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IT'S COMPLICATED: YOUTH, PRIVACY, AND LIBRARY ETHICS

Barbara M. Jones

12.1 Introduction

Danah Boyd's excellent study of privacy and youth, *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens* (Yale University Press, 2014) inspired the title of this paper. Boyd's data from 166 United States teens in 18 states led her to conclude that, popular assumptions notwithstanding, the youth culture cares about privacy but constructs private space differently than their elders.

Boyd has worked closely with librarians in the United States, because she recognizes that as a profession, librarians here had incorporated privacy into their professional ethics and best practices. Libraries uphold the freedom to read as a core value. But a reader can't feel free if the government or a corporation is looking over their shoulder—collecting information from their e-book reading device, or collecting data about the books they borrow or the questions they ask. This is particularly complex in an environment in which digital technology gives access at the same time it takes away some privacy.

To grapple with these complexities, the American Library Association's governance and policy framework include the Office for Intellectual Freedom at ALA/Chicago, and the two member committees of the member Council: the Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC) and

the Committee on Professional Ethics (COPE). And ALA's Washington Office works with Congress on specific legislation and policy issues having to do with privacy and surveillance.

Because they knew of the profession's commitment to privacy, the Open Society Foundations granted ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom 4-year funding to create Choose Privacy Week and the web site: www.chooseprivacyweek.org. All 50 states have library confidentiality statutes or their equivalent. The American Library Association's *Intellectual Freedom Manual* includes several Council-approved interpretations and guidelines about privacy. And already the first *Library Privacy Tool Kit* has been replaced by a second edition, adding information about social media[1]. ALA's first code of ethics in 1939 included privacy as a best practice. In today's version:

> *III. We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted.*

The right to user privacy in U.S. libraries extends to children and young people. Until they reach the age of majority--which in the United States is 18 years for most library privacy concerns--there are some limits to this privacy. Parents, teachers, and doctors are three examples of people who can and do have rights to information about individual children in some cases. But children want and need some private space, too. How children exercise these privacy needs is the source of many struggles between young people and their parents—and not just in the United States.

This paper will explore three 21st century issues as they are playing out in the United States: the Youth Culture; Privacy as it applies to youth; and the Role of Libraries in upholding reader privacy in best practices and in educational programming. Examples of initiatives past

[1] http://www.ala.org/advocacy/privacyconfidentiality/toolkitsprivacy/privacy

and present will be covered. The paper will conclude with recommendations for libraries world-wide in regard to privacy initiatives. All over the world people are concerned about government surveillance and corporate collection of their personal data. Now is the time for libraries to seize the opportunity to play a major role in this policy arena! Librarians and library associations from all cultures must collaborate in this work, since the concept and application of privacy principles varies from culture to culture. But we must find common ground on those core principles of reader privacy that lie at the core of the library profession.

12.2 Youth Culture in the United States

This paper will use broad brush strokes to describe U.S. youth culture, since it is the stuff of popular culture around the world and is not the key focus of this paper. But given the prevailing myths about teens, some of this paper's assumptions are listed below:

- 75 to 80% of U.S. teens utilize social media and cell phones, regardless of class, economic, or ethnic background. Internet service is slower and less accessible in economically deprived regions of the country, and economically challenged teens may begin to feel the impact of being an information "have not" as they get older. They may not have the I-Phone with all the bells and whistles. But they will have a phone. More details can be found in a Pew Research Project: http://www.pewresearch.org/daily-number/a-quarter-of-teens-mostly-access-the-internet-using-their-cell-phones/.
- Invasion of youth privacy by the government and corporations can be found in all segments of the youth culture. Teens with credit cards may be more vulnerable in terms of data collection by corporations because they are a targeted market for many products and services. When the author of this article told a

Chicago high school class that a major blue jeans retail chain probably knows what size jeans they wear, they were shocked. In fact, even if they don't use a credit card, customers are often asked for personal information at the cash register so that they can receive coupons or discounts. Teens are shocked to discover that this personal information is bought and sold by third parties.

