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## Secure Biometrics:Concepts, Authentication Architectures & Challenges

Rane, S.; Wang, Y.; Draper, S.C.; Ishwar, P.

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### Abstract

BIOMETRICS are an important and widely used class of methods for identity verification and access control. Biometrics are attractive because they are inherent properties of an individual. They need not be remembered like passwords, and are not easily lost or forged like identifying documents. At the same time, biometrics are fundamentally noisy and irreplaceable. There are always slight variations among the measurements of a given biometric, and, unlike passwords or identification numbers, biometrics are derived from physical characteristics that cannot easily be changed. The proliferation of biometric usage raises critical privacy and security concerns that, due to the noisy nature of biometrics, cannot be addressed using standard cryptographic methods. In this article we present an overview of "secure biometrics", also referred to as "biometric template protection", an emerging class of methods that address these concerns.

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# Secure Biometrics: Concepts, Authentication Architectures & Challenges

Shantanu Rane, Ye Wang, Stark C. Draper, and Prakash Ishwar

**B**IOMETRICS are an important and widely used class of methods for identity verification and access control. Biometrics are attractive because they are inherent properties of an individual. They need not be remembered like passwords, and are not easily lost or forged like identifying documents. At the same time, biometrics are fundamentally noisy and irreplaceable. There are always slight variations among the measurements of a given biometric, and, unlike passwords or identification numbers, biometrics are derived from physical characteristics that cannot easily be changed. The proliferation of biometric usage raises critical privacy and security concerns that, due to the noisy nature of biometrics, cannot be addressed using standard cryptographic methods. In this article we present an overview of “secure biometrics”, also referred to as “biometric template protection”, an emerging class of methods that address these concerns.

The traditional method of accommodating measurement variation among biometric samples is to store the enrollment sample on the device, and to match it against a probe provided by the individual being authenticated. Consequently, much effort has been invested in the development of pattern recognition algorithms for biometric matching that can accommodate these variations. Unfortunately, this approach has a serious flaw: An attacker who steals or hacks into the device gains access to the enrollment biometric. In conventional password-based systems, this type of problem can be mitigated by storing a non-invertible cryptographic hash of the password rather than the password itself. However, cryptographic hashes are extremely sensitive to noise, and thus incompatible with the inherent variability of biometric measurements. Therefore, the above approach used for securing passwords is ill-suited to biometric security.

The loss of an enrollment biometric to an attacker is a security hazard because it may allow the attacker to gain unauthorized access to facilities, sensitive documents, and the finances of the victim. Further, since a biometric signal is tied to unique physical characteristics and the identity of an individual, a leaked biometric can result in a significant loss of privacy. In this article, we refer

to a *security* breach as an event wherein an attacker successfully accesses a device. We refer to a *privacy* breach as an event wherein an attacker partially, or completely, determines the victim’s biometric. Security and privacy breaches represent distinct kinds of attacks. Significantly, the occurrence of one does not necessarily imply the occurrence of the other.

Addressing these challenges demands new approaches to the design and deployment of biometric systems. We refer to these as “secure biometric” systems. Research into secure biometrics has drawn on advances in the fields of signal processing [1–6], error correction coding [7–11], information theory [12–15] and cryptography [16–18]. Four main architectures dominate: fuzzy commitment, secure sketch, secure multiparty computation, and cancelable biometrics. The first two architectures, fuzzy commitment and secure sketch provide information-theoretic guarantees for security and privacy, using error correcting codes or signal embeddings. The third architecture attempts to securely determine the distance between enrollment and probe biometrics, using computationally secure cryptographic tools such as garbled circuits and homomorphic encryption. The final architecture, cancelable biometrics, involves distorting the biometric signal at enrollment with a secret user-specific transformation, and storing the distorted biometric at the access control device.

It is the aim of this article to provide a tutorial overview of these architectures. To see the key commonalities and differences among the architectures, it is useful to first consider a generalized framework for secure biometrics, composed of biometric encoding and decision-making stages. For this framework, we can precisely characterize performance in terms of metrics for accuracy, security and privacy. Furthermore, it is vital to understand the statistical properties and constraints that must be imposed on biometric feature extraction algorithms, in order to make them viable in a secure biometric system. Having presented the general framework, and specified constraints on feature extraction, we can then cast the four architectures listed above as specific realizations of the generalized framework, allowing the reader to compare and contrast them with

ease. The discussion of single biometric access control systems naturally leads to questions about multi-system deployment, i.e., the situation in which a single user has enrolled his or her biometric on multiple devices. An analysis of the multi-system case reveals interesting privacy-security tradeoffs that have been only minimally analyzed in the literature. One of our goals is to highlight interesting open problems related to multi-system deployment in particular and secure biometrics in general, and to spur new research in the field.

## I. A UNIFIED SECURE BIOMETRICS FRAMEWORK

Secure biometrics may be viewed as a problem of designing a suitable *encoding* procedure for transforming an enrollment biometric signal into data to be stored on the authentication device, and of designing a matching *decoding* procedure for combining the probe biometric signal with the stored data to generate an *authentication decision*. This system is depicted in Figure 1. Any analysis of the privacy and security tradeoffs in secure biometrics must take into account not only authentication accuracy but also the information leakage and the possibility of attacking the system when the stored data and/or keys are compromised. At the outset, note that in authentication, a probe biometric is matched against a particular enrollment of one claimed user. This differs from identification, in which a probe biometric is matched against each enrollment in the database to discover the identity associated with the probe. These are distinct but closely related tasks. For clarity, our development focuses only on authentication.

### A. Biometric Signal Model

Alice has a biometric — such as a fingerprint, palmprint, iris, face, gait, or ECG — given by nature, that we denote as  $\Lambda_0$ . To enroll at the access control device, Alice provides a noisy measurement  $\Lambda_E$  of her underlying biometric  $\Lambda_0$ . From this noisy measurement, a feature extraction algorithm extracts a feature vector, which we denote by  $\mathbf{A}$ . At the time of authentication, Alice provides a noisy measurement  $\Lambda_P$ , from which is extracted a probe biometric feature vector  $\mathbf{B}$ . In an attack scenario, an adversary may provide a biometric signal  $\Phi$ , from which is extracted a biometric feature vector  $\mathbf{C}$ . We note here that most theoretical analyses of secure biometric systems omit the feature extraction step and directly work with  $(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B}, \mathbf{C})$  as an abstraction of the biometric signals. For example, it is convenient to analyze models in which  $(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B}, \mathbf{C})$  are binary vectors with certain statistical properties. We will elaborate on the feature extraction process in an upcoming section, but

for the exposition of the system framework, we directly use the feature vectors  $\mathbf{A}$  and  $\mathbf{B}$  (or  $\mathbf{C}$ ) rather than the underlying biometric signals  $\Lambda_E$ ,  $\Lambda_P$  and  $\Phi$ .

### B. Enrollment

Consider a general model in which a potentially randomized encoding function  $F(\cdot)$  takes the enrollment feature vector  $\mathbf{A}$  as input and outputs stored data  $\mathbf{S} \in \mathcal{S}$ ,  $|\mathcal{S}| < \infty$ , which is retained by the access control device. Optionally, a key vector  $\mathbf{K} \in \mathcal{K}$ ,  $|\mathcal{K}| < \infty$ , may also be produced and returned to the user, or alternatively, the user can select the key  $\mathbf{K}$  and provide it as another input to the encoding function. The arrow in Figure 1(a) is shown as bi-directional to accommodate these two possibilities, viz., the system generates a unique key for the user, or the user selects a key to be applied in the encoding. The enrollment operation  $(\mathbf{S}, \mathbf{K}) = F(\mathbf{A})$  (or  $\mathbf{S} = F(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{K})$  in the case where the key is user specified) can be described, without loss of generality, by the conditional distribution  $P_{\mathbf{S}, \mathbf{K} | \mathbf{A}}$ , which can be further decomposed into various forms and special cases (e.g.,  $P_{\mathbf{S} | \mathbf{A}, \mathbf{K}} P_{\mathbf{K} | \mathbf{A}}$ ,  $P_{\mathbf{S} | \mathbf{A}, \mathbf{K}} P_{\mathbf{K}}$ ,  $P_{\mathbf{K} | \mathbf{A}, \mathbf{S}} P_{\mathbf{S} | \mathbf{A}}$ , etc.) to specify the exact structure of how the key and stored data are generated from each other and the enrollment biometric. Depending upon the physical realization of the system, the user may be required to remember the key or carry the key  $\mathbf{K}$ , e.g., on a smart card. Such systems are called *two-factor* systems because both the “factors”, namely the biometric and the key, are needed for authentication and are typically independent of each other. In this model, *keyless* (or single-factor) systems follow in a straightforward way by setting  $\mathbf{K}$  to be null; these do not require separate key storage (such as a smart card).

