Is Library User Privacy still Paramount in the 2.0 Era?

(spoiler: yes, it is, but it gets complicated)

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Libraries in the 2.0 Era

• Libraries are at a crossroads
  – Services are being replicated by Web-based, socially-oriented information systems
  – Traditional role/authority challenged by algorithms and peer-based information systems
  – Patrons live in technologically-mediated, socially-integrated, data-saturated information spheres
Libraries in the 2.0 Era

• What, then, is the role of the library for providing access to information in today’s digitally networked world?
Library 2.0

• Rooted in ideology of Web 2.0
  – Encourages interaction, participation, collaboration, personalization, socialization
  – Data-rich, dynamic, expressive, relevant

• Library 2.0 attempts to bring the ideology of Web 2.0 into the sphere of the library
  – Give users participatory role, personalize
  – Interactive, collaborative, social
  – Leverage big data
Library 2.0 - Examples

- Synchronous messaging & chat
- Blogs, wikis, and comment platforms to encourage communication & interaction
- Personalized and/or crowd-sourced tagging and organization
- Ratings systems, discussion forums
- Interfacing with social media platforms for communication and service delivery
- Dynamic and personalized recommendation systems
Library 2.0 - Infrastructures

data, circulation and cataloguing rules, branding, content enhancement providers, and feature configuration references

connectors, code, servers, security, upgrades, updates, support, and APIs

of bookworms, movie mavens, searchers and explorers ... contributing ratings, reviews, lists, and recommendations
Library 2.0 - Infrastructures

What's LibraryCloud?
It's a metadata server. It gathers up metadata - information about information - from libraries, museums, and other participating institutions, and makes that metadata available to any application that wants to use it.
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Faustian Bargain

Anyone who has studied the history of technology knows that technological change is always a Faustian bargain: **Technology giveth and technology taketh away**, and not always in equal measure.

A new technology sometimes creates more than it destroys. Sometimes, it destroys more than it creates. But it is never one-sided.

Talk given at the German Informatics Society
Web 2.0 & Personal Data Flows

• Inherent in Web 2.0 evangelism is an overall faith in the logic of the platform
  – We are increasingly compelled to give up our personal information to the Web

• We allow various services, platforms, and communities to capture, process, and mashup our information flows to make them more useful, more social, and (hopefully) more meaningful
Library 2.0 & Personal Data Flows

- **Personalization** requires the capture and storage of personal information, interests, etc.
Library 2.0 & Personal Data Flows

- Use of social networking potentially provides access to patrons’ personal information
Library 2.0 & Personal Data Flows

• Creation of apps & widgets
  – API platforms typically designed around advertising and the desire for tracking and logging of profile information and usage data
Library 2.0 & Personal Data Flows

- Recommendation systems require aggregation of large sets of patron borrowing & OPAC activity

![Diagram showing user, OPAC, observation agent, aggregation agent, recommendation agent, and usage statistics]
Librarian Ethic

• Rich history of protecting patron privacy and intellectual freedom
  – 1939 “Library’s Bill of Rights”
  – 1971 “Policy on Confidentiality of Library Records”
  – 1980 Amendment to “Code of Ethics”
  • protect each library user’s right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, or acquired
  – Historic resistance to collection of data that might aid government surveillance
Faustian Bargain of Library 2.0

• Placing pressure on libraries to sacrifice patron privacy in the name of better services & access

“As serious as privacy concerns may turn out to be, the features of Web 2.0 applications that make them so useful and fun all depend on users sharing private information with the owners of the site, so that it can be processed statistically or shared with others.

…If we value reader privacy to the extent that we always have, I think it’s clear that our experiments with Library 2.0 services will have uncomfortable limitations..”
Faustian Bargain of Library 2.0

• Placing pressure on libraries to sacrifice patron privacy in the name of better services & access

The potential of Library 2.0 should lead libraries make use of all available and permitted data in order to help further the interests of their users:

“They will do this because it advances the values core to the mission of libraries, and thus advances the value of libraries in the networked age.”

