

# CS489/689

# Privacy, Cryptography, Network and Data Security

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Syntactic Notions of Privacy

# Recap

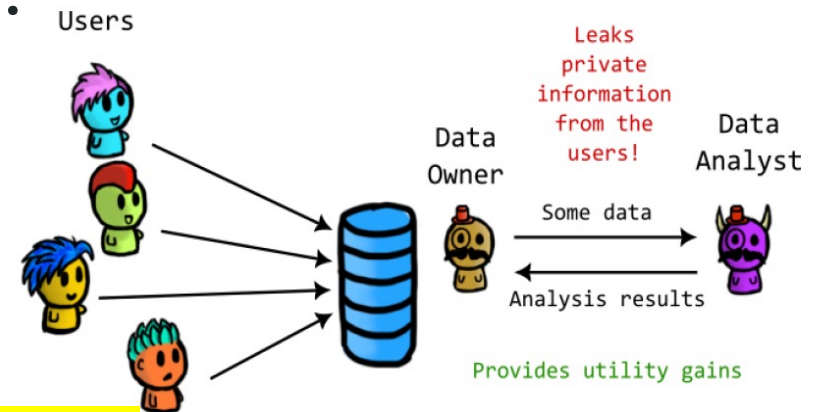
- In the previous lecture, we saw many attacks.
- Now, we're going to see some defenses.
- How do we measure privacy?

- **Empirically:**

- by measuring the performance of an attack

- **Theoretically:**

- **Syntactic** notions: measuring a property on the released data / leakage.
- **Semantic** notions: ensuring the data release mechanism itself has a property (independent of its inputs/outputs)



# Syntactic Privacy in relational databases

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- Syntactic notions of privacy define a property that the released data must satisfy.
- The notions we will see refer to tabular data (relational databases).
- When talking about a table, the columns are the attributes, and the rows are the data entries or samples.

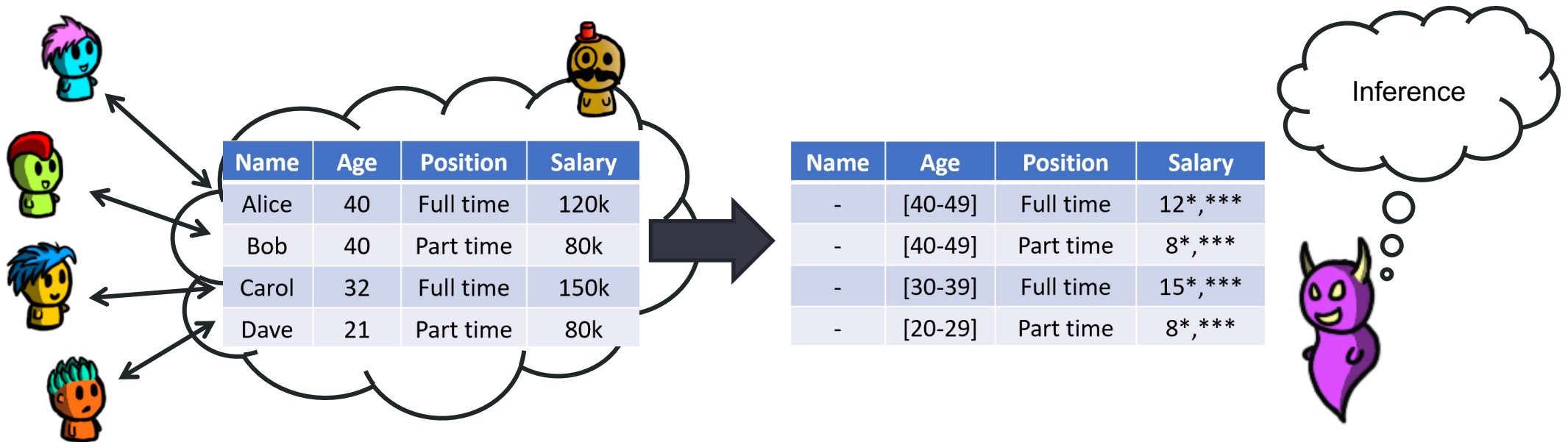
# Syntactic Privacy in relational databases

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- The attributes of a table can be classified into:
  - Identifiers: uniquely identify a participant
  - **Quasi-identifiers**: in combination with external information, can identify a participant (ZIP, DOB, Gender, etc.)
  - **Confidential attributes**: contain privacy-sensitive information
  - Non-confidential attributes: are not considered sensitive
- We will always remove identifiers and focus on confidential attributes.