### C. Authentication

As shown in Figure 1(a), a legitimate user attempts to authenticate by providing a probe feature vector  $\mathbf{B}$  and the key  $\mathbf{K}$ . An adversary, on the other hand, provides a stolen or artificially synthesized feature vector  $\mathbf{C}$  and a stolen or artificially synthesized key  $\mathbf{J}$ . Let  $(\mathbf{D}, \mathbf{L})$  denote the (biometric, key) pair that is provided during the authentication step. We write

$$(\mathbf{D}, \mathbf{L}) := \begin{cases} (\mathbf{B}, \mathbf{K}), & \text{if legitimate,} \\ (\mathbf{C}, \mathbf{J}), & \text{if adversary.} \end{cases}$$

The authentication decision is computed by the binary-valued decoding function  $g(\mathbf{D}, \mathbf{L}, \mathbf{S})$ . In keyless systems, the procedure is similar with  $\mathbf{K}$ ,  $\mathbf{J}$ , and  $\mathbf{L}$  removed from the above description. To keep the development simple, we considered only a single enrollment  $\mathbf{A}$  and a single probe  $\mathbf{D}$  above; in practice, using multiple biometric

measurements during the enrollment or decision phase can improve the authentication accuracy [19].

#### D. Performance Measures

The model explained above provides a generalized framework within which to design, evaluate and implement secure biometric authentication systems. As we shall see later, this framework accommodates several realizations of secure biometrics. It can encapsulate several ways of implementing the encoding and decoding functions, various biometric modalities, and even different kinds of adversaries – computationally unbounded or bounded, possessing side information or not, and so on. Furthermore, in spite of its simplicity, the framework permits us to define precisely all performance measures of interest, including conventional metrics used to measure accuracy, as well as newer metrics needed to assess security and privacy.

Conventionally two metrics are used to measure the matching accuracy of biometric systems. The first is the *False Rejection Rate (FRR)*, which is the probability with which the system rejects a genuine user (the missed detection probability). The second is the *False Acceptance Rate (FAR)* which is the probability that the system authenticates a probe biometric that came from a person different from the enrolled (and claimed) identity. For any given realization of a biometric access control system, there exists a tradeoff between these two quantities as illustrated in Figure 1(b). It is not possible simultaneously to reduce both beyond a fundamental limit governed by the statistical variations of biometric signals across users and measurement noise and uncertainties. The performance of a biometric access control system is typically characterized by its empirical Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) curve which is a plot of the empirical FRR against the empirical FAR. Based on the ROC curve, the performance is sometimes expressed in terms of a single number called the *Equal Error Rate (EER)* which is the operating point at which FAR equals the FRR, as is depicted in Figure 1(b).

In addition to the two conventional metrics discussed above, in the following we present three performance measures that allow us to characterize the privacy, security and storage requirements of a secure biometric system.

The first is *Privacy Leakage*. This is the number of bits of information leaked about the biometric feature vector  $\mathbf{A}$  when an adversary compromises the stored data  $\mathbf{S}$  and/or the secret key  $\mathbf{K}$ . An information theoretic measure of privacy leakage is mutual information  $I(\mathbf{A}; \mathbf{V}) = H(\mathbf{A}) - H(\mathbf{A}|\mathbf{V})$ , where  $\mathbf{V}$  represents the

information compromised by the adversary and may equal  $\mathbf{S}$ ,  $\mathbf{K}$ , or the pair  $(\mathbf{S}, \mathbf{K})$ . The two terms on the right hand side are, respectively, the entropy of  $\mathbf{A}$  and the conditional entropy (or “equivocation”) of  $\mathbf{A}$  given the leaked data  $\mathbf{V}$ . As  $H(\mathbf{A})$  quantifies the number of bits required to specify  $\mathbf{A}$  and  $H(\mathbf{A}|\mathbf{V})$  quantifies the remaining uncertainty about  $\mathbf{A}$  given knowledge of  $\mathbf{V}$ , the mutual information is the *reduction* in uncertainty about  $\mathbf{A}$  given  $\mathbf{V}$  [20]. Mutual information (or equivalently, equivocation) provides a strong characterization of the privacy leakage [12–14, 21].

The accuracy with which an adversary can *reconstruct* the original biometric is often used as an additional performance metric [22], and sometimes as a loose proxy for privacy leakage. Driving privacy leakage (as defined by mutual information) to zero necessarily maximizes the adversary’s reconstruction distortion. This is due to the data processing inequality and the rate-distortion theorem of information theory [20]. However, for many commonly encountered distortion functions that measure the average distortion per component, e.g., the normalized Hamming distortion, the reverse is not true, i.e., maximizing the adversary’s distortion does not necessarily minimize privacy leakage in terms of mutual information. To illustrate how this could happen, consider a scheme which reveals to the adversary that the user’s (binary) biometric feature vector is equally likely to be one of two possibilities: the true vector or its bit-wise negation. The adversary’s best guess would get all bits correct with probability 0.5 and all incorrect with probability 0.5. Thus, under a normalized Hamming distortion measure, the expected distortion would be 0.5, i.e., the same as guessing each bit at random. However, while the expected distortion is maximum, all but one bit of information about the biometric is leaked. The mutual information measure would indicate this high rate of privacy leakage. Thus reconstruction distortion cannot be a proxy for privacy leakage although the two are loosely related as discussed above.

The second performance measure is the *Successful Attack Rate (SAR)*. This is the probability with which a system authenticates an adversary instead of the victim, where the adversary’s knowledge has been enhanced by some side information consisting of the victim’s biometric, stored data, and/or key. The SAR is always greater than or equal to the nominal FAR of the system. This follows because the side information can only improve the adversary’s ability to falsely authenticate.

The above definition of security is different from that used in some of the literature. Our definition of SAR is specific to the authentication problem, quantifying the probability that an adversary gains access to the

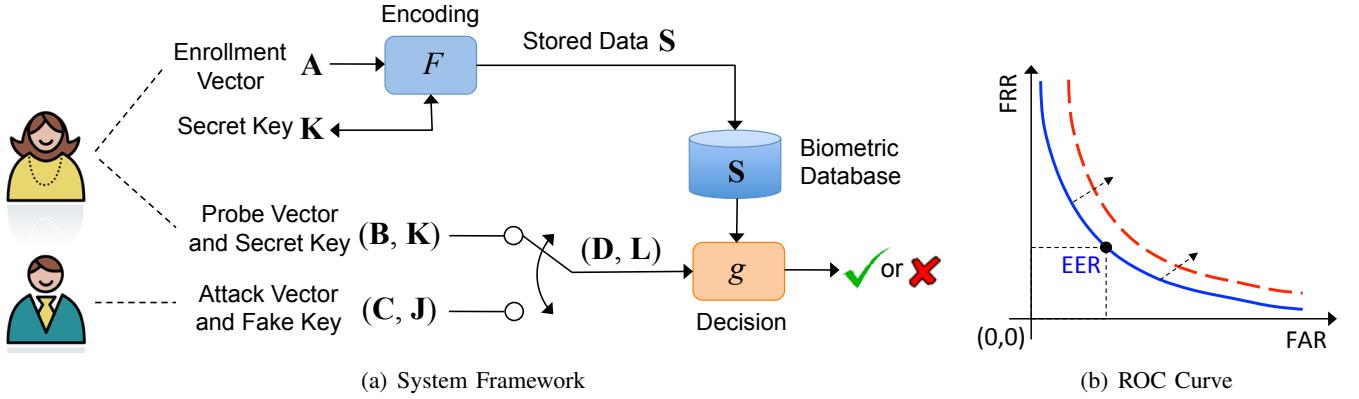


Fig. 1. (a) Secure biometrics involves encoding the biometric features before storage at the access control device. The authentication decision checks whether the probe biometric is consistent with the stored data. For clarity, the figure depicts the feature vectors extracted from biometrics, rather than the underlying biometric measurements. (b) Typical tradeoffs between FAR and FRR in biometric-based authentication systems. In general, incorporating security and privacy constraints comes at the price of diminished accuracy, which is manifested as a shift of the nominal ROC curve (blue) away from the axes (red).

system. In other settings, security has been related to the difficulty faced by an adversary in discovering a secret that is either a function of the biometric, or is chosen at enrollment, see, e.g., [12–14]. The motivation for using SAR as the security metric in our development is two-fold. First, as in [12–14], it can capture the difficulty of discovering the user’s secret and thereby gaining access to the system. Second, it is conceptually related to the FAR; the SAR defaults to the FAR when the adversary has no side information. Given a choice of two systems, and knowledge of the possible attack scenarios, a system designer may prefer the system with the higher FAR if it provides the lower SAR of the two.