- Parents are becoming increasingly concerned about "child safety." In fact, it has become a big business, as parents want to buy safety--to filter their children's Internet access and consult "apps" to decide what books their kids should read. The term, "helicopter parents," is commonly used to describe these parents. "Safety" doesn't necessarily refer to physical threats but, rather, to the perceived impact of violent or sexually explicit content. It definitely applies to Internet access, as many are concerned about children's access to online predators and sexually explicit images. The 24/7 news cycle and sensationalist media exploit that fear in a psychological process not unlike the current fear mongering about Ebola in the United States.
- Reliable 2010 research suggests that young people do care about privacy but don't know how to protect themselves[2]. Their behavior regarding social media and cell phone use would suggest that they do not care when in fact, they just don't understand. When asked a series of 10 questions about online privacy, 42% of the youth got all 10 questions wrong. This, with growing evidence that colleges and prospective employers regularly troll such sources as Facebook to find potentially compromising photos or information that could jeopardize their

[2] http://ssm.com/abstract=1589864

organization's reputation (see National Public Radio program on the topic of employers and social media)[3]

This gap between privacy values and lack of understanding how privacy invasion works should be viewed as an opportunity for information organizations to provide just that—information on how teens can create a private space for themselves online. For teens the major consideration is often how to keep their parents out--but nobody else. They need to understand that beyond their parents there are government and private sector interests in collecting and monetizing their personal information. U.S. library programming on the topic of privacy has demonstrated that once teens understand that, they are able to make informed choices about sharing their personal information.

12.3 Youth People and Libraries in the United States

Why use libraries for privacy programming to reach young people?

Because young people in the United States do use libraries—both their local public libraries, and their school libraries. And the library profession has focused resources and policies on youth in particular. The American Association of School Librarians (AASL), a division of ALA, focuses on all issues and policies in libraries from kindergarten through high school. An excellent source for understanding United States youth in public libraries can be found in a groundbreaking Pew Foundation Report, *Younger Americans and Public Libraries*[4].

In addition there are youth privacy advocates like Cory Doctorow—the very popular author of *Little Brother* (a takeoff on George Orwell's "Big Brother") and the Craphound blog[5]. *Little Brother* is a novel about

[3] http://www.npr.org/blogs/alltechconsidered/2014/04/11/301791749/cant-ask-that-some-job-interviewers-go-to-social-media-instead

[4] http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/09/10/younger-americans-and-public-libraries

[5] http://craphound.com/littlebrother/download/

young people in a totalitarian society with no privacy; the book is free to download at the Craphound site. Doctorow is a frequent speaker at ALA and is an avid supporter of the freedom to read privately.

Compared to the rest of the world, most U.S. libraries are technology-rich and this capacity is a double-edged sword. Personal privacy has always been compromised when someone checks out a book; but once that book is returned, that link between the individual and the book is broken. During that transaction, state laws protect the person who borrowed the book. With online public catalogs this is not the case, as some offer the capability to make permanent notations about books that have been read. School assignment software often collects data about which student is reading what book at what time of day. E-reader vendors often collect information about the person reading the content, in direct violation of the intent of most state privacy laws. Unfortunately, libraries have been so eager to try new technology, they have not always thought through the compromises technology requires, or examine the profit and marketing motives of their vendors. Quite simply, the regulations and laws have fallen behind the technology's ability to compromise personal privacy.

Chicago Public Library's YOU Media Center has become a national model for teen-only interactive library space[6]. In the evenings this space is packed with students doing homework, having conversations, composing or performing music, writing or reading poetry out loud. This interactive space sponsors a literary magazine and was one of the sites for an ALA News Know-how project. There are now three sites and they focus on meeting the information needs of those Chicago teens who do not have these opportunities in their homes or schools. CPL has also added a Maker Space to their library services, and this is extremely popular with teens: http://www.chipublib.org/maker-lab/. These types of

[6] http://youmediachicago.org/

services demonstrate to teens that city resources are being spent on them and that the library is a good place to go for more than books.

Libraries should seize this opportunity to play a major role in teen entrepreneurship, critical thinking, creativity—and the role of privacy in their digital lives. Libraries are well positioned to educate teens on how their personally identifiable information can be used to compromise their privacy and possibly hurt them at a job interview or other important events in their lives. The very technology that enables them so much creative freedom can also be used against them. With education on how their personal information is collected, and what they can do to protect their privacy, they will learn to make educated decisions and choices about their personal space.

