6) by refusing to disclose, conveying a general distaste for interacting with E, but where E still manages to force P to listen (Case 3). Or, consider a mix of Cases 1 and 8. P is receptive to E and opens his self boundaries, listens to E's problem, permits E's access to P's physical areas (Case 1) but P's hope to reciprocate, to enter the self of E and to have E listen in return, is rebuffed (Case 8).

#### PRIVACY MECHANISMS

People implement desired levels of privacy by behavioral mechanisms such as verbal and paraverbal behavior, nonverbal use of the body, environmental behaviors and cultural norms and customs. These mechanisms function as an integrated system, e.g., verbal and nonverbal behaviors sometimes substitute for one another (a head nod substitutes for words of praise), sometimes complement one another (a smile, head nod and verbal praise combine to reflect strong agreement), sometimes conflict and convey ambivalence or nongenuineness (verbal agreement or praise but with a hostile glance or a nonrelaxed body posture).

These privacy mechanisms are also dynamic and responsive to ongoing events. If an individual is unable to achieve a desired level of boundary regulation, then additional mechanisms may be brought to bear. For example, if a closed door is ignored, the intruder might be told to leave, might be given nonverbal cues

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of disapproval, or might even be tossed out bodily. Thus, privacy regulation involves a complex feedback system in which resources are mobilized to move the system toward a match between desires and outcomes—much as an automatic heating system uses a thermostat and temperature gauge to maintain a desired level of heat.

*Verbal Privacy Mechanisms.* A main vehicle of interpersonal exchange is verbal behavior, which can be considered from the perspective of its *content* and *structure*.

Verbal content refers to the substance of verbal communication or “what” is said. Obvious content in regard to privacy includes: “Keep out,” “Come in,” “I’d like to be alone,” “I’d like you to listen to me.” People also use verbal content to convey discrepancies between desired and achieved privacy: “You’re too noisy,” “Don’t you know what a closed door means?” “I called you and you didn’t come when I needed you.”

Structural aspects of verbal behavior refer to “how” a statement is made. One approach to structural aspects of speech was proposed by Mahl and Schulze (1964). Their classification includes such factors as: (a) *language styles*, e.g., verb: adjective ratios, parts of speech, verb tense; (b) *vocabulary selection and diversity*, e.g., types of speech: tokens or numbers of outputs; (c) *pronunciation and dialect*; (d) *voice dynamics*, e.g., rhythm, pauses, and intrusions; (e) *speech rates*; (f) *temporal phenomena*, e.g., speech duration and latency; (g) *verbal output*; (h) *voice quality*, e.g., pitch, rate, and loudness; (i) *vocalizations*, e.g., yawning and crying.

Only a few studies examined verbal aspects of privacy. For example, Davis and Olesen (1971) observed that residents of an Israeli kibbutz sometimes achieved intimacy with another person by lapsing into native languages other than Hebrew. This is similar to children’s use of pig-Latin and other spontaneous “languages,” and to special words with unique meanings among in-group members.

Another approach distinguishes between *immediacy* and *nonimmediacy* in verbal communications (Mehrabian, 1969,

1971; Weiner and Mehrabian, 1968). Verbal immediacy is reflected in direct personal references, assumption of personal responsibility for feelings, and use of active speech forms. Mehrabian found more immediacy in communications with liked people than with disliked people, as well as greater attribution of positive qualities to a communicator who used more immediate forms of expression.

*Nonverbal Privacy Mechanisms.* Nonverbal behavior involves various parts of the body – the head and face, limbs, trunk. There is relatively little research on nonverbal aspects of privacy, except for a few studies of reactions to spatial intrusion. For example, Patterson, Mullens and Romano (1971) observed that the closer an invader sat to a subject the greater the glaring, leaning away, blocking (placement of a hand or elbow between the self and the invader) and reorienting of the body away from the intruder. In a similar study, Felipe and Sommer (1966) found that the closer an intrusion, the greater the flight by victims. Those intruded upon also exhibited other nonverbal behaviors designed to ward off the intruder, e.g., turning away, pulling in elbows. In these examples, adjustments of nonverbal behavior in reaction to increased “immediacy” of another person may reflect attempts to establish acceptable boundaries between the self and nonself.

There is also anthropological data on the role of nonverbal communication as a privacy mechanism. For example, Westin (1970) indicated that many cultures do not have elaborate environmental mechanisms, but nevertheless have some form of privacy regulation, often of a nonverbal nature. Covering the face, averting direct eye contact, speaking softly often occur in lieu of environmental barriers. For example, Murphy (1964) described the Tuareg male’s use of the veil around the face as a privacy mechanism; Rapoport (1967) reported that the Yagua (an Amazon society) have a rule system that people signify being absent merely by turning toward the wall.