The third and final measure is the *Storage Requirement* per biometric. This is the number of bits needed to store  $\mathbf{S}$  and, in two-factor systems,  $\mathbf{K}$ . For some secure biometrics realizations, this can be much smaller than the number of bits used to represent  $\mathbf{A}$ . For methods involving encryption, this value can be much larger owing to ciphertext expansion. For detailed mathematical definitions of these metrics, we refer the reader to [21].

Unlike the FAR/FRR tradeoff which has been extensively studied, the inter-relationships between privacy leakage, SAR and the FAR/FRR performance are less clearly understood. It is important to realize that privacy leakage and security compromise (quantified by the SAR) characterize distinct adversarial objectives: An adversary may discover the user’s biometric without necessarily being able to break into the system. Alternatively, an adversary may illegally access the system without necessarily being able to discover the user’s biometric.

## II. PROCESSING OF BIOMETRIC SIGNALS

Let us first consider the properties of biometric feature vectors that would ensure good accuracy, i.e., a low FRR and a low FAR. It is often useful to think about biometric variability in terms of communications: any two biometric measurements can be regarded as the input and output of a communication channel. If the measurements are taken from the same user, they will typically be quite similar, and the channel has little “noise”. In contrast, if the measurements come from different users, they will typically be quite different, and the channel noise will be large. A “good” feature extraction algorithm must deliver this type of variability among biometric samples – strong intra-user dependence and weak inter-user dependence. A simple case is binary features where the relationship between feature vectors can be modeled as a binary bit-flipping (“binary-symmetric”) channel. This is depicted in Figure 2 where the crossover probability between feature bits of the same user is small ( $0 < p \ll 0.5$ ), and that between feature bits of different users is large ( $p' \approx 0.5$ ). Smaller feature vectors are also desirable due to lower storage overhead.

In practice, the situation is more complicated: the statistical variation between biometric measurements is user specific, i.e., some users inherently provide more strongly correlated measurements than others [23]. Furthermore, depending upon the feature extraction algorithm, some elements of a feature vector may remain more stable across multiple measurements than others [11]. The statistical variation is typically estimated at the enrollment stage by taking several samples from the individual being enrolled. This allows the system designer to set (possibly user-specific) parameters, e.g., acceptance thresholds, to accommodate the typical varia-

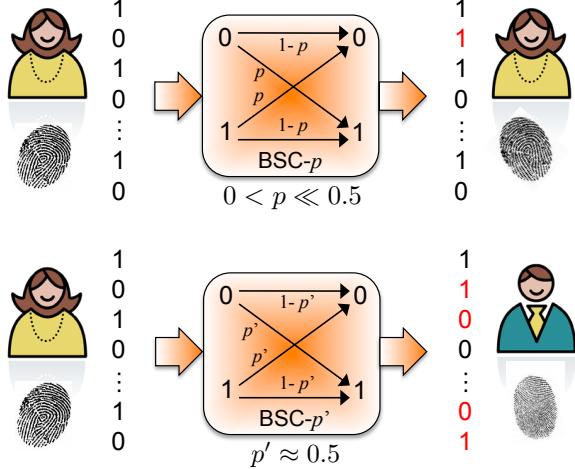


Fig. 2. Binary feature vectors extracted from two biometric measurements can be related by a Binary Symmetric Channel (BSC). A good feature extraction algorithm ensures that the crossover probability is low when the measurements come from the same user and nearly 0.5 if the measurements come from different users.

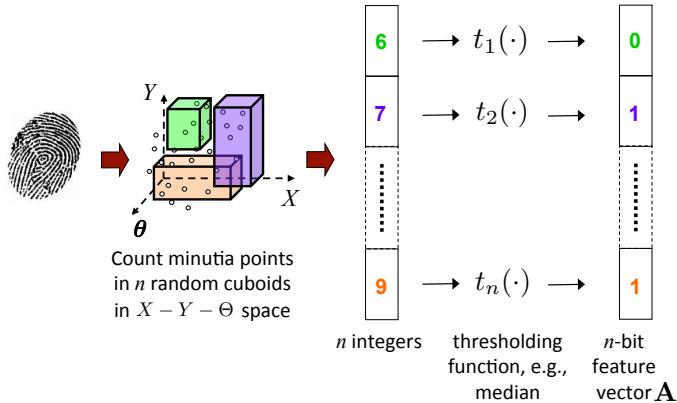


Fig. 3. Each random cuboid in the  $X - Y - \Theta$  space contributes one bit toward an  $n$ -bit binary feature vector. A thresholding function converts the  $n$ -length integer vector of minutiae counts to a binary feature vector. An example of a threshold for each cuboid is the median of minutiae counts computed over all enrollment fingerprints of all users in the database. This ensures that each cuboid produces a ‘0’ bit for half of the fingerprints in the database, and a ‘1’ bit for the other half. This is desirable because it makes a feature bit maximally hard to guess given no other side information [10].

tion between enrollment and probe biometrics. Biometric feature extraction is a rich area of research, and several algorithms have been proposed for extracting discriminable information from fingerprints [24], irises [25, 26], faces [27–29], speech [30] and more exotic biometric modalities such as gait [31, 32] and ECGs [33].

In addition to FRR/FAR considerations we can also ask what statistical properties should the features have to guarantee low privacy leakage? In the binary example of Figure 2, it would be desirable to have the value of a bit at position  $i$  in the feature vector be statistically independent of the value of a bit at position  $j$ . This would

ensure that a compromised feature bit does not reveal any information about hitherto uncompromised feature bits. For the same reason, the value of a feature bit in Alice’s feature vector should ideally be independent of the value of any bit in Bob’s feature vector [10]. Designing feature vectors to possess such privacy-preserving properties forces a compromise between discriminability, i.e., the independence of the feature values, and robustness, i.e., the reproducibility of the feature values. This, in turn, affects the accuracy (FRR and FAR) of the system, highlighting the fact that privacy comes at the price of performance.

In secure biometrics, the derived features must satisfy an additional constraint: The operations performed on the features during secure access control protocols must be permissible within the architecture of the encoding and decision modules of Figure 1(a). For instance, minutiae points are the *de facto* standard features for highly accurate fingerprint matching, but they cannot directly be encrypted for use in secure biometric matching, because the mathematics required to model minutiae movement, deletion and insertion — such as factor graphs [34] — are very difficult to implement in the encrypted domain. In response to this problem, biometrics researchers have used methods that extract equal-length feature vectors from biometrics [35–38]. The idea behind this is to turn biometric matching into a problem of computing distance (e.g., Euclidean, Hamming, or Manhattan), an operation that is feasible within secure biometric architectures. Figure 3 shows an example in which a fingerprint impression is transformed into a binary feature vector that is suitable for Hamming distance-based matching, and amenable to many secure biometrics architectures [10]. It must be noted that imposing constraints on the feature space makes secure architectures feasible, but forces the designer to accept a degradation in the FAR-versus-FRR tradeoff in comparison to that which would have been achieved in an unconstrained setup. This degradation in the tradeoff is depicted in the ROC curve in Figure 1(b). As an example, by fusing scores from multiple sophisticated fingerprint matchers, it is possible for conventional fingerprint access control systems to achieve an EER below 0.5% [39]. In contrast, to the best of our knowledge, no secure fingerprint biometric scheme has yet been reported with an EER below 1%.

### III. SECURE BIOMETRICS ARCHITECTURES

We now turn to methods for converting biometric features into “secure” signals that can be stored in the biometric database, to be used for authentication. We briefly cover the four most prominent classes mentioned

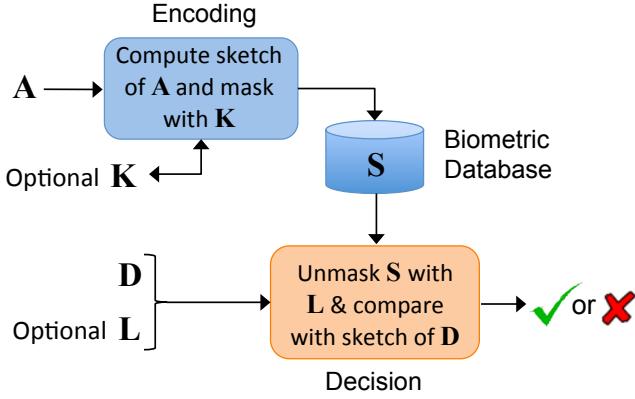


Fig. 4. In secure sketch systems, encoding involves deriving a “sketch” that reveals little or no information about the underlying biometric. The decision function involves determining whether the probe feature vector is consistent with the sketch derived from the enrollment feature vector. A two-factor implementation using a secret key in addition to the biometric features is also possible.

in the introduction, treating each as a specific manifestation of the unified framework of Figure 1(a).

