Megan Morse

Professor Michelle M. Pulaski Behling

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Issue Reaction Paper #4

Issue: Privacy

Case: Rockland and Westchester County gun license holders

Days after the [Connecticut school killings](http://nyti.ms/YNSpWt), a newspaper in nearby Westchester County, N.Y., responded by publishing the names and addresses of handgun permit holders in its readership area. [The Journal News](http://www.lohud.com/) said it was a public service informing people about ownership of a pistol revolver in their neighborhoods.

The right to know is a legal term often associated with open-meeting and open-record statutes (Patterson, Wilkins 2011). The people of Rockland and Westchester County have the right to know who living in their neighborhood have the license to possess a legal weapon. Since the map’s information is public record by state law anybody could obtain this knowledge. “The map does not mean the individual at a specific location owns a weapon, just that they are licensed to do so” (lolud Dec 2012). This still leaves a lot of mystery to the public.

Need to know information is provided to allow citizens to go about their daily lives (Patterson, Wilkins 2011). The Journal News’ map of gun license holders is not need to know information. What the public really needs to know who is in procession of a weapon. “The map does not include owners of long guns, rifles, or shot guns which can be purchased with out a permit” (lolud 2012). Even with the information the map provides there are still people out there who own guns and there is no way of finding out who or where they are. “The purchase of rifles and shotguns with out a permit leaves the public knowing little abut the types of deadly weapons that might be right next door,” says John Thompson program manager for project SNUG at the Yonkers Family YMCA (Worley Dec 2012).

License holders are arguing that personal information such as their name and address is private. In reality that type of information is not private at all. Anyone who obtains a license signed up to have his or her information available to the public at any time. They knew this from the beginning. If they did not want their information like their name and address in public records they should not have gotten a license. “The interactive map put together by The Journal News, compiled by publicly available records, has already been shared tens of thousands of times on the internet” (Goodman Dec 2012). The information has always been available for the public to see, but now it is more accessible.

I think The Journal News had the right to publish the map. They did nothing wrong by wanting to inform the public. They did not obtain the information in an unethical way. The only reason this is making people uncomfortable is because now the information is more accessible for the public to see. In this day and age and the way technology is today I am surprised this hasn’t been done sooner.

References

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