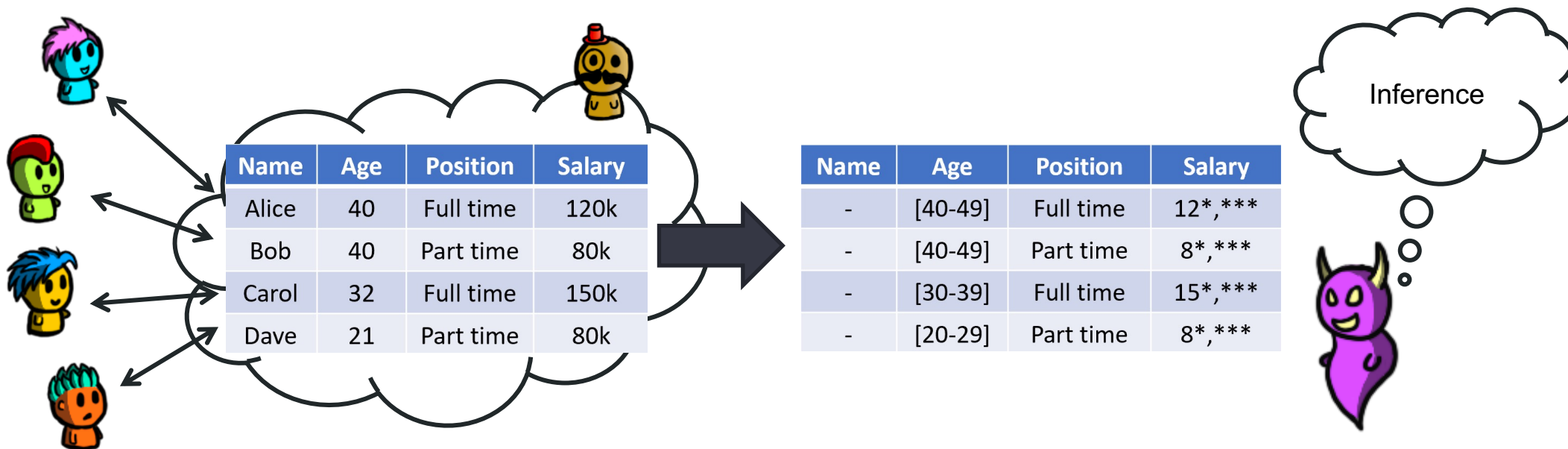
# System Model

- Each user contributes to a row in a database
- A data curator releases a sanitized version of the database
- The adversary/analyst sees the sanitized database



# System Model

Q: What are the properties the sanitized database should have to preserve some level of privacy to its users?

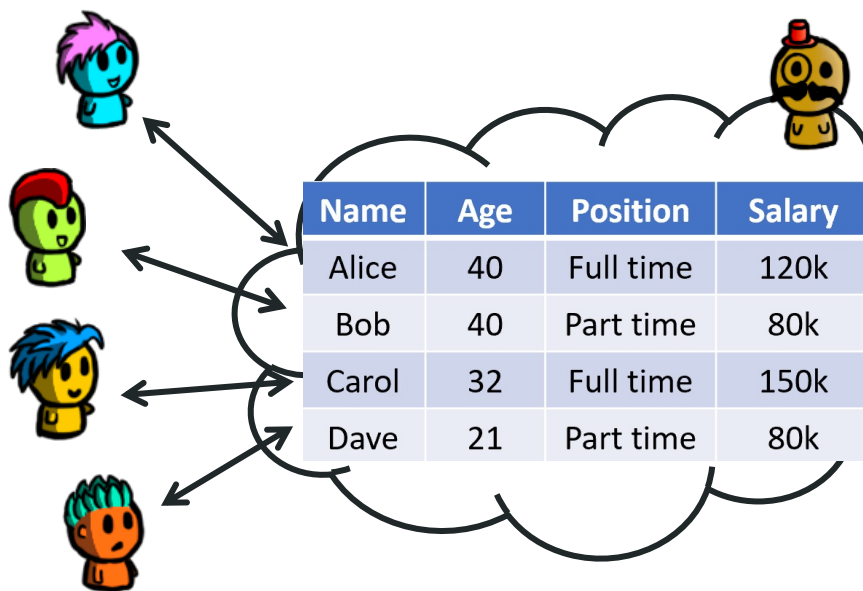


# System Model

Q: What are the properties the sanitized database should have to preserve some level of privacy to its users?