#### A. Secure Sketches

A secure sketch-based system derives information – called a sketch or helper data  $\mathbf{S}$  – from Alice’s enrollment biometric  $\mathbf{A}$  and stores it in the access control database [40], as shown in Figure 4. The decision function tests whether the probe biometric  $\mathbf{D}$  is consistent with the sketch and grants access when it is. The sketch  $\mathbf{S}$  should be constructed so that it reveals little or no information about  $\mathbf{A}$ .

Secure sketches can be generated in several ways, for example, by computing a small number of quantized random projections of a biometric feature vector [4]. A particularly instructive method – one that shows the connections between secure sketches and the fuzzy commitment architecture – employs error correcting codes (ECCs). The secure sketch is constructed as a syndrome of an ECC with parity check matrix  $\mathbf{H}$ , given by  $\mathbf{S} = \mathbf{H}\mathbf{A}$ . The idea is that a legitimate probe biometric  $\mathbf{D} = \mathbf{B}$  would be a slightly error prone version of  $\mathbf{A}$ . Therefore, authentication can be accomplished by attempting to decode  $\mathbf{A}$  given  $\mathbf{D}$  and  $\mathbf{S}$ . Secure sketches constructed in this way provide information theoretic security and privacy guarantees that are functions of the dimension of the ECC. They also suggest an interesting interpretation in which  $\mathbf{S}$  is a Slepian-Wolf encoded version of  $\mathbf{A}$  [41]. Thus, biometric authentication is akin to Slepian-Wolf decoding [10]. This observation paves the way for implementations based on graphical models, e.g., belief propagation decoding coupled with appropriately augmented LDPC code graphs [9].

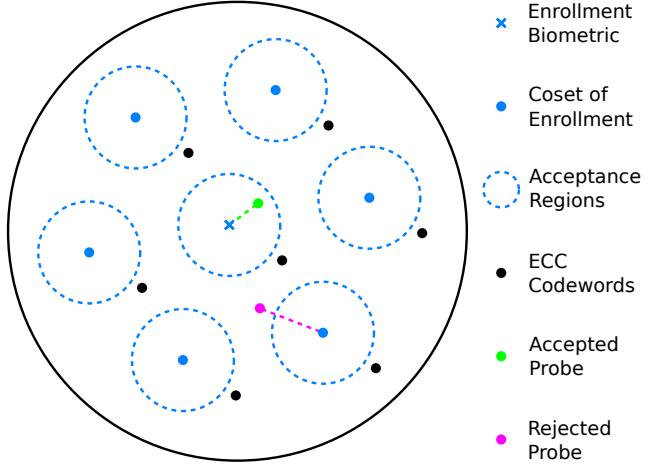


Fig. 5. An abstract representation of the ECC-based secure sketch authentication system, depicting the acceptance regions in relation to the enrollment biometric and its coset.

A natural question to ask here is: “How does the decision box know that it has correctly decoded  $\mathbf{A}$  given  $\mathbf{D}$  and  $\mathbf{S}$ .” In practice, this question is answered by storing a cryptographic hash of  $\mathbf{A}$  on the device along with the stored data  $\mathbf{S}$ . Then, assuming no hash collisions, if the cryptographic hash of the decoded vector matches the stored hash, the device determines that authentication is successful. However, due to the use of a cryptographic hash, this system is only computationally secure and not information-theoretically secure. But, as we will describe, an information-theoretic test for the recovery of  $\mathbf{A}$  can be constructed by considering the geometry of the ECC. The result is an information-theoretically secure solution that retains the FAR/FRR performance of the design that uses cryptographic hashes. This leads to an interesting coding theory exercise, the details of which are worked out in the sidebar: “A Linear ECC-based Secure Sketch Authentication System”. For an implementation of an ECC-based secure sketch-based system see [11]. There, using an irregular LDPC code of length 150 bits, an EER of close to 3% is achieved.

#### Begin Sidebar Inset #A: A linear ECC-based secure sketch authentication system

The underlying geometry of a secure sketch system based on a binary linear ECC is illustrated in Figure 5. For simplicity, we focus on keyless systems, i.e., ones that do not involve the secret key  $\mathbf{K}$ . We consider binary biometric sequences  $\mathbf{A}$  of length  $n$ . The black circle bounds the set of all length- $n$  binary words. The black dots represent  $2^{n-m}$  codewords that correspond to the null space of an  $m \times n$  binary parity check matrix  $\mathbf{H}$  of rank  $m$ .

**Enrollment via ECC:** The blue cross (arbitrarily placed at the center) indicates the enrollment biometric feature vector  $\mathbf{A}$ . Enrollment consists of mapping  $\mathbf{A}$  to its  $m$ -bit syndrome  $\mathbf{S} := \mathbf{H}\mathbf{A}$  where operations are in the binary field  $\mathbb{F}_2$ . The set of  $2^{n-m}$  binary words that are mapped by  $\mathbf{H}$  to  $\mathbf{S}$  form the enrollment coset, of which  $\mathbf{A}$  is a member. The blue dots represent the other members of the coset that, together with the blue cross, form the entire enrollment coset. Knowledge of stored information  $S$  is equivalent to knowledge of the members of this coset and hence is available to the decision module.

**Authentication:** The first step in authenticating a probe vector  $\mathbf{D}$ , is to perform syndrome decoding to recover  $\hat{\mathbf{A}}$ , the estimate of the enrollment vector. This is the element of the coset specified by  $\mathbf{S}$  that is closest to  $\mathbf{D}$  in Hamming distance. The probe is accepted as authentic if the normalized Hamming distance between this estimate and the probe is less than a threshold  $\tau$ , i.e.,  $\frac{1}{n}d_H(\hat{\mathbf{A}}, \mathbf{D}) < \tau$ , where  $\tau \in (p, 0.5)$ ; otherwise the probe is rejected. Thus, the system accepts a probe if it is within a certain distance of the coset of  $\mathbf{S}$ , and otherwise rejects it. In Figure 5, each blue dashed circle represents the boundary of an acceptance region associated with a single coset member that is produced by syndrome decoding and the threshold test. The overall acceptance region is the union of these individual acceptance regions. The green dot is an example of a probe vector  $\mathbf{D}$  that will be accepted and the magenta dot an example of a  $\mathbf{D}$  that will be rejected.

**FRR:** The probe  $\mathbf{D} = \mathbf{B}$  of a legitimate user is a noisy version of  $\mathbf{A}$ . Ideally this is equivalent to the output of a BSC- $p$  channel with input  $\mathbf{A}$ , so that the bits of the noise vector  $(\mathbf{A} \oplus \mathbf{B})$  are independent Bernoulli- $p$  random variables independent of  $\mathbf{A}$ . For any  $\mathbf{A}$ , the FRR is equal to the probability that the noise pushes it outside the acceptance region. Since the code is linear, all cosets are translations of the coset of all codewords whose syndrome is zero. Hence the FRR is the same for all  $\mathbf{A}$ . It turns out that  $\mathbf{H}$  can be designed to make FRR exponentially small in  $n$  (for large enough  $n$ ) if (i) the threshold  $\tau \in (p, 0.5)$  and (ii) the rate  $(n-m)/n$  of the ECC is strictly smaller than the capacity of a BSC- $\tau$  channel [21].

**FAR:** An attacker unassisted by any compromised information must pick an attack probe uniformly over the space of all length- $n$  binary words. The FAR is thus given by the ratio of the total volume of the acceptance spheres to the overall volume of the space. Coding

theory tells us that, in high dimensions ( $n \gg 1$ ), if the rate  $(n-m)/n$  of the ECC is strictly smaller than the capacity of a BSC- $\tau$  channel, the coset members can be well-separated and the volume outside of the acceptance spheres can be made to dominate the volume inside them. Thus, the FAR can also be made exponentially small in  $n$  by suitably designing the ECC [21].

**Privacy leakage:** Knowledge of  $\mathbf{S}$  would reveal to an attacker that  $\mathbf{A}$  belongs to the set of  $2^{n-m}$  blue points as opposed to the set of all  $2^n$  binary words. If  $\mathbf{A}$  is equally likely to be any  $n$ -bit word, then this corresponds to an information-theoretic privacy leakage rate (in bits) of  $I(\mathbf{A}; \mathbf{S}) = m = \log_2(\#\text{all binary sequences}) - \log_2(\#\text{blue points})$ .

**SAR:** From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that an attacker who is assisted by compromised information (either  $\mathbf{A}$  or  $\mathbf{S}$ ) can determine the acceptance regions and choose an attack probe that falls within them. Thus, given such side information, the SAR of this system is one. This property, however, is not unique to this system, but a general drawback of *any keyless system* [21]. A two-factor scheme partially addresses this drawback by using a key  $\mathbf{K}$  independent of  $\mathbf{A}$  in the enrollment state, keeping SAR down to the nominal FAR when  $\mathbf{A}$  is compromised. However, revealing  $\mathbf{S}$  to the adversary still results in SAR = 1.