*Environmental Privacy Mechanisms.* How people use doors, windows, furniture arrangements, and home designs have been the traditional route to understanding privacy. The role of the

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physical environment as a regulatory privacy mechanism is quite complex. To break the problem down we first focus on aspects of the environment closest to the self, e.g., personal space, and then on more remote features of the environment, such as territories, areas, and objects.

*Personal Space.* The closest layer of the self which serves as a privacy mechanism is that of personal space, or the invisible boundary surrounding the self (Hall, 1966; Sommer, 1969). Hall (1966) proposed four distance zones linked to interpersonal contact: (1) an *intimate* distance, ranging from body contact to about 18 inches, is appropriate to close relationships in private situations, and permits extensive communication involving olfaction, heat, sound, smell and close physical contact. (2) *Personal* distance spans the area from 1.5-4 feet and also permits considerable exchange of cues. (3) *Social* distance, 4-12 feet, occurs in impersonal, work, or casual relationships, and (4) a *public* zone, beyond 12 feet, is appropriate to formal meetings and interactions with higher status persons.

These zones represent hypothetically appropriate or "correct" distances within which interactions with different people occur. Violation of personal space boundaries against the desire of the person may be a basis for conflict, tension, or discomfort. For example, Hall gave several anecdotal examples of how persons from Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cultures are accustomed to very close distances, including exchange of touch and odor cues, often to the dismay of North Americans and Englishmen. In the present model (see Figure 1), this represents Cases 2 and 3 where one party wishes to approach closely, inside the other's boundaries, and the other person attempts to prevent inputs from reaching the self. Studies of attraction and liking also illustrate how self-boundaries change as a function of interpersonal compatibility. One of the better established findings is a direct relationship between interpersonal distance and liking—the more people like one another the closer in distance they are. Thus, self boundaries become more permeable in the presence of desired inputs and outputs (a liked person).

*Areas, Objects and Territories* represent another mechanism of privacy regulation. Anthropological studies of Mexican families (Lewis, 1959, 1961) illustrate how physical environments are used to regulate privacy. In one poor family, with parents and seven children living in a single room and kitchen, the adults located their bed in a far corner of the kitchen behind a wall built of empty crates. In a second family of tenement dwellers, interfamily privacy was achieved by a norm of nonvisiting and a custom of always keeping outside doors closed. However, inside the home, there was little privacy, especially in regard to the toilet, which was near the kitchen and eating area. The toilet only had a half shutter swinging door, and a rule was developed (and never really enforced) that no one could use the bathroom while the family was eating, because of the noise, teasing, and general indelicacy which inevitably arose.

Other analyses of family life illustrate how the physical environment can be used to pace social interaction. For example, Jourard (1966) noted the importance of people in families having rooms of their own, where they could be alone and away from others. Schwartz (1968) described how doors, fences, signs, and the like are used to protect against unwanted intrusions. Chermayeff and Alexander (1963) called for the design of homes with a firm boundary between the home and the public environment, for privately owned rooms for family members, for areas which separated adults and children, for access routes which were direct and private to various parts of the house.

*Culturally Based Privacy Mechanisms.* An important feature of cultural factors in privacy regulation is that different societies have evolved alternative mechanisms and behaviors. Some cultures do not rely as heavily on environmental mechanisms as other cultures, but use nonverbal, verbal, or other means. And, we agree strongly with Westin's (1970) thesis that all societies probably have some mechanisms to achieve privacy regulation, although not always in the form of physical environmental control. For example, Geertz (cited in Westin,

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1970) found few physical symbols of privacy in Javanese society, but identified psychological techniques used to maintain boundaries from others. Social relationships are restrained, people do not express their feelings easily, etiquette and politeness are at a premium, and people speak softly. Or, the English do not often have private offices or exclusive ownership of places (Hall, 1966), but obtain privacy by interpersonal reserve, speak less loudly than Americans, direct their voices and remarks carefully, and generally use a variety of nonverbal and verbal mechanisms.

Naturally, many societies rely on environmental mechanisms to achieve privacy. For example, in Bali, Geertz (cited in Westin, 1970) reported the existence of high walls which surround homes, and the fact that people only rarely entered other people's homes. Or, as Canter and Canter (1971) noted, the Japanese home is carefully designed to maximize privacy. High walls, careful lot and site locations insure prevention of visual access; elaborate inside miniaturization of detail and shifting room and wall arrangements are aimed at achieving appropriate levels of privacy. Thus, if cultures are examined carefully, one will eventually uncover privacy mechanisms used to regulate social interaction. These mechanisms may be nonverbal, verbal, or environmental. To put the point more dramatically, one might say that mechanisms for regulating interpersonal boundaries to achieve a desired level of privacy are universal and present in all societies. While some cultures may appear to have little privacy, this is probably due to a traditional view of privacy as solely a physical and environmental process, not as a complex behavioral system which draws on many levels of functioning.