A:

- $k$ -anonymity
- $\ell$ -diversity
- $t$ -closeness



Name	Age	Position	Salary
-	[40-49]	Full time	12*,***
-	[40-49]	Part time	8*,***
-	[30-39]	Full time	15*,***
-	[20-29]	Part time	8*,***



# $k$ -anonymity

## $k$ -anonymity

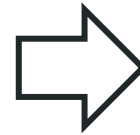
For each published record, there exists at least  $k - 1$  other records with the same quasi-identifiers

- **To compute  $k$ -anonymity:**
  - Group the rows with the same quasi-identifier(s).
    - These rows form an *equivalence class* or equi-class.
  - Count: what is the smallest size of a group? That will be the level of  $k$ -anonymity
- **To provide  $k$ -anonymity:**
  - Remove a quasi-identifier
  - Reduce the granularity of a quasi-identifier (e.g., hiding the last characters of a ZIP code)
  - Group quasi-identifiers (e.g., report age ranges instead of actual ages)



# $k$ -anonymity: example

ZIP (QI)	Party affiliation
N1CFFA	Green Party
G0ANFA	Liberal Party
N1C5YN	Green Party
N2J0HJ	Conservative Party
N1C4KH	Green Party
G0A3G4	Conservative Party
G0A3GN	Liberal Party
N2JWBV	New Democratic Party
N2JWBV	Liberal Party



ZIP	Party affiliation
N1C***	Green Party
G0A***	Liberal Party
N1C***	Green Party
N2J***	Conservative Party
N1C***	Green Party
G0A***	Conservative Party
G0A***	Liberal Party
N2J***	New Democratic Party
N2J***	Liberal Party

Q: what is the  $k$ -anonymity level?

# $k$ -anonymity: example

ZIP (QI)	Party affiliation
N1CFFA	Green Party
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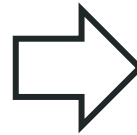
ZIP	Party affiliation
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G0A***	Liberal Party
N1C***	Green Party
N2J***	Conservative Party
N1C***	Green Party
G0A***	Conservative Party
G0A***	Liberal Party
N2J***	New Democratic Party
N2J***	Liberal Party

**Q:** what is the  $k$ -anonymity level?

**A:** the table is 3-anonymous

# $k$ -anonymity: example (II)

ZIP (QI)	DOB (QI)	Party affiliation
N1CFF	1962-01-24	Green Party
G0ANF	1975-12-30	Liberal Party
N1C5YN	1966-10-17	Green Party
N2J0HJ	1996-08-14	Conservative Party
N1C4KH	1963-04-06	Green Party
G0A3G4	1977-07-09	Conservative Party
G0A3GN	1973-08-14	Liberal Party
N2JWBV	1990-11-02	New Democratic Party
N2JWBV	1990-01-25	Liberal Party

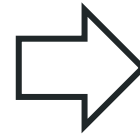


ZIP	DOB	Party affiliation
N1C***	196*_*_*_*	Green Party
G0A***	197*_*_*_*	Liberal Party
N1C***	196*_*_*_*	Green Party
N2J***	199*_*_*_*	Conservative Party
N1C***	196*_*_*_*	Green Party
G0A***	197*_*_*_*	Conservative Party
G0A***	197*_*_*_*	Liberal Party
N2J***	199*_*_*_*	New Democratic Party
N2J***	199*_*_*_*	Liberal Party

Q: what is the  $k$ -anonymity level?

# $k$ -anonymity: example (II)

ZIP (QI)	DOB (QI)	Party affiliation
N1CFF	1962-01-24	Green Party
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ZIP	DOB	Party affiliation
N1C***	196*_*_*_*	Green Party
G0A***	197*_*_*_*	Liberal Party
N1C***	196*_*_*_*	Green Party
N2J***	199*_*_*_*	Conservative Party
N1C***	196*_*_*_*	Green Party
G0A***	197*_*_*_*	Conservative Party
G0A***	197*_*_*_*	Liberal Party
N2J***	199*_*_*_*	New Democratic Party
N2J***	199*_*_*_*	Liberal Party

**Q:** what is the  $k$ -anonymity level?

**A:** the table is 3-anonymous

# $k$ -anonymity: practice

- Both age and gender are **QI**.

Age	Gender	...
23	F	
25	F	
33	F	
35	F	
27	M	
30	M	
32	M	
21	NB	
25	NB	

**Q:** What is the  $k$ -anonymity if...

- We hide the Age
- We hide the Gender (but not the age)
- We report the most significant digit of Age, plus the Gender
- We only report the most significant digit of Age, but not the Gender

# $k$ -anonymity: practice

- Both age and gender are **QI**.