### End Sidebar Inset #A

The preceding explanation assumes a keyless secure sketch architecture. However, as shown in Figure 4, a two-factor implementation is possible by using an independent key  $\mathbf{K}$  provided by the system or chosen by the user. The advantage of the two-factor architecture is enhanced privacy and security, as well as revocability of a compromised secure biometric  $\mathbf{S}$  or key  $\mathbf{K}$ . Specifically, when the adversary discovers either  $\mathbf{K}$  or  $\mathbf{S}$ , but not both, the two-factor system suffers no privacy leakage. Furthermore, when the adversary discovers  $\mathbf{K}$  or the biometric  $\mathbf{A}$ , but not both, the SAR is still no larger than the nominal FAR of the system [21]. In other words, the second factor  $\mathbf{K}$  prevents privacy leakage while preventing degradation in the biometric authentication performance [14]. Lastly, if only either  $\mathbf{K}$  or  $\mathbf{S}$  is compromised by an attacker, the enrollment can be revoked by discarding the other factor. The user can then refresh their enrollment without any security or privacy degradation. The penalty of two-factor system is a loss of convenience, since the user must either memorize  $\mathbf{K}$  or carry it on a smart card.

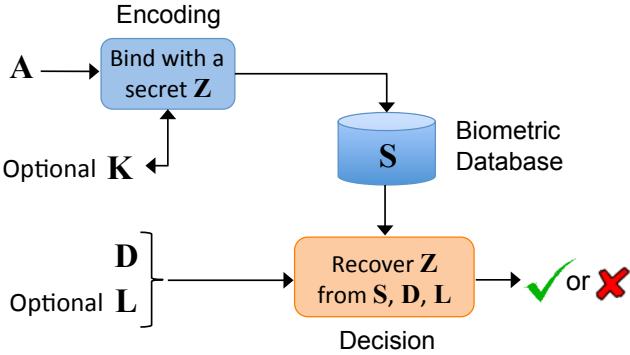


Fig. 6. In fuzzy commitment, encoding involves binding the biometric features to a randomly generated vector  $Z$  resulting in stored data  $S$ . The decision module checks whether  $Z$  is exactly recovered using the probe feature vector and the stored data. A two-factor realization with a user-specific key in addition to the biometric feature is also possible.

### B. Fuzzy Commitment

Fuzzy commitment involves binding a secret message to the enrollment biometric which can later be recovered with a legitimate probe biometric to perform authentication [7, 8]. As depicted in Figure 6, Alice binds her biometric feature vector  $A$  to a randomly generated vector  $Z$ , producing the data  $S$  which is stored in a database as the secure biometric. Again, the encoding function should ensure that  $S$  leaks little or no information about  $A$  or  $Z$ . To perform authentication, a user claiming to be Alice provides a probe biometric feature vector  $D$  and the device attempts to recover  $Z$ . Access is granted only when there is exact recovery of the message  $Z$ , which would happen only if  $D$  is sufficiently similar to  $A$ .

There are several ways to bind a secret message to the enrollment biometric. One such method uses quantization index modulation (QIM) [42], in which the biometric features are quantized in such a way that the choice of the quantizer is driven by the secret message [43]. Another method uses error correcting codes. We explain this ECC embodiment below because it clarifies the basic concepts of fuzzy commitment using familiar ideas from channel coding. Assuming that all vectors are binary, consider a simple example wherein the secure biometric is computed as  $S = G^T Z \oplus A$ , where  $G$  is the generator matrix of an ECC. During authentication, the access control device receives the probe vector  $D$  and computes  $S \oplus D$  which results in a noisy codeword. The noise is contributed by the difference between  $A$  and  $D$ . Then, using classical ECC decoding, the device attempts to decode the random message  $Z$  and allows access only if it is successful. The ECC-based implementation provides concrete information theoretic guarantees of privacy and security depending upon the parameters of the selected

ECC. In fact, in terms of the FRR, FAR, privacy leakage, and SAR this ECC-based construction is equivalent to the ECC-based secure sketch construction discussed earlier [21]. They are not identical however, as the storage requirement of fuzzy commitment is generally greater than that of secure sketch.

An alternative way of understanding the ECC-based implementation of fuzzy commitment is to view it as a method of extracting a secret  $Z$  by means of polynomial interpolation [7, 8]. Suppose that the decoder is given a large constellation of candidate feature points (vectors) containing a few genuine points and a large number of “chaff” points, generated for the purpose of hiding the relevant points. The secret can be recovered only by interpolating a specific polynomial that passes through the relevant feature points for the user being tested. It is inefficient to perform polynomial interpolation by brute force. Fortunately, polynomial interpolation can be efficiently accomplished by ECC decoding, for example, Reed-Solomon decoding using the Berlekamp-Massey algorithm [44]. This realization has inspired many implementations of fuzzy commitment, primarily for fingerprints, where polynomial interpolation is applied to a collection of genuine and chaff points constructed from locations and orientations of fingerprint minutiae [1, 2, 5, 6]. An example implementation of such a fuzzy commitment scheme appears in [2], wherein a (511,19) BCH code is employed for polynomial interpolation; experiments show that when the degree of the interpolated polynomial is increased, the matching becomes more stringent, reducing the FAR, but increasing the FRR.

Based on the relationships between the ECC-based constructions discussed so far, it becomes clear that the fuzzy commitment is closely related to the secure sketches. In fact, it is possible to show that if a secure sketch scheme is given, it can be used to construct a fuzzy commitment scheme [40]. As explained in the case of secure sketch, in practical systems, a cryptographic hash of  $Z$  is stored on the device along with  $S$ , to verify correct recovery of  $Z$ . Furthermore, a two-factor scheme that utilizes a key  $K$  independent of the enrollment vector  $A$  can similarly improve security and privacy performance, as well as enable revocability.

### C. Biometrics as Secure Multiparty Computation

This architecture involves finding the distance between enrollment and probe biometric features in the encrypted domain. There has been intense research activity recently on accomplishing this using public-key homomorphic cryptosystems. These allow an operation on the underlying plaintexts — such as addition or multiplication

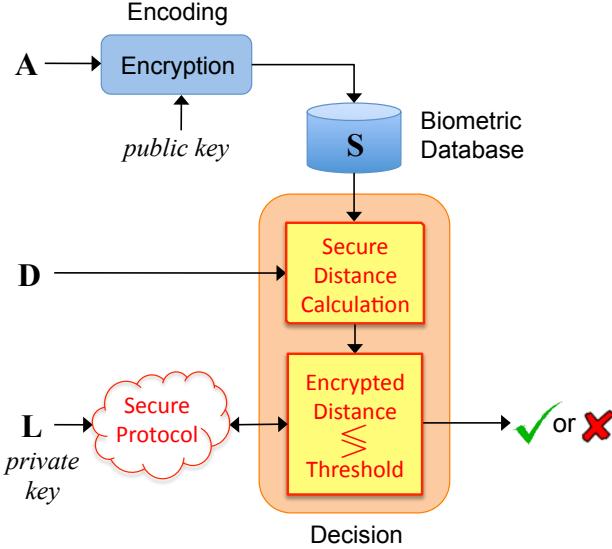


Fig. 7. In biometrics based on multiparty computation, enrollment involves encrypting the biometric features. The authentication decision involves encrypted-domain distance computation and followed by a comparison protocol between the claimant, who possesses a secret decryption key  $\mathbf{L}$  and the database server which only sees encrypted data.

— to be carried out by performing a suitable operation on the ciphertexts. To fix ideas, consider the following simple example. Suppose the length- $n$  enrollment feature vector  $\mathbf{A}$  is encrypted elementwise using an additively homomorphic cryptosystem and the resulting ciphertext  $\mathbf{S}$  is stored in the database of the access control system, as shown in Figure 7. An additively homomorphic cryptosystem, e.g., the Paillier cryptosystem [45], satisfies  $E(a)E(b) = E(a + b)$  for integers  $a, b$  and encryption function  $E(\cdot)$ .

A realistic assumption in our simple example is that the encryption key is public, while the decryption key  $\mathbf{L}$  is available only to the individual attempting to authenticate. Thus, by construction, this secure biometrics architecture results in two-factor systems, in which the first factor is a biometric token and the second factor is a privately held decryption key for a homomorphic cryptosystem. Suppose a user claiming to be Alice (say) provides a probe feature vector  $\mathbf{D}$  for authentication. Since the encryption key is public, the device can encrypt elements of probe biometric  $\mathbf{D}$  and compute the squared distance between  $\mathbf{A}$  and  $\mathbf{D}$  in the encrypted domain using the additively homomorphic property as:

$$\begin{aligned} & E\left(\sum_{i=1}^n a_i^2\right) E\left(\sum_{i=1}^n d_i^2\right) \prod_{i=1}^n E(a_i)^{-2d_i} \\ &= E\left(\sum_{i=1}^n (a_i - d_i)^2\right). \end{aligned}$$

The device then executes a privacy-preserving comparison protocol with the user to be authenticated to determine whether the distance is below a threshold. The protocol ensures that the claimant does not discover the threshold, while neither the claimant nor the device discovers the actual value of the distance or any of the  $a_i$ . If the distance is below the threshold, access is granted. Clearly, the claimant — whether Alice or an adversary — must use the correct decryption key, otherwise the protocol will generate garbage values.

