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Living Comfortably In Glass Houses

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Our homes are becoming instrumented glass houses where even the most intimate and personal acts may leave data footprints that companies providing services (and potentially others) can access. As homes become instrumented with data-generating technologies, existing information boundaries will be tested, and householders will take on the burden of creating new boundaries on information about their homes lives. Existing low-tech methods of obfuscating activities will no longer suffice. As ethnographers working on smart home solutions, we wonder: what information about which daily activities and home conditions will make householders uncomfortable living in glass houses? Who do people imagine will be looking through those glass facades, and what do they worry about them 'seeing'? Even when the activities they consider sensitive are self-described as 'normal', how do we design smart home solutions so that householders can continue to do 'normal' things and benefit from new services, with the confidence that their glass homes won't reveal too much, won't easily break, or when they inevitably do break, won't cause irrevocable damage? What role do ethnographers play in design smart home solutions that allow us all to live comfortably in glass houses?

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