Age	Gender	...
23	F	
25	F	
33	F	
35	F	
27	M	
30	M	
32	M	
21	NB	
25	NB	

**Q:** What is the  $k$ -anonymity if...

- We hide the Age
- We hide the Gender (but not the age)
- We report the most significant digit of Age, plus the Gender
- We only report the most significant digit of Age, but not the Gender

**A:** 2, 1, 1, 4

# $k$ -anonymity: practice (II)

- Both age and DOB are **QI**.

Gender	DOB	Party affiliation
M	1968-**-**	Green Party
F	1975-**-**	Liberal Party
O	1966-**-**	Green Party
M	1962-**-**	Green Party
M	1962-**-**	Conservative Party
O	1966-**-**	Conservative Party
F	1973-**-**	Liberal Party
F	1973-**-**	Liberal Party
O	1968-**-**	Green Party
F	1975-**-**	Liberal Party

**Q:** What is the  $k$ -anonymity if...

- We publish the table as shown
- We hide the least-significant digit of year
- We hide the Gender column
- We hide the least-significant digit of year and hide the Gender column

# $k$ -anonymity: practice (II)

- Both age and DOB are **QI**.

Gender	DOB	Party affiliation
M	1968-**-**	Green Party
F	1975-**-**	Liberal Party
O	1966-**-**	Green Party
M	1962-**-**	Green Party
M	1962-**-**	Conservative Party
O	1966-**-**	Conservative Party
F	1973-**-**	Liberal Party
F	1973-**-**	Liberal Party
O	1968-**-**	Green Party
F	1975-**-**	Liberal Party

**Q:** What is the  $k$ -anonymity if...

- We publish the table as shown
- We hide the least-significant digit of year
- We hide the Gender column
- We hide the least-significant digit of year and hide the Gender column

**A:** 1, 3, 2, 4





# $k$ -anonymity: practice (III)

Age	Province	...
21	ON	
23	ON	
26	ON	
32	ON	
33	ON	
35	ON	
36	ON	
43	ON	
45	ON	
22	BC	
24	BC	
26	BC	
27	BC	
32	BC	
33	BC	
43	BC	
45	BC	
49	BC	

- Age and Province are **QI**.

**Q1:** what is the  $k$ -anonymity if we replace the age with ranges [20-29], [30-39], [40-49]?

**Q2:** design ranges that provide a higher level of  $k$ -anonymity, ensuring that

- Ranges must cover all ages from 20 to 49
- You must create 3 age ranges
- Each range must contain at least one record

**Submit the answers of Q1-3 (next slide too) to Learn**



# $k$ -anonymity and privacy

ZIP (QI)	DOB (QI)	Party affiliation
N1C***	196*_**_**	Green Party
N1C***	196*_**_**	Green Party
N1C***	196*_**_**	Green Party
G0A***	197*_**_**	Liberal Party
G0A***	197*_**_**	Liberal Party
G0A***	197*_**_**	Conservative Party
N2J***	199*_**_**	Conservative Party
N2J***	199*_**_**	New Democratic Party
N2J***	199*_**_**	Liberal Party

- This table is 3-anonymous.

**Q3:** This provides some resistance against linking attacks, why?

**Submit the answers of Q1-3 to Learn**

# $k$ -anonymity and privacy

ZIP (QI)	DOB (QI)	Party affiliation
N1C***	196*_**_**	Green Party
N1C***	196*_**_**	Green Party
N1C***	196*_**_**	Green Party
G0A***	197*_**_**	Liberal Party
G0A***	197*_**_**	Liberal Party
G0A***	197*_**_**	Conservative Party
N2J***	199*_**_**	Conservative Party
N2J***	199*_**_**	New Democratic Party
N2J***	199*_**_**	Liberal Party

- This table is 3-anonymous.

Q: Is  $k$ -anonymity enough? Can you see any issues with it?

# $k$ -anonymity and privacy

ZIP (QI)	DOB (QI)	Party affiliation
N1C***	196*_**_**	Green Party
N1C***	196*_**_**	Green Party
N1C***	196*_**_**	Green Party
G0A***	197*_**_**	Liberal Party
G0A***	197*_**_**	Liberal Party
G0A***	197*_**_**	Conservative Party
N2J***	199*_**_**	Conservative Party
N2J***	199*_**_**	New Democratic Party
N2J***	199*_**_**	Liberal Party

- This table is 3-anonymous.

**Q:** Is  $k$ -anonymity enough? Can you see any issues with it?

*Attack 1:* if you know Alice has ZIP code N1C\*\*\*, what can you learn from her?