The example above is meant to illustrate the basic concepts of secure biometrics based on multiparty computation. Many extensions of the above scheme have been studied, all of which involve some form of privacy-preserving nearest neighbor computation [16, 17, 46, 47]. The protocols apply a combination of homomorphic encryption and garbled circuits. The latter is especially useful in the final authentication step, i.e., performing an encrypted-domain comparison of the distance between the enrollment and probe biometrics against a predetermined threshold. The distance measures need not be restricted to Euclidean distance; secure biometric comparisons based on Hamming distance and Manhattan ( $\ell_1$ ) distance have also been realized. Privacy-preserving nearest-neighbor protocols such as these have been proposed for various biometric modalities, for instance, face images [18], fingerprints [17] and irises [16]. For further details and analysis of the steps involved in the cryptographic protocols for biometric authentication, we refer the reader to a recently published survey article [48].

Privacy and security in these methods depend on proper protocol design and key management to ensure that the attacker does not gain access to the decryption keys. Privacy and security guarantees are computational, not information-theoretic, i.e., they rely on the unproven hardness of problems such as factorization of large numbers, the quadratic residuosity problem [45], or the discrete logarithm problem [49]. In other words, if Alice's decryption key is discovered by an adversary, then the system becomes vulnerable to a wide variety of attacks. Depending upon his computational resources, the adversary can now query the system using several (possibly synthetic) candidate biometrics until access is granted by the system, thereby resulting in a successful attack. Further, the adversary gains a reasonable proxy biometric vector to be used in the future to impersonate Alice. Even though it is difficult to give concrete expressions for the SAR and the privacy leakage for such a system, it is clear that a compromised decryption key will significantly increase both the SAR and the privacy leakage.

This architecture requires the database server to store

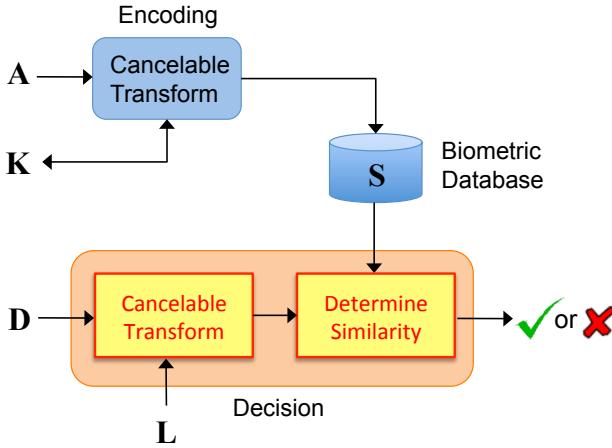


Fig. 8. In cancelable biometrics, encoding involves applying a secret distorting transform indexed by a key  $K$  to generate the stored data  $S$ . The decision function involves applying a distorting transform, indexed by a key  $L$ , to the probe biometric  $D$  and determining whether the result is sufficiently similar to  $S$ .

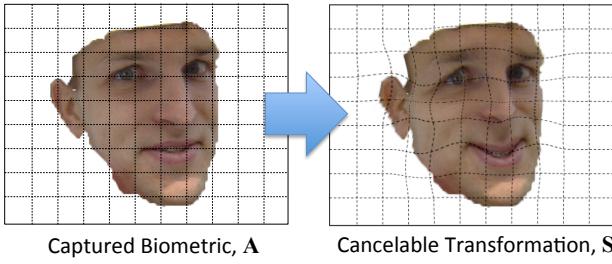


Fig. 9. An example of a cancelable transformation of a face image. If the stored data  $S$  is known to have been compromised, the system administrator can revoke it, and store a different transformation as the new enrollment.

encryptions of biometric features, therefore the storage cost is high owing to ciphertext expansion. This is because of the large key sizes used in the privacy-preserving protocols; typical values are 1024 or 2048 bits [48]. The computational complexity is also much higher than the other architectures due to the high overhead of interactive encrypted-domain protocols.

#### D. Cancelable Biometrics

Cancelable biometrics refers to a class of techniques in which the enrollment biometric signal is intentionally distorted before it is stored in the biometric database [50]. This architecture is depicted in Figure 8. The distorting function is repeatable, so that it can be applied again to the probe biometric, facilitating comparison with the distorted enrollment biometric. Further, the distorting function is intended to be a non-invertible and “revocable” mapping. This means that, if Alice’s stored distorted biometric is known to have been compromised, a system administrator can cancel her enrollment data,

apply a fresh distorting function to Alice’s biometric, and store the result as her new enrollment.

The most popular methods of implementing cancelable biometrics involve non-invertible mappings applied to rectangular tessellations of face or fingerprint images [50], salting of biometric features with a secret key [51], and computing quantized random projections of biometric feature vectors [52]. An example of a cancelable transformation applied to a face image, similar to schemes proposed in [50], is shown in Figure 9. To authenticate in this architecture, a user must provide their biometric measurement along with correct distorting transformation that should be applied to the measurement. Thus, by construction, these are two-factor systems in which the second factor  $K$  is a secret value held by the user which indexes the user-specific deformation, or salting key, or the realization of a random matrix. The secret value can be in the form of a memorized PIN number or a longer key held on a smart card.

As would be expected, the choice of the space of distorting functions affects the accuracy, i.e., the FAR, FRR and EER for the system under consideration. The non-invertibility of the distorting function ensures that an adversary cannot recover the underlying biometric by reading the database of distorted biometrics. In other words, privacy leakage can be low, or zero, depending on the implementation. Most importantly, the secrecy of the chosen distorting function is critical as far as the SAR is concerned. In the various cancelable biometrics implementations, if the chosen non-invertible image transform, or the salting key, or the realization of the random projection matrix are revealed, the adversary’s task is considerably simplified: he needs to find some biometric signal that, when transformed according to the revealed distorting function, yields an output that is similar to the stored enrollment data. This would be sufficient for the adversary to gain unauthorized access.

Though many cancelable transformations have been proposed, formal proofs regarding the accuracy, privacy and security of these methods are elusive. In other words, given a distorted biometric database, we do not always have a quantitative measure of how difficult it is to discover the distorting function and subsequently compromise a legitimate user’s biometric. Further, even given the distorting function, indexed by the secret key  $K$ , we do not always have a quantitative measure of how easy it is to gain unauthorized access to the system. Finally, it is not always possible to quantify the degradation (if any) in the FAR-versus-FRR performance when when a user’s enrollment data is repeatedly revoked and reassigned. Nevertheless, the low implementation complexity, the large variety of distorting transfor-

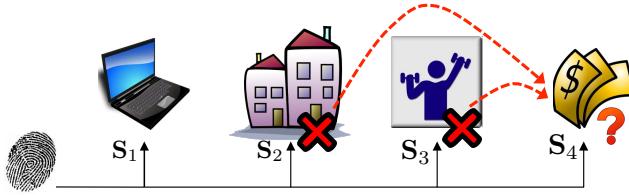


Fig. 10. An adversary can compromise security and privacy by attacking multiple devices at which the victim is enrolled.

tions, and the conceptual simplicity of the administrative tasks needed to revoke compromised templates makes cancelable biometrics an attractive architecture. This is especially true in scenarios in which a user has enrolled the same biometric – e.g., her index finger – at multiple access control devices.

#### IV. MULTIPLE SECURE BIOMETRIC SYSTEMS

We now consider a topic that is extremely important but remains little investigated, namely the implications for security and privacy when a user has enrolled a biometric on several access control devices. As a concrete example, say that Alice has enrolled her fingerprints at her bank, at her gym, on her laptop, and at her apartment complex. In this case, an adversary may first attempt to compromise the systems that have less stringent security requirements, perhaps the apartment complex and/or the gym, as shown in Figure 10. The adversary could then use the information acquired to attack the more sensitive systems; for instance to gain access to Alice’s bank accounts. There is an inherent tension between the need for security from an attack spanning multiple systems and the desire to preserve as much privacy as possible in the face of one or more systems being compromised. We illustrate this tradeoff with a simplified example in the sidebar on “Tradeoff between security and privacy leakage in multiple biometric systems”.