12.4 Privacy, Libraries, and Youth Programming

The U.S. library community has incorporated privacy as part of the professional mission since at least the first code of ethics in 1939. Historically, privacy has been at the core of library best practices. It has been embedded in state laws. The professional has been rudely reminded of privacy and surveillance in recent decades: the FBI Library Awareness Project in the 1980's; the terrorist attacks on the United States on 9/11 and the resultant USA PATRIOT Act; and the Edward Snowden revelations in Summer 2013. These actions are described in detail in the ALA *Intellectual Freedom Manual*.

Around the same time, big data became part of the public vocabulary. Collection of mass data files by corporations, we learned, could be used for good or ill. Data about personal income and medical conditions could be used to build health clinics in neighborhoods lacking them; or it could be used to deny the same people health insurance. It could also be used by retailers to entice young people to buy clothes beyond their means. The "creepiness" factor began to have an effect on popular culture, as we realized that if we searched for a

particular kind of boot, hundreds of boot ads would pop up for months after. And finally, many public libraries host coupon clipping clubs. Community members come to workshops on how to clip coupons, register them online, and save money on groceries. The problem is that supermarkets and food companies can them keep track of one's eating habits.

The Office for Intellectual Freedom has been holding workshops and teaching about privacy for several years now. The approach is that of "choice." In the United States of the 21st century, one would need to become a hermit to totally protect one's privacy. Buying a home, shopping, driving on a toll road, going to the doctor—all compromise privacy. And because librarians are not advocating the hermit's lifestyle, the approach to privacy has been that of making an informed choice. If teens find out how Facebook, for example, might compromise their personal privacy, they might take steps (as explained on the Facebook page) to place limits on who might view their page. Or they might decide to get off Facebook altogether. Libraries are not condoning one choice or another. They are simply promoting *informed* choice.

The Open Society Foundations' grant helped the Office for Intellectual Freedom to do the following to promote privacy for youth:

- A two-day international workshop in Chicago for librarians, NGOs, government officials—and teens—to discuss how to make teens aware of privacy choice points.
- A web site, www.chooseprivacyweek.org, that contains blog posts, videos, and information on how to celebrate Choose Privacy Week, the first week in May. OIF offers posters, bookmarks, a workbook, buttons, and other ways to make CPW come alive for teens.
- A teen pizza party evening at a branch of the Lexington, Kentucky, public library branch for the Latino community. OIF discovered that immigrants are often scammed and give away

their personal information to criminals. This party was an opportunity to talk to teens and use materials geared for their age group, to explain privacy right in the United States and how they can protect themselves.

- Collaborations with the Electronic Frontier Foundation and other groups to do webinars and advocacy projects to promote privacy best practices for the government and the private sector.

12.5 How IFLA Can Play a Role

IFLA has just approved the first Code of Ethics for Librarians and Other Information Workers: http://www.ifla.org/news/ifla-code-of-ethics-for-librarians-and-other-information-workers-full-version

The Free Access to Information and Free Expression Section (FAIFE) worked for many years on this document. In addition, FAIFE has written several teaching modules on such topics as: the impact of corruption on libraries; public health information in libraries; HIV/AIDS information dissemination in libraries; and the *Internet Manifesto* and libraries. These packets have been taught in many countries on all continents. The *Internet Manifesto* training in the Philippines led to a cascade training program leading to 3, 000 librarians learning how to implement the Internet in their libraries and to advocate for Internet freedom to the national legislature.

This powerful training program must be developed and taught for privacy in libraries. If IFLA can't afford it, a grant must be found to continue a proven successful training method.

Since FAIFE began its trainings in various countries, the webinar platform is more highly developed. International webinars, leading to certification as a Privacy Librarian, could be implemented.

A Privacy Manifesto could be adopted as the basis for the educational ideas above. In fact, many librarians were not taught about

privacy in their professional education, so a module for practicing librarians and for LIS professors could be developed.

IFLA is the perfect place to begin these initiatives. It is the largest and most influential international library association and it has the trust of the library community and potential funders around the world. Privacy is an extremely culturally bound value, and IFLA has a culturally diverse membership to interpret privacy to in various contexts.

This author has heard many librarians from the developing world say that they do not have time to think about privacy when they don't even have computers. But now is the time to think about it! Many developing countries have had to backtrack and take back privacy after it was lost. Some countries have the opportunity to get it right—to make it clear to technology companies that contracts must include privacy provisions, for example. And librarians can be an essential partner in this effort! We have a brand new ethics document to inspire and guide us.