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Here's Looking at You, Selfie

This column may not sound like it has anything to do with libraries but hang in there. I'll make the tie-in, not to everyone's satisfaction of course, but at least I'll make the tie-in.

By the time you read this column this story may have lost all its relevance but it has made a bit of a dust up lately and so I think it deserves some further treatment. About two weeks ago, the cyberspace was all a twitter about naked selfies, mainly of celebrities, that had been hacked right out of the cloud. Imagine that. What goes online isn't exactly private. Doh!

Celebrities flew into high dudgeon about this, and a few tech places wrote about the scumbags that hacked the cloud to get them (<http://bit.ly/1pMh4m4>) (<http://bit.ly/1qucugi>) (<http://eonli.ne/1qJAL1Z>). Some were aghast. How could this happen?! Some argued that the pictures were not of them. Most of the comments were along the lines that we all have an inalienable right to make naked photos of ourselves on our phones and store them online, only to be let out when we deem them relevant. And furthermore, how dare they? Taking something that isn't theirs, yada, yada. Lena Dunham, she of *Girls* fame and one who cannot seem to stay clothed under any circumstance for long, blamed it on everyone *but* those who had taken nude selfies.

Ah, the Internet.

First, raise your hand if you think that what goes on line is only a little less private than what you might post on the Times Square marquee. Seriously, can anyone today believe that something cannot be taken off the web even after it's been deleted? Unless you are the IRS, you can't really delete anything off the web.

Secondly, naked pictures on your phones? Really people. Isn't that what mirrors are for? I know that narcissism is rampant and that the web has made all of us self-loving-loathing creatures. But honestly, why exactly do we need to be making pictures of ourselves and of, well you know. I think they're called "privates" for a reason. Just saying.

Thirdly, yes, there are scumbags out there and many of them work in Silicon Valley or Cupertino or some other tech-related field. *As a group*, tech folks aren't exactly known for 1) their upright and positive views of women (look at the gaming images of women, though women are nearly 50% of all gamers); <http://huff.to/1hyjVQi>, 2) their unwelcoming attitude to members of the opposite sex (i.e., women need not apply <http://bit.ly/OnwW3m>; <http://bit.ly/1ieCDeO>) or 3) their lack of restraint about what the web can display, show or otherwise unleash (just start typing into Google....). Anything goes is, I believe, the view, and information-wants-to-be-free is the mantra.

Given all this, it should come as no surprise that this happened and some members of the rich and famous were made, for a moment or two, still very, very rich and only slightly chagrined. A good rule of thumb about the web is that you put nothing on it you wouldn't want your mother to see. If you do, brace yourself as you may find that your mom is a bit annoyed, not to mention embarrassed (<http://bit.ly/1qeiWcH>).

So what does this have to do with libraries? Only to show the stark contrast between one medium, the Internet that has no appreciation for your privacy, and the other that has protected it from the first day you checked out your first book. It's odd, isn't it, that we hear all sort of "stuff" about privacy and first amendment rights only to watch the Internet make roadkill of both on the information superhighway? Furthermore, no one really seems to care, not, at least, the way they would had another entity been so cavalier about both. Apparently we will put up with anything when it comes to the web. It treats us shabbily, embarrasses us, encourages us to embarrass ourselves, and then laughs when we come back for more. Or, maybe that's just laughing all the way to bank. Meanwhile, it continues to contend insidiously that it has or will soon replace libraries.

No one wants to put the genie back in the bottle (though many of us want to put clothes back on many of those selfies!). Still, is it too much to ask that our choice not be between having a convenient service *and* giving up our privacy? Probably not.

But the story of the selfie is emblematic. On the one hand, social media encourages you to look within, navel-gazing (*omphaloskepsis* for the academic in you) *ad infinitum*. On the other hand, libraries services force you to view the larger world outside you. Remember, the web is not exactly looking out for your best interests because it believes you have no privacy anyway so get over it. Should, however, you want privacy, well then, get thee ...

...to a library.