##### Begin Sidebar B: Tradeoff between security and privacy leakage in multiple biometric systems

We use the secure sketch architecture for this discussion. Let the binary ECC used in enrollment be of length four and span a subspace of dimension two. This means there are  $2^2 = 4$  codewords. We consider the  $[4, 2]$  code described by the parity-check matrix  $\mathbf{H}$  where

$$\mathbf{H} = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 \end{bmatrix}.$$

The codewords of this code are  $\mathcal{C} = \{[0000]^T, [1110]^T, [1101]^T, [0011]^T\}$ . As an example of an enrollment let  $\mathbf{A} = [1011]^T$ , yielding as stored data the syndrome  $\mathbf{S} = \mathbf{HA} = [10]^T$ . The set of candidate

biometrics that share this syndrome (coset members) are  $\mathcal{P} = \{[1011]^T, [0101]^T, [0110]^T, [1000]^T\}$ . For simplicity, we set the decision threshold for authentication, i.e., the radius of the blue dashed circles in Figure 5, to be  $\tau = 0$ . In this case, access will be given only if the probe  $\mathbf{D} \in \mathcal{P}$ .

Now, consider three additional secure sketch systems that use  $\mathbf{H}_1$ ,  $\mathbf{H}_2$ ,  $\mathbf{H}_3$ , where  $\mathbf{H}_1 = \mathbf{H}$ ,

$$\mathbf{H}_2 = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix}, \text{ and } \mathbf{H}_3 = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 & 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix}.$$

For the same enrollment biometric  $\mathbf{A} = [1011]^T$ , the syndromes, codewords and cosets are respectively given by  $\mathbf{S}_1 = \mathbf{S}$ ,  $\mathcal{C}_1 = \mathcal{C}$ , and  $\mathcal{P}_1 = \mathcal{P}$ ;  $\mathbf{S}_2 = [11]^T$ ,  $\mathcal{C}_2 = \{[0000]^T, [1101]^T, [0111]^T, [1010]^T\}$ , and  $\mathcal{P}_2 = \{[1011]^T, [0110]^T, [1100]^T, [0001]^T\}$ ;  $\mathbf{S}_3 = [00]^T$  and  $\mathcal{C}_3 = \mathcal{P}_3 = \{[0000]^T, [1100]^T, [1011]^T, [0111]^T\}$ . The geometry of the cosets  $\mathcal{P}_i$  is shown in Figure 11. There is linear dependence between the codes defined by  $\mathbf{H}_1$  and  $\mathbf{H}_2$  because of the shared first row and we observe  $|\mathcal{C}_1 \cap \mathcal{C}_2| = 2 > 1$ . In contrast, the rows of  $\mathbf{H}_1$  and  $\mathbf{H}_3$  are linearly independent and  $|\mathcal{C}_1 \cap \mathcal{C}_3| = 1$  due to only one intersection at the origin,  $[0000]^T$ . As we discuss next, linear independence between the parity check matrices makes the systems more secure, i.e., it reduces the SAR, but increases the potential for privacy leakage.

First consider the SAR. Say that the original system, encoded using  $\mathbf{H}$ , is compromised, i.e., an attacker has learned the stored data  $\mathbf{S}$ . Note that the attacker can gain access to System 1 with probability one, or SAR = 1. This follows because  $\mathbf{H}_1 = \mathbf{H}$ . With knowledge of  $\mathbf{S}$ , the attacker knows  $\mathcal{P}_1 = \mathcal{P}$  and can gain access by uniformly setting  $\mathbf{D}$  to be any member of  $\mathcal{P}$ . Recall that access is granted only if  $\mathbf{D} \in \mathcal{P}$  since we have set  $\tau = 0$ . If, instead of System 1, the attacker wants to access System 2 using the same attack, i.e., by uniformly setting  $\mathbf{D}$  to be any member of  $\mathcal{P}$ . In this case, SAR =  $|\mathcal{P} \cap \mathcal{P}_2| / |\mathcal{P}_2| = 0.5$ . Finally, if the attacker wants to access System 3, using the same strategy will result in an even smaller SAR of 0.25. Note that 0.25 is also the nominal FAR for System 3, and so the attacker does no better than random guessing. The decrease in SAR is due to the decrease in linear dependence between the parity check matrices: reduced dependence implies reduced overlap in the respective cosets.

Next consider the privacy leakage. Compromising the original system meant that the attacker has discovered  $\mathbf{S}$ , thus 2 out of the 4 bits of  $\mathbf{A}$  have been leaked. Suppose that, in addition to the original compromised system, the attacker could pick one more system to compromise. Which system should he choose to obtain the most additional information about  $\mathbf{A}$ ? Observe that if the  $i^{th}$

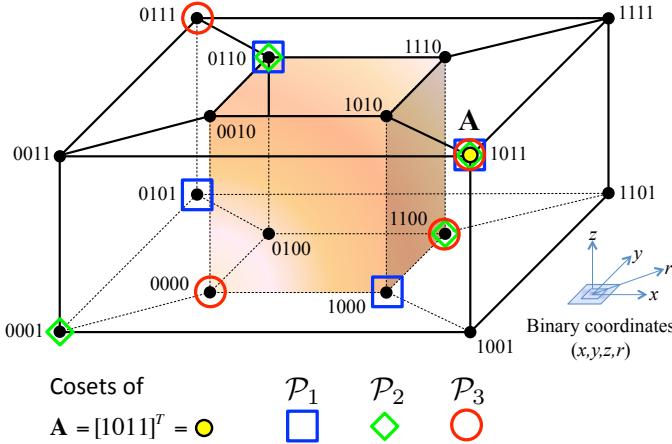


Fig. 11. This figure depicts the three codebook example of the sidebar to illustrate the design tension between maximizing security and privacy. This example concerns the space of 4-bit biometrics, which is illustrated by the 16 points arranged on the vertices of a tesseract. The three cosets (with respect to each code) corresponding to enrollment biometric  $\mathbf{A} = [1011]^T$  are depicted in this figure.

system is chosen for compromise, then  $\mathbf{A} \in \mathcal{P} \cap \mathcal{P}_i$ , so he wants the intersection set to be as small as possible. He learns nothing more about  $\mathbf{A}$  by compromising System 1 since  $|\mathcal{P} \cap \mathcal{P}_1| = |\mathcal{P}| = 4$ . However, as shown in Figure 11, by choosing to compromise System 2 instead, his uncertainty of discovering  $\mathbf{A}$  is reduced by one bit because  $|\mathcal{P} \cap \mathcal{P}_2| = 2$ . Even better, by choosing to compromise System 3, his uncertainty is completely eliminated and he discovers  $\mathbf{A}$  because  $|\mathcal{P} \cap \mathcal{P}_3| = |\{\mathbf{A}\}| = 1$ . Thus, the attacker would benefit the most by compromising the system with the *most* linear independence in its parity check matrix.

#### End Sidebar Inset # B

Using secure sketch for the purpose of illustration, this example shows how linearly independent parity check matrices make the systems most resistant to attack, but also most susceptible to privacy leakage. For simplicity, our example assumed identical enrollment vectors  $\mathbf{A}$  for all systems and a strict threshold  $\tau = 0$ ; the tension between privacy leakage and SAR also exists when the enrollment vectors used by the different systems are noisy versions of each other and when the threshold  $\tau$  is set to some nonzero value [21, 53].

Analysis of linkage attacks can be further complicated when the systems involved use different architectures. For example, one system may use secure sketch, another fuzzy commitment, and a third cancelable biometrics. Even when all systems have the same architecture, it is still a difficult problem to select biometric encoding parameters on each device to achieve a desired tradeoff between security and privacy. In the analysis of [12, 13], information theoretically achievable outer bounds

are derived for the privacy-security region for multiple systems. However, practical code designs that achieve these bounds remain elusive.

It is also natural to ask what advantages and disadvantages result when, in the context of multiple systems, two-factor variants of the biometric architectures are used. For secure sketches and fuzzy commitments, each device can generate a different key then assigned to the user. If the key or the stored data — but not both — is compromised, there is no privacy leakage; the enrollment can be revoked and new keys and new stored data can be assigned. However, a (pessimistic) information theoretic argument shows that the SAR still saturates to one whenever the stored data is compromised, since an unbounded adversary could always find an acceptable probe biometric (and key) through exhaustive search [21]. In the case of secure multiparty computation-based systems, the architecture extends in a straightforward way to multiple systems: the user can simply choose a different public-private key pair at each device. As long as computational privacy guarantees hold, this strategy ensures that the SAR remains low for devices whose decryption keys are not compromised. However, if even one of the private keys is revealed, the privacy leakage could be significant. This is because the adversary can access unencrypted information about the user's biometric feature vector during the private distance computation protocol or during the private comparison protocol. In the case of cancelable biometrics, the user may employ a different non-invertible transformation at each device, thereby ensuring that the SAR remains low for devices whose specific transformation or stored data are not compromised. However, as noted earlier, the privacy leakage in the case of a compromised transformation could be significant.

