Can Your Fingerprints Be Stolen From a Picture?

January 10, 2017 - Identity theft and data breaches have become a fact of life in this age of electronic communications. Anyone born today, and pretty much anyone living in the United States today can be assured that their personally identifiable information has been input to multiple electronic databases. And many databases now contain digital copies of your biometric information. These are things like fingerprints, iris scans or even your DNA. All of this information makes an attractive target for identity thieves. And biometric data may be the most valuable information of all because it is often used to gain access secure areas and computer systems. But it turns out that hacking into a database may not be the only way to gain access to certain biometric data. A simple picture of you may give a resourceful ID thief everything needed to copy your fingerprints.

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A group of researchers from the National Institute of Informatics in Japan wondered if your fingerprints could be copied in a cell phone picture. They studied pictures of people flashing the peace sign with their fingers. They found that from a distance of about 9 feet, it was possible to copy the picture subjects fingerprints and then to digitize them.

The researchers didn't need to use any special equipment in their study. The higher resolution cameras included with most newer smart phones were sufficient as long as there was good lighting.

This means that if you place a higher quality picture of yourself on your Facebook page, and that picture shows your fingertips, you may be providing all of the information needed to create a fraudulent biometric identity to anyone who is interested in stealing it.

So the next time someone wants to take your picture, think twice before you decide to make a gestureâ€¦ any gestureâ€¦ using your fingers. Whether you are flashing a peace sign or putting up devils horns behind someone else's head, you may want to show only the back of your hand. Better yet, maybe just keep your hands at your side and smile for the camera.
byJim Malmberg
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