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Earlier this month, a number of photographs of high-profile celebrities appeared on the anonymous web forum 4chan. These photographs were highly explicit, clearly of a private nature and, shortly after they appeared online, it was revealed that they had been obtained by a hacker who had acquired them from the relevant individual's iCloud accounts. What followed was, understandably, one of the most pervasive and widely-read stories of the year so far.

Yes, many of the column inches dedicated to the story focused on the fact that the images in question featured celebrities in various stages of undress but, beyond the tabloid's, pertinent questions were asked; not least why a company of Apple's stature could allow its customers data to be compromised and, more importantly, just how damaging could it be if someone gained access to a person's iCloud account?

As discussed above, it would appear that the individual/s that hacked the accounts of the celebrities affected collected only sensitive photos and, whilst this will undoubtedly have greatly embarrassed and angered those concerned, it is fair to say that they could have done far greater harm to the account's owners if they were so inclined.

Once someone has gained access to another person's iCloud account, a wealth of information will be made available to them, much of which could be exploited and used to steal an individual's identity. This includes the user's call history, their contact list, text messages that they have received and sent, addresses that they have searched for in iMaps and, as we know, their photos. More worrying still is the fact that this will include data that the user has since deleted. Effectively, following an account having been compromised, a wealth of data is made available to the hacker. Whilst this information could then be used in order to steal someone's identity, another feature could be used to engage in behaviour that is far more sinister still.

The Find my iPhone feature built into all phones in order to assist owners who lose or, somewhat ironically, have their phones stolen could be used by a hacker to track the location of the device thereby tracking the location of the device's owner also. In other words, by hacking a user's iCloud account, unscrupulous individuals could stalk said user – a very worrying thought indeed!

Fortunately, Apple has confirmed that they will be upgrading their online security as a result of this breach. As for whether or not these measures will be sufficient, however, only time will tell.