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Privacy and Freedom of Information in Organizational Contexts: Human Rights Issues in an Era of Big Data (abstract)

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The Social Practice of Human Rights: Charting the Frontiers of Research and Advocacy

2015 Conference of the University of Dayton Human Rights Center

Oct. 1-3, 2015, Dayton, Ohio

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Research Panel: Media and the Digital Age

Presenter: Jo Ann Oravec, University of Wisconsin at Whitewater

Title: Privacy and Freedom of Information in Organizational Contexts: Human Rights Issues in an Era of Big Data

Abstract: Large-scale information collection and dissemination practices are acquiring greater economic and political significance in the everyday lives of citizens. Privacy and freedom of information issues are becoming more complex as “big data” and machine learning replace traditional forms of dossier collection, statistical analysis, and archiving. This paper explores the varieties of human rights issues that are emerging. The enormous amounts of data associated with social media systems and mobile applications have increased the number of facial recognition, locational tracking, socioeconomic analysis, and related practices being conducted by corporations as well as governmental agencies.

Often corporations and governmental agencies couple their efforts, which can magnify the difficulty of discerning legitimate and actionable citizen concerns and mapping practical modes for addressing them. Citizens who pose requests as to what kinds of information is being held about them by organizations and as to how it is being used can be frustrated by the lack of specificity in the responses they receive (if any). Privacy structures can often hurt individuals’ chances of obtaining information rather than assist them, providing barriers that are largely designed to protect organizations rather than increase organizational transparency.

This presentation outlines a set of recent cases that relate human rights involving free movement and access to needed resources to concerns dealing with privacy and freedom of information. It emphasizes facial recognition and socioeconomic analysis initiatives along with geographic information system (GIS) and related locational applications. It projects some of the consequences for human rights that technological developments toward a cashless society (with applications such as Apple Pay) may engender. The presentation also relates the technological initiatives described in this paragraph to various rhetorics about terrorism and national security.

Keywords:

privacy, freedom of information, social media, big data, geographic information systems (GIS)

Biography: Jo Ann Oravec received her MBA, MS, MA, and PhD at UW-Madison. She also taught at Baruch College of the City University of New York as well as UW-Madison and Ball State University. She chaired the Privacy Council of the State of Wisconsin, the nation's first state-level council dealing with information technology and privacy. She has written books including *Virtual Individuals*, *Virtual Groups: Human Dimensions of Groupware and Computer Networking* (Cambridge University Press) and has more than 1,100 citations of her academic articles. She has written extensively on time capsules, futurism, online reputational systems, and archiving. She held visiting fellow positions at Cambridge and Oxford.