*Attack 2:* if you know Bob has ZIP code G0A\*\*\* and does not like Liberal Party, what can you learn from him?

# $\ell$ -diversity

## $\ell$ -diversity

For each quasi-identifier value, there should be at least  $\ell$  **distinct** values of the sensitive attributes

- **To compute  $\ell$ -diversity:**
  - Group the rows by quasi-identifiers into equi-classes.
  - For each equi-class, compute how many distinct sensitive values there are
  - The equi-class with the smallest number of distinct sensitive values is the level of  $\ell$ -diversity.
- **To provide  $\ell$ -diversity:**
  - Similar to k-anonymity: try to make the equi-classes as large as possible, while making sure there is enough variety of sensitive attributes per class.

# $\ell$ -diversity: example

Gender	DOB	Party affiliation
M	196*_**_**	Green Party
M	196*_**_**	Liberal Party
M	196*_**_**	Conservative Party
O	196*_**_**	Green Party
O	196*_**_**	Green Party
O	196*_**_**	Conservative Party
F	197*_**_**	Liberal Party
F	197*_**_**	Green Party
F	197*_**_**	Conservative Party
F	197*_**_**	Liberal Party

- Gender and DOB are **QI**, Party affiliation is the **sensitive attribute**.

**Q:** what is the level of  $\ell$ -diversity?

# $\ell$ -diversity: example

Gender	DOB	Party affiliation
M	196*_**_**	Green Party
M	196*_**_**	Liberal Party
M	196*_**_**	Conservative Party
O	196*_**_**	Green Party
O	196*_**_**	Green Party
O	196*_**_**	Conservative Party
F	197*_**_**	Liberal Party
F	197*_**_**	Green Party
F	197*_**_**	Conservative Party
F	197*_**_**	Liberal Party

- Gender and DOB are **QI**, Party affiliation is the **sensitive attribute**.

**Q:** what is the level of  $\ell$ -diversity?

**A:** the table is 2-diversified

# $\ell$ -diversity and privacy

Q: what is the level of k-anonymity and  $\ell$ -diversity?

ZIP	DOB	Salary
N3P***	199*_**_**	20K
N3P***	199*_**_**	15K
N3P***	199*_**_**	25K
H1A***	196*_**_**	100K
H1A***	196*_**_**	90K
H1A***	196*_**_**	120K
S4N***	197*_**_**	50K
S4N***	197*_**_**	60K
S4N***	197*_**_**	65K



# $\ell$ -diversity and privacy

ZIP	DOB	Salary
N3P***	199*_**_**	20K
N3P***	199*_**_**	15K
N3P***	199*_**_**	25K
H1A***	196*_**_**	100K
H1A***	196*_**_**	90K
H1A***	196*_**_**	120K
S4N***	197*_**_**	50K
S4N***	197*_**_**	60K
S4N***	197*_**_**	65K

**Q:** what is the level of k-anonymity and  $\ell$ -diversity?

**A:** 3 and 3

**Q:** why does this provide privacy?

# $\ell$ -diversity and privacy

ZIP	DOB	Salary
N3P***	199*_**_**	20K
N3P***	199*_**_**	15K
N3P***	199*_**_**	25K
H1A***	196*_**_**	100K
H1A***	196*_**_**	90K
H1A***	196*_**_**	120K
S4N***	197*_**_**	50K
S4N***	197*_**_**	60K
S4N***	197*_**_**	65K

**Q:** what is the level of k-anonymity and  $\ell$ -diversity?

**A:** 3 and 3

**Q:** why does this provide privacy?

**A:** it alleviates the problem of k-anonymity when all values are the same.

**Q:** is this good enough? Do you see any issue?

# $\ell$ -diversity and privacy

ZIP	DOB	Salary	Disease
N3P***	199*_**_**	20K	gastric ulcer
N3P***	199*_**_**	15K	gastritis
N3P***	199*_**_**	25K	stomach cancer
H1A***	196*_**_**	100K	heart attack
H1A***	196*_**_**	90K	flu
H1A***	196*_**_**	120K	bronchitis
S4N***	197*_**_**	50K	COVID
S4N***	197*_**_**	60K	kidney stone
S4N***	197*_**_**	65K	pneumonia

**Q:** is this good enough? Do you see any issue?

**Q:** if you know Charles, who earns a low salary, is in this table: what else did you learn?

# $\ell$ -diversity and privacy

ZIP	DOB	Salary	Disease
N3P***	199*_**_**	20K	gastric ulcer
N3P***	199*_**_**	15K	gastritis
N3P***	199*_**_**	25K	stomach cancer
H1A***	196*_**_**	100K	heart attack
H1A***	196*_**_**	90K	flu
H1A***	196*_**_**	120K	bronchitis
S4N***	197*_**_**	50K	COVID
S4N***	197*_**_**	60K	kidney stone
S4N***	197*_**_**	65K	pneumonia

