

Annotation #4

Comments on Patricia Boling's Privacy and Intimate Life and related topics

By Dave Olson

Privacy rights wouldn't be such a touchy topic if there were fewer things to be private about. In many instances, specifically the intimate personal decisions discussed by Patricia Boling in "Privacy and the Politics of Intimate Life," it seems to me that culture rather than the laws, are the problem.

On paper, we are all equal (see US Constitution, Fourteenth amendment), further, the Fourth suggests that we are free to pursue liberty (if the opportunity to do sex isn't a liberty, I'm not sure what is). The Declaration of Independence puts forth the basic notion of pursuing happiness, yet in contemporary American culture, reality dictates a rather narrow view of what happiness and liberty are by excluding numerous options for pursuing one's personal happiness.

Let's face it, all humans do at least a few things that we wish to keep discreet or secret from others. Depending on our personalities, culture and political climate, we may wish to not disclose hobbies, passions, or vices with

others. Whether 'others' includes **all** others, some groups of acquaintances but not other groups, or all save for one or two close intimates depends on the context each relationship and what we feel comfortable sharing within that sphere. The decision to share such intimacies should not be based on statute (specifically fear of enforcement of the law) but rather on one's conscience and personal predilections.

While the USA still clings to rather Victorian hang-ups, other countries have moved on and accepted the fact that "some people are different and that's OK." The closeness in which a country lives together, both spatially and culturally, seems to define the fulcrum point between secrecy and openness. Once a culture learns that the more it collectively knows about "different people," the more it understands that, "you don't have to be best friends, you just have to let each other be."

Indeed, if cultures grow more able to accept a wider realm of non-harmful behaviors within the confines of "normality," then we would have fewer behaviors to be secret about and could then concentrate on keeping actually important information secret/non-secret as needed.

In "Privacy and the Politics of Intimate Life," the author discusses privacy mostly in terms of sexual freedoms. In particular, in terms of reproductive rights (i.e.: a woman's right to privacy and freedom to make decisions for her body), and sexual identity, specifically, the maze of privacy compromises

and tacit disclosure required by a homosexual person to insert themselves into society. Certainly, there are few more challenging activities for some individuals than redefining their public sexual persona however, I wonder why as a society we care so much about one another sexual habits?

It seems "coming out" is considered paramount to treason in some communities where homosexuality is shunned under a cloud of "morals and family values" rhetoric. Similar myopic views of "normal" marginalize other groups that can be carved out of the "normal" pie and sequestered elsewhere with a label (whether ethnic, cultural, racial, vocational, etc.). This non-acceptance by "normal" society simply divides different groups into separate communities in turn stunting any fostering of understanding or acceptance by the less-tolerant, further exacerbating the situation.

Eventually, as Boling discusses on Page 138, such trivialized groups gain more public momentum through political process, community building and interaction with other somewhat like-minded marginalized groups (the enemy of my enemy is friend) and eventually (after several generations perhaps) gain some level of societal acceptance, but at what cost? An inability to pursue happiness at a minimum. At a maximum, abuse and violence may result, simply for being who you are.

Throughout our personal and professional lives, we are frequently asked questions which seek to define us into a category with unknown

consequences or benefits. Yet the incidence that I am caucasian, male with no significant handicaps or felonies, and two parents who graduated from college should have no more value or non-value than if I were any other variety of human whatsoever. To paraphrase the character Popeye, "I yam what I yam."

To allow each human to find their own essential nature – or at least have a fair chance of fair treatment in a job, school, etc. - the question shouldn't be "What are you (check box below)?" But rather "What have you accomplished with who you are?" or even the blunt but useful, "What can you do for me?"

If the fact that I love rainy days, ice hockey and Van Gogh paintings should be no more important as what sexual orientation I fancy, my ancestral heritage or if I have a sixth toe. Such topics should be purely anecdotal chitchat for the coffeehouse or tavern, not grounds for hiring or firing, social embarrassment or prejudice within a community.