#### **DYNAMICS OF PRIVACY REGULATION**

This paper specified some of the relationships between privacy, personal space, and territoriality, and also relationships between desired levels of privacy, privacy mechanisms, and achieved privacy. A sequential chain of privacy regulation is



proposed. This involves, first, a subjective statement of desired levels of privacy in a specific situation, which can range from an ideal of no interaction to a desired level of maximum interaction with others. Based on this subjective goal it is hypothesized that a mix of various behavioral mechanisms is employed in the service of that ideal or desired state. Mechanisms can include various blends of verbal, paraverbal, nonverbal, and environmentally related behaviors, as well as cultural norms and customs. As discussed earlier, one outcome might be that achieved levels of privacy match desired levels, yielding a state of balance. Another outcome may be a discrepancy or imbalance between desired and achieved privacy. More achieved privacy than desired is analogous to being isolated or separated from others; less achieved privacy than desired is analogous to being crowded, intruded upon, or invaded. Such discrepancies reflect a failure of behavioral mechanisms to meet a personally defined ideal state of interpersonal boundary control.

When divergencies occur between desired and achieved privacy, people may mobilize additional behaviors to provide a better match between outcomes and ideals. For example one may close a door to signal that social interaction is not desired. However, intrusion may occur if someone barges in. To maintain low contact, any of several steps may then be taken, e.g., nonverbal cues of dissatisfaction with being interrupted, ignoring the intruder, even verbally directing comments that one wishes to be left alone. If none of these work one might bodily remove the intruder, or leave the setting and go somewhere else. Another possible outcome of a poorly working boundary system is to shift the original desired level of privacy. One may discover that the achieved outcome is, in fact, rewarding and worth having, e.g., an intruder is actually stimulating and likeable.

Whatever mode of resolution is sought, interpersonal boundary regulation is a dynamic process. There is a continual adjustment and readjustment as new situations emerge, as personal and group motivations shift, and as varying degrees of

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match between desired and achieved levels of privacy occur. However, systemic adjustments should also be examined from the perspective of the "costs" or "prices" incurred to regulate boundary processes. Costs can be physical or psychological energy expenditures, such as effort, stress, or work. Associated with the sheer expenditure of physical time and energy can be a number of psychological costs—stress, tension, anxiety. In addition, physiological costs such as heightened adrenal functioning and cardiovascular activity may occur. If these costs are incurred over long periods of time, or repeatedly, the person may well be involved in a personally expensive situation. Thus, costs may be accrued if desired boundary control (1) is not achieved, or (2) is attained but requires enormous personal and behavioral resources. While little is known about the impact of inability to maintain boundaries or about the need to mobilize resources to maintain boundaries, the whole issue of dynamics and costs is critical. As Dubos (1965, 1968) has so aptly put it, people are capable of extraordinary adaptation to extreme physical and social situations. The question is not one of survival or nonsurvival. It is more a matter of the costs and prices paid for successful adaptation—whether these costs are physical, physiological, psychological, or social.

**FUNCTIONS OF PRIVACY REGULATION**

In this section privacy is viewed from the perspective of its functions and goals. What needs does privacy regulation serve? What is its purpose? What does it do for individuals or groups? It is proposed that privacy is concerned with (1) relationships between a person or group and others, (2) the interface of the self and others, and (3) self-definition and self-identity.

(1) *Interpersonal Functions of Privacy*. A major function of privacy is regulation of interaction with the social environment, such as *limited and protected communication* (Westin, 1970). This involves the individual regulating interaction with others, to set boundaries between the self and nonself, and to achieve a sensible balance between openness and withholding information about the self.

The regulation of self-other boundaries is an important contributor to self-definition, a central goal of privacy discussed below. The ability to regulate boundaries (or failure to do so) provides a person with basic information regarding the social definition of the self. If I see that I cannot regulate inputs from others or outputs to them when I desire to do so, I am thereby provided with some important information about the social environment and my ability to regulate it. If this happens to me with many people and in many situations, i.e., I can seldom be private, then such information will contribute to how I ultimately define myself as a person. Therefore, while interpersonal boundary regulation is an important privacy function, it also has implications for more fundamental goals.