**Q:** is this good enough? Do you see any issue?

**Q:** if you know Charles, who earns a low salary, is in this table: what else did you learn?

**A:** Charles has a stomach disease (Similarity attack)

# $\ell$ -diversity and privacy

ZIP	DOB	Virus X Test
N3P***	199*_**_**	Positive
N3P***	199*_**_**	Positive
N3P***	199*_**_**	Positive
... 45 more positive cases ...		
N3P***	199*_**_**	Negative
H1A***	196*_**_**	Negative
H1A***	196*_**_**	Negative
H1A***	196*_**_**	Negative
... 945 more negative cases ...		
H1A***	196*_**_**	Positive

**Q:** if you know David, who is in his 20s, is in this table: what else did you learn?

# $\ell$ -diversity and privacy

ZIP	DOB	Virus X Test
N3P***	199*_**_**	Positive
N3P***	199*_**_**	Positive
N3P***	199*_**_**	Positive
... 45 more positive cases ...		
N3P***	199*_**_**	Negative
...		
H1A***	196*_**_**	Negative
H1A***	196*_**_**	Negative
H1A***	196*_**_**	Negative
... 945 more negative cases ...		
H1A***	196*_**_**	Positive

**Q:** if you know David, who is in his 20s, is in this table: what else did you learn?

**A:** David probably has the virus (Skewness attack)

# What went wrong?

ZIP	DOB	Virus X Test
N3P***	199*_**_**	Positive
N3P***	199*_**_**	Positive
N3P***	199*_**_**	Positive
... 45 more positive cases ...		
N3P***	199*_**_**	Negative
H1A***	196*_**_**	Negative
H1A***	196*_**_**	Negative
H1A***	196*_**_**	Negative
... 945 more negative cases ...		
H1A***	196*_**_**	Positive

- The data in each equi-class is unexpectedly skewed.
- This means that learning the equi-class of a person can leak a lot of statistical information about the sensitive attributes of that person.

# $t$ -closeness

## $t$ -closeness

The distribution of sensitive values in each equi-class is no further than a threshold  $t$  from the overall distribution of the sensitive values in the whole table

- **To compute  $t$ -closeness:**
  - Organize rows by equi-class
  - Compute the distribution of sensitive attributes per equi-class and for the whole table.
  - Compute the maximum difference between a class distribution and the whole table's distribution on a sensitive value. That's the value of  $t$ .
- **To provide  $t$ -closeness:**
  - Similar to  $k$ -anonymity: try to make the equi-classes as large as possible, while trying to maintain a uniform distribution.
  - Could add dummy records to help smooth the distribution.



# $t$ -closeness

## $t$ -closeness

The distribution of sensitive values in each equi-class is no further than a threshold  $t$  from the overall distribution of the sensitive values in the whole table

- To **compute**  $t$ -closeness we need to define a notion of distance between distributions. See the [original paper](#) that proposes  $t$ -closeness for a full description of distance notions
- We will only see one distance:

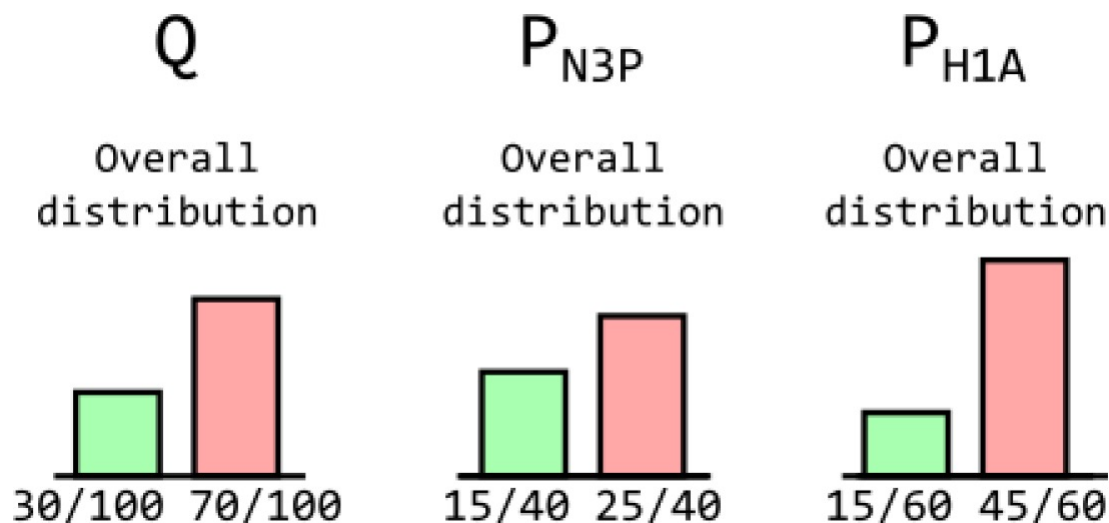
### Variational distance (or EMD Categorical Distance using Equal Distance)