LibraryCloud developers
Conceptual Muddles

• What is the primary value within the librarian ethic that should drive policy: access or privacy?
  – Resolution of this conceptual problem was simpler when providing library services wasn’t intimately tied to retaining patron data.
  – How do we value patron privacy in a Web 2.0 world where information appears to flow freely and willingly?
  – Conceptually, does privacy still matter when it comes into conflict with technologies that could provide new levels of access?
Conceptual Muddles

• Conceptual vagueness regarding patron privacy

  - “[Library 2.0] is probably going to lead many librarians to say that privacy is not as important a consideration as it once was. They will say that the Millennial generation doesn’t have the same expectations of libraries in terms of privacy that older generations do, and that we should simply adjust” (Litwin)

  - “social norms about privacy are obviously changing” (LibraryCloud)
An Acceptable Bargain?

• Should libraries resist Library 2.0?
  – Hold firm in the face of social media trends
  – Resist technologies that might jeopardize patron confidentiality
  – Remain as a “safe harbor” for anonymous intellectual inquiry

• Or, pursue Library 2.0?
  – Collect patron data to personalize services, improve recommendations, enhance patron experience
  – Retreat (a bit) from traditional stance against holding records of patron activity
A Middle Ground

• Pursue Library 2.0, cautiously
  – Ok to move slowly
  – Find ways to collect and share data anonymously
  – Confer with privacy experts
  – Follow best practices
Best Practices for Library 2.0

- Notification, informed consent, recurring opt-in
- Separate (preferably anonymous) Library 2.0 user accounts
- Avoid external data collection via social media or mobile apps
- Minimize use of tracking cookies, web bugs
- Anonymize activity logs (as best you can)
- Never release activity logs; fight subpoenas
A Middle Ground

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• Affirm Role of Library in Protecting Privacy
  – Not retreating from librarian ethics and principles that drive the profession
  – Address the complexities of privacy in 2.0 era
  – Libraries are a point of intervention for privacy
Complexities of Privacy

• Myth: “People don’t care about privacy anymore”

• Myth: “Youth are digital natives”

— “Young-adult Americans have an aspiration for increased privacy even while they participate in an online reality that is optimized to increase their revelation of personal data.”

“How Different are Young Adults from Older Adults When it Comes to Information Privacy Attitudes and Policies?”
Chris Hoofnagle, Jennifer King, Su Li, & Joseph Turow, 2010
Complexities of Privacy

• Myth: “People don’t care about privacy anymore”

• Myth: “Youth are digital natives”

– To teens, all personal information is not created equal. They say it is very important to understand the context of an information-sharing encounter

“Teens, Privacy and Online Social Networks”
Pew Internet & American Life, 2007
Complexities of Privacy

• Reconceptualizing “privacy” as “contextual integrity” (Nissenbaum)

• As information flows through Library 2.0 systems, the context itself – *information-seeking within a library* – remains unchanged.
  
  – Thus, the informational norms of that context – *the library* – should be preserved to best protect patron privacy.
Libraries as Point of Intervention

- Librarians (and educations) must build on existing information literacy standards (AASL, ACRL, 21st Century Skills) to ensure youth have “privacy literacy”
- Turn development of Library 2.0 into “teaching moments” regarding the complexities of privacy in a 2.0 era
- Engage with patrons, community, government on issues of privacy & surveillance
ALALaunches Resources for Community Dialogue Around Privacy | ALA 2013

By Meredith Schwartz on July 1, 2013 Leave a Comment

The American Library Association has launched a new website, ala.org/liberty, in response to the recent revelations about widespread surveillance by the National Security Agency (NSA). The site offers a toolkit and other resources for libraries to convene forums and moderate community discussions on privacy. Many more resources will be added in the weeks to come, an ALA representative said.
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Resources


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