## V. SUMMARY AND RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

In this article, we have presented the main concepts that underlie secure biometric systems and have described the principal architectures by casting them as realizations of a single, general authentication framework. Our objectives have been, first, to acquaint readers with the differences between secure and traditional biometric authentication; next to familiarize them with the goals, ideas and performance metrics common to all realizations of secure biometrics; and finally to introduce them to the ways in which the various realizations differ. Table I provides a high-level summary of the secure biometrics architectures discussed, comparing and contrasting their security assumptions, tools, complexity, salient features and open problems.

The study of secure biometric systems is a topical and fertile research area. Recent advances have addressed many aspects of secure biometrics including new information theoretic analyses, the emergence of new biometric modalities, the implementations of new feature extraction schemes, and the construction of fast, encrypted-domain protocols for biometric matching. That said, much work remains to be done before secure biometric access control becomes commonplace. We now describe some research directions.

**Biometric Feature Spaces:** In almost all secure biometric system implementations, a traditional biometric feature extraction technique is modified to make it compatible with one of the privacy architectures that we have covered. As observed in the article, the incorporation of a “secure” aspect to the biometric authentication system impacts the underlying tradeoff between FAR and FRR. The price of privacy is most often some drop in authentication performance. The development of biometric feature spaces that provide excellent discriminative properties, while simultaneously enabling efficient privacy-preserving implementations, is among the most important current problems in the area. This is especially important when the aim is to preserve discriminative properties in the context of multiple systems in simultaneous use. As discussed in the article, the effort involved would not be limited to signal processing algorithms, but would also require evaluation of biometric architecture using, for example, information theoretic or game-theoretic problem formulations.

**Alignment and Pre-processing:** Much current work on implementation of secure biometric systems ignores the fact that, prior to feature extraction and matching in traditional biometric systems, a complicated and usually non-linear procedure is necessary to align the probe and enrollment biometrics. Traditional biometric schemes can store alignment parameters such as shifts and scale factors in the clear. But, for a secure biometric system, storing such data in the clear can be a potential weakness. On the other hand, incorrect alignment drastically reduces the accuracy of biometric matching. Thus, it is necessary to develop biometric matching schemes that are either robust to misalignment, such as the spectral minutiae method [36], or allow alignment to be performed under privacy constraints.

**New Standardization Efforts:** In addition to the development of novel approaches and methods, widespread deployment of secure biometric systems will

demand interoperability across sensors, storage facilities, and computing equipment. It will also require an established methodology for evaluating the performance of secure biometric systems according to the metrics discussed herein. To this end, new standardization activity has been undertaken in several domestic and international bodies, composed of participants from industry, government and academia [54, 55]. In the coming years, standardization efforts are expected to address the task of establishing guidelines and normative procedures for testing and evaluation of various secure biometrics architectures.

**Attack Analysis and Prevention:** In this article, we have covered security attacks and privacy attacks, wherein the attacker attempts to extract information about the stored data, the biometric features and/or the keys and tries to gain unauthorized access to the system. In these attack scenarios, the attacker does not disrupt or alter the system components themselves — for example, change the ECC parity check matrix, thresholds, keys, or the biometric database, or arbitrarily deviate from the encrypted-domain protocols and so on. A comprehensive discussion of such attacks, including collusion with system administrators, and network-related attacks such as Denial-of-Service (DOS) attacks appears in [56]. Modeling, experimental analysis and prevention of such attacks remains a very challenging topic in academia and industry.

**Fully Homomorphic Encryption:** In the secure computation community, much excitement has been generated by the discovery of fully homomorphic encryption, which allows arbitrary polynomials to be computed in the encrypted domain [57, 58]. Though current implementations are exceedingly complex, faster and more efficient constructions are emerging. These promise to be able, eventually, to compute complicated functions of the enrollment and probe biometrics — not just distances — using a simple protocol where nearly all the computation can be securely out-sourced to a database server.

**Emerging Biometric Modalities:** Through the proliferation of tablet computers, smartphones, and motion sensor devices for gaming, many people have become familiar with touch and gesture-based interfaces. This has led to the emergence of new biometric modalities. Authentication can be based on hand movements and multi-touch gestures, leveraging techniques from machine learning and computer vision [59, 60]. These modalities also have

|                                   | Secure Sketch  | Fuzzy Commitment   | Secure Computation  | Cancelable Biometrics   |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| Analysis framework                | Information-theory   | Information-theory   | Cryptography  | Signal Processing   |
| Adversary                         | Computationally Bounded or Unbounded                                     | Computationally Bounded or Unbounded                                     | Computationally Bounded   | Computationally Bounded   |
| Popular methods of implementation | ECC, Randomized Embeddings   | ECC, Quantization Index Modulation                                       | Homomorphic Encryption, Garbled Circuits                            | Secret Transformations on Images                                  |
| Factors                           | Single or Two: Biometric only or Biometric + Key                         | Single or Two: Biometric only or Biometric + Key                         | Two: Biometric + Key  | Two: Biometric + Specific transform selector                      |
| Revocability                      | Yes, with 2 factor schemes   | Yes, with 2 factor schemes   | Yes   | Yes   |
| Storage overhead                  | Very Low: ECC syndromes  | Low: ECC codewords   | High: Encrypted features  | Low: Signal transformations                                       |
| Computational complexity          | Low: ECC decoding  | Low: ECC decoding or polynomial interpolation                            | High: Encrypted-domain protocols & decryption                       | Low: Comparison of transformed signals                            |
| Salient features                  | Rigorous characterization of security and privacy                        | Rigorous characterization of security and privacy                        | Uses well-understood public-key cryptography tools                  | Fewer constraints on feature extraction, low complexity           |
| Open issues                       | Characterization of Privacy/Security tradeoffs for multiple systems case | Characterization of Privacy/Security tradeoffs for multiple systems case | Leveraging fully homomorphic encryption, encrypted-domain alignment | Characterization of privacy and security of cancelable transforms |

TABLE I  
A HIGH-LEVEL COMPARISON OF THE FOUR SECURE BIOMETRICS ARCHITECTURES.

an interesting property from the point of view of cancelability: compromised templates can be revoked and renewed merely by having a user choose a different gesture. Aspects of a gesture, such as body shape and the relative sizes of limbs and fingers, generate features that are irrevocable, just as with traditional biometrics. Incorporating the dynamics of gestures into the authentication process has been shown to improve FRR-FAR tradeoffs [60]. In principle, there are an unlimited number of ways in which one could personalize gestures that are reliable, easy to remember, reproducible, and pleasant to work with. The study of gesture-based biometric modalities is a nascent area of research.

**Related Applications:** As noted in the beginning of the article, many of the principles discussed here extend to secure biometric identification systems. A practical concern is that identification involves matching the test biometric against the entire database, which means that the decision module in Figure 1 will be executed once for each identity in the database. For large databases, ECC decoding or secure multiparty computation will be prohibitively complex unless fast, parallelizable algorithms are developed to compensate for the increased computational overhead. Other than authentication, these methods extend with minor

modifications to the related problem of secret key generation from biometrics. Furthermore, the concepts and methods are readily applicable in emerging authentication scenarios that do not involve human biometrics, e.g., device forensics and anti-counterfeiting technologies based on physical unclonable functions (PUFs) [61–64].

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## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

**Shantanu Rane** (Ph.D., Stanford University, 2007) is a Principal Research Scientist at Mitsubishi Electric Research Laboratories in Cambridge, MA. He is an Associate Editor of the IEEE Signal Processing Letters, and Transactions on Information Forensics and Security and is a member of the IFS Technical Committee. He has participated in standardization activity for the H.264/AVC standard, INCITS/M1 Biometrics, and the ISO/SC37 Biometrics Subcommittee.

**Ye Wang** (Ph.D., Boston University, 2011) is a Visiting Researcher at Mitsubishi Electric Research Laboratories in Cambridge, MA. His research interests include secure biometrics, information theoretically secure multiparty computation, and inference in networks.

**Stark C. Draper** (Ph.D., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002) is an Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He has held a research position at Mitsubishi Electric Research Labs (MERL) and postdoctoral positions at the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Toronto, Canada. He has received the NSF CAREER award, the MERL 2010 President’s Award, and a U.S. State Department Fulbright Fellowship.

**Prakash Ishwar** (Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2002) is an Associate Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Boston University, an Associate Editor of the IEEE Transactions on Signal Processing, and a member of the IEEE IVMS Technical Committee. He was a recipient of the 2005 US NSF CAREER award, a co-winner of the ICPR’10 Aerial View Activity Classification Challenge, and a co-recipient of the AVSS’10 best paper award.