For two distributions over  $m$  values  $P = (p_1, p_2, \dots, p_m)$  and  $Q = (q_1, q_2, \dots, q_m)$ :

$$D[P, Q] \doteq \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^m |p_i - q_i|$$

# $t$ -closeness example

ZIP (QI)	Virus (Sens)	
N3P***	Pos	x15
N3P***	Neg	x25
H1A***	Pos	x15
H1A***	Neg	x45



$$D[\mathbf{P}_{N3P}, \mathbf{Q}] = \frac{1}{2} \left( \left| \frac{15}{40} - \frac{30}{100} \right| + \left| \frac{25}{40} - \frac{70}{100} \right| \right) = 0.075$$

$$D[\mathbf{P}_{H1A}, \mathbf{Q}] = \frac{1}{2} \left( \left| \frac{15}{60} - \frac{30}{100} \right| + \left| \frac{45}{60} - \frac{70}{100} \right| \right) = 0.05$$

$t$ -close with  $t=0.075$  (the **maximum** of these values)

**Variational distance:**

$$D[P, Q] \doteq \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^m |p_i - q_i|$$

# $t$ -closeness example: more sensitive values

ZIP (QI)	Virus (Sens)	
N3P***	Pos	x5
N3P***	Neg	x22
N3P***	Inc	x3
H1A***	Pos	x12
H1A***	Neg	x47
H1A***	Inc	x1

**Variational distance:**

$$D[P, Q] \doteq \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^m |p_i - q_i|$$

**Q:** what is the  $k$ -anonymity,  $\ell$ -diversity and  $t$ -closeness level of this published dataset?

**A:** 30-anonymous and 3-diversified.

$$D[P_{N3P}, Q] = \frac{1}{2} \left( \left| \frac{5}{30} - \frac{17}{90} \right| + \left| \frac{22}{30} - \frac{69}{90} \right| + \left| \frac{3}{30} - \frac{4}{90} \right| \right) = \frac{1}{18}$$

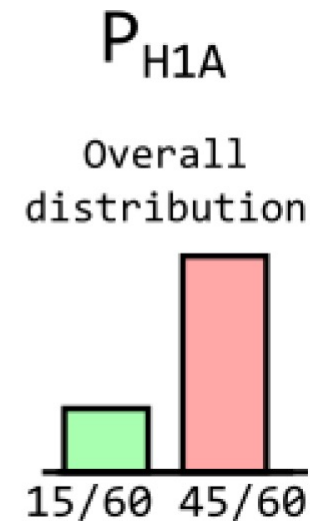
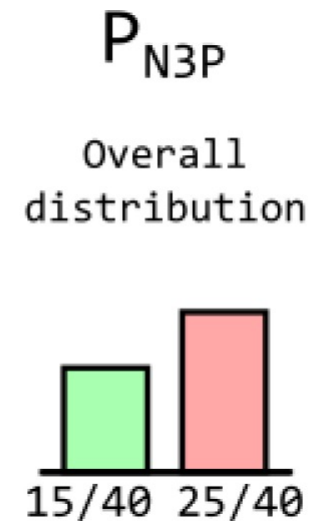
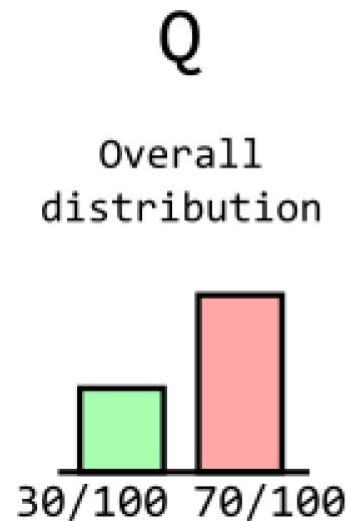
$$D[P_{H1A}, Q] = \frac{1}{2} \left( \left| \frac{12}{60} - \frac{17}{90} \right| + \left| \frac{47}{60} - \frac{69}{90} \right| + \left| \frac{1}{60} - \frac{4}{90} \right| \right) = \frac{1}{36}$$

Therefore, the table is  $\frac{1}{18}$ -close with respect to Virus

# Notes on computing $t$ -closeness

- If you have  $k$  equi-classes, you would have to compute  $k$  distances and take the maximum of those distances as the value of  $t$ .
- If you have  $m$  distinct sensitive values, the histograms would have  $m$  bars and you would have to add  $m$  absolute value terms to compute each distance.