(2) *The Interface of the Self and the Social World.* Westin (1970) pointed to *self-evaluation* as a privacy goal. When away from the presence of others, the individual can integrate experiences with others, can process information received from interactions, and can formulate and weigh alternative plans of future behavior. Privacy therefore provides the opportunity for a person to assimilate experiences and information, and to examine possible future relationships with others. Other writers speak of privacy as involving the possibility for reflection and meditation and assisting in the assessment and interpretation of interaction with others (Kira, 1966; Chapin, 1951; Chermayeff and Alexander, 1963; Jourard, 1966). Thus, it is a use of experience with others, not necessarily in their presence, but with the implicit focus of the *self in relation to others*.

(3) *Self-Identity.* This function of privacy builds upon earlier levels, and has its psychological locus "inside" the self. In our framework, self-identity is the ultimate goal of privacy regulation. For purposes of this discussion, self-identity is a person's cognitive, psychological, and emotional definition and understanding of himself as a being. It includes knowing where one begins and ends vis-à-vis others, what aspects of the physical and social environment are parts of the self and which aspects are parts of others. It encompasses some understanding of one's capabilities and limitations, strengths and weaknesses, abilities and disabilities.

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Privacy in the service of self-identity is evident in the writings of many people. For example, Westin (1970) described *personal autonomy* as a major function of privacy, which includes an individual's sense of integrity and independence, and the ability to avoid being manipulated by others. As such, it is "... basically an instrument for achieving individual goals of self-realization" (Westin, 1970: 39). Pennock and Chapman (1971), Beardsley (1971), and Gross (1971) spoke of invasions of privacy as especially harmful because they destroy individual autonomy, self respect and dignity.

To our way of thinking, self-identity is central to human social behavior. For a person to function effectively in interaction with others requires some understanding of what the self is, where it ends and begins, when self-interest and self-expression can be exhibited. If one's self is perceived as worthless, if none of the world belongs to the self, if the self has no boundaries, then the person is literally "nothing." It is difficult to conceive of a person with such feelings as being able to function very well. Or, at the other extreme, if everything is viewed as part of the self and controlled by the self, e.g., the young child who does not separate the world from the self, then there is also no sense of self-identity, for the self is "everything" and knows no uniqueness or separation from others.

The essence of this discussion is that privacy mechanisms serve to define the limits and boundaries of the self. By being able to change the permeability of the boundaries around oneself, a sense of individuality develops—sometimes incorporating others and the world, sometimes keeping them out. But it is not the inclusion or exclusion process itself which is central; it is the *ability* to do so which contributes to self-definition. If I can control what is me and not me; if I can define what is me and not me; if I can observe the limits and scope of my control, then I have taken major steps toward understanding and defining what I am.

#### SUMMARY

This paper described privacy as the selective control of access to the self. In addition to a review of various definitions and

theoretical approaches, the paper proposed a conceptual framework, based on several key elements of privacy:

- (1) Privacy as a dialectic process involving both a closing off of the self and an opening of the self to others.
- (2) Privacy as an interpersonal boundary control process, or a series of events involving regulation and control of social interaction or "permeability" of the self to others. This boundary control process aids in the pacing and management of social interaction.
- (3) Privacy as a nonmonotonic process, with a region above and below which interaction amount and quality are unsatisfactory.
- (4) Privacy involves various social units, or different combinations of persons and groups.
- (5) Desired and achieved privacy. A distinction was made between subjectively desired or momentary ideal levels of privacy (desired privacy) and actual outcomes (achieved privacy). When achieved privacy is below desired privacy, a condition of crowding or intrusion obtains; when achieved privacy is greater than desired privacy, a state of social isolation exists.
- (6) Privacy as an input and output process, or a combination of incoming social stimulation from others and outgoing interaction from the self to others.

The paper also described mechanisms or vehicles used to implement desired levels of privacy. These included verbal and paraverbal behavior, personal space, territorial behavior and culturally based norms and customs. These mechanisms were hypothesized to operate as a system, sometimes substituting for and sometimes amplifying one another. Persons and groups use different mixes of these behaviors to achieve desired social interaction processes.

The privacy regulation system was also described as dynamic with adjustments and readjustments occurring over time. These changes result from new desired levels of privacy, attempts to achieve desired levels when mechanisms over- or undershoot the mark, and the like. One result of these efforts at adjustment can be costs of various types—physical and psychological—which may take the form of illness, stress, or anxiety.

Finally, the paper considered functions of privacy regulation. An interpersonal function is concerned with the management of

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self-other boundaries. A second function concerns the interface of the self and others and how people use social interaction information to define self-other roles. Most central is the function of self-identity. It was proposed that histories of ability to regulate interaction with others contribute to an understanding of the self—where it begins, its capabilities and limitations, and the power to control and regulate one's life.

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