ZIP (QI)	Virus (Sens)	
N3P***	Pos	x15
N3P***	Neg	x25
H1A***	Pos	x15
H1A***	Neg	x45



# Notes on computing $t$ -closeness

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- If you have more than one sensitive attribute (column), you can compute the  $t$ -closeness for each sensitive attribute independently (e.g., a table can be  $t_1$ -close with respect to Salary and  $t_2$ -close with respect to Virus).
- Check the [original paper by Li et al.](#) for other distance metrics and more examples.

# Limitations

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- $t$ -closeness is overall a reasonable syntactic notion of privacy. It prevents the attacks that we have seen. However, it still has some limitations:
  1. These privacy notions require a clear distinction between quasi-identifiers and sensitive values, which is not always possible (and is subjective)
  2. Expensive to compute:
    - Computing the optimal  $k$ -anonymous dataset is NP-hard
  3. These notions of privacy do not provide guarantees against an adversary with (arbitrary) background knowledge

# Limitations Example

	Non-Sensitive			Sensitive
	Zip code	Age	Nationality	Condition
1	130**	<30	*	AIDS
2	130**	<30	*	Heart Disease
3	130**	<30	*	Viral Infection
4	130**	<30	*	Viral Infection
5	130**	≥40	*	Cancer
6	130**	≥40	*	Heart Disease
7	130**	≥40	*	Viral Infection
8	130**	≥40	*	Viral Infection
9	130**	3*	*	Cancer
10	130**	3*	*	Cancer
11	130**	3*	*	Cancer
12	130**	3*	*	Cancer

	Non-Sensitive			Sensitive
	Zip code	Age	Nationality	Condition
1	130**	<35	*	AIDS
2	130**	<35	*	Tuberculosis
3	130**	<35	*	Flu
4	130**	<35	*	Tuberculosis
5	130**	<35	*	Cancer
6	130**	<35	*	Cancer
7	130**	≥35	*	Cancer
8	130**	≥35	*	Cancer
9	130**	≥35	*	Cancer
10	130**	≥35	*	Tuberculosis
11	130**	≥35	*	Viral Infection
12	130**	≥35	*	Viral Infection

**Q:** We know that Dave just had his 35<sup>th</sup> birthday! He told us on his way to the hospital on the left. What did we learn?

**Q:** We know a 28 year old visited both hospitals. What can we infer?

# Limitations Example

	Non-Sensitive			Sensitive
	Zip code	Age	Nationality	Condition
1	130**	<30	*	AIDS
2	130**	<30	*	Heart Disease
3	130**	<30	*	Viral Infection
4	130**	<30	*	Viral Infection
5	130**	>=40	*	Cancer
6	130**	>=40	*	Heart Disease
7	130**	>=40	*	Viral Infection
8	130**	>=40	*	Viral Infection
9	130**	3*	*	Cancer
10	130**	3*	*	Cancer
11	130**	3*	*	Cancer
12	130**	3*	*	Cancer

	Non-Sensitive			Sensitive
	Zip code	Age	Nationality	Condition
1	130**	<35	*	AIDS
2	130**	<35	*	Tuberculosis
3	130**	<35	*	Flu
4	130**	<35	*	Tuberculosis
5	130**	<35	*	Cancer
6	130**	<35	*	Cancer
7	130**	>=35	*	Cancer
8	130**	>=35	*	Cancer
9	130**	>=35	*	Cancer
10	130**	>=35	*	Tuberculosis
11	130**	>=35	*	Viral Infection
12	130**	>=35	*	Viral Infection

**Q:** We know that Dave just had his 35<sup>th</sup> birthday! He told us on his way to the hospital on the left. What did we learn?

**A:** Dave has Cancer

**Q:** We know a 28 year old visited both hospitals. What can we infer?

**A:** They likely have AIDS



# Limitations

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- We need a privacy notion that is adversary-agnostic... a *semantic* notion of privacy, that only depends on the mechanism!
  - In the next lectures, we will see Differential Privacy (DP)