

# Privacy and Library 2.0: How Do They Conflict?

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Library 2.0, building on the success of Web 2.0, has the potential to provide tremendous opportunities for libraries to provide specialized service to patrons in ways never imagined before. Library 2.0 uses Web 2.0 technologies to make resources available at the point of need, at the time of need, and allows for libraries to be integrated into campus portals, course management systems (Chad and Miller 2005, 9). Library 2.0 concepts can be used to create customized book recommendations, include book reviews in the OPAC, make use of folksonomies and social tagging, create interactive virtual reference services, and much more. It also allows users to customize library resources in their own way, using their own tools. However some librarians are concerned that the information needed to provide these services may have a detrimental effect on privacy. How are librarians dealing with this potential conflict? This paper reports on a survey of librarians that asked about their experience, attitudes, policies, and procedures relating to privacy issues involving Library 2.0 and Web 2.0 applications.

In order to take full advantage of Web 2.0, companies such as Amazon.com and Yahoo! collect personal, and sometimes sensitive or confidential data. In order for Library 2.0 to take full advantage of Web 2.0, librarians will need to collect some amount of personal data about their patrons. One of the key principles for academic librarians is that the "privacy of library users is and must be inviolable" (American Library Association). Many librarians are concerned that the information collected in order to provide the best possible service via Library 2.0 could potentially be used in a manor that violates this core principle of privacy.

## **Patron Data in Library 2.0**

The type and amount of patron data that libraries will need to collect in order to implement a Library 2.0 service will vary depending on the type of service being offered. For example, in order to implement a social bookmarking service like del.icio.us that enables patrons to tag articles and books, libraries will need to collect a unique identifier, such as a user name, for each person who chooses to tag one or more items. While it might be possible to anonymize the display of this username for public view, anyone who has access to the system will be able to know who tagged which article, Web site, or book. The University of Pennsylvania has created such a service called PennTags (Sweda 2006, 31) and by looking at a user's Web page, anyone can see all of the items that a particular user has tagged, and, presumably, read.

When implementing a virtual reference service using Web 2.0 or other technologies, it may be necessary to collect, and associate with a particular reference question, a patron's name, instant messaging username, email address, and/or phone number in order to provide service. If a library has a blog that allows comments, many times the patron who commented leaves his or her name. Librarians have reported that they have been asked reference questions on the library's profile on social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook (Heather Huey, personal communication, January 5, 2007). The profile and email address of the person who asked these questions on such a site, in most cases, can easily be determined. In order to offer a customized recommended reading list to a patron, a library will need to keep track of books that a patron has read and enjoyed. While these services may enhance the user's library experience, the issue of privacy should not be ignored. Libraries that offer these types of services should make it clear what privacy implications these services might have and should take all reasonable steps to

maintain the patron's privacy and confidentiality whenever possible.

### **Patron Privacy**

While library patron privacy has received increased attention since the 2001 passage of the USA PATRIOT Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001), the issue of privacy of patron records is not a new concern. In the 1940s the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began accessing the books that were being read by people under investigation. After the 1968 Democratic National Convention, the FBI examined circulation records in several public and academic libraries (Johnston 2000, 511). The Internal Revenue Service's Alcohol and Tobacco Tax Division requested the circulation records of library materials about explosives to determine who was reading such books. From the late 1970s into the 1980s, the Library Awareness Program was implemented by the FBI to systematically monitor the behavior of foreigners in libraries (Bowers 2006, 379). These are just some examples of the federal government's attempts (some successful, some not) to obtain circulation records from libraries. In response to these programs, almost all of the states have adopted library patron confidentiality laws. These laws vary greatly as to what is covered and what is not. In many cases the state laws regarding the privacy of library records are limited to circulation records and may not cover other types of patron data. Since there is no federal legislation protecting library records, these laws may not apply to federal investigations. Laws may make it illegal for government officials to access library patron data without just cause, but there are other risks as well. Recently, there have been numerous reports of personal data being accidentally exposed (or contained on stolen laptops). It is possible that in a similar fashion, library employees may accidentally expose patron data. There is also danger from computer

crackers who may attempt to access patron data from a library system, which may appear as easy prey to the cracker (Breeding 2003, 39).

There has been a multitude of articles investigating privacy and confidentiality in libraries since the American Library Association drafted its first privacy statement, "Policy on Confidentiality of Library Records" in 1970. These articles cover things ranging from law and judicial decisions, to the need for privacy. Many libraries have decided to retain less information about patrons under the belief if they don't have it, no one can get it. As Regan (2004, 485) described, although libraries may not have discretion as to what data they disclose, they "do have their discretion in their creation and maintenance of records." However, the mass deletion of information has not been universally accepted as a wise thing. Nicholson and Stanton (2004) believe by not "bibliomining" patron data, libraries are missing a golden opportunity to better serve their patrons. This echoes Estabrook (1996, 48) who earlier stated that "in the name of one good--keeping patron records confidential--we are sacrificing another: targeted and tailored services to library users." Estabrook felt that by retaining library patron data, libraries could improve library services and information could be used in a number of ways that are useful for both the library and the patron.

While the privacy of circulation data has been a focus of library policies and procedures, it is unclear how far this has made its way into some other areas of the library. In 1993, Nolan questioned the practices of libraries when it comes to the confidentiality of interlibrary loan records and many of his complaints still exist in some interlibrary loan departments today. In the mid-1980s a study of academic librarians in Illinois providing online bibliographic searches showed that although librarians expressed the importance of confidentiality in online searching, in practice there was generally no guarantee of this confidentiality in practice (Isbell and Cook

1986, 486). Approximately ten years later, a similar study done in Texas found that in many respects, little had changed (Wilkes and Grant 1995, 477-482). Advancements in access and technology may have made the necessity of mediated searches rarer in 2007. However, the collection of patron data while searching bibliographic databases remains an issue. Besides proxy server logs and other data gathered by the library (or its parent institution); there are issues relating to data collected by commercial database providers that libraries sign licensing agreements with in order to allow patrons to access online content. As an academic librarian who answered this survey asked, "What about the information being held on vendor servers?"

Sturges et al. (2003, 49) found that while library patrons trust that libraries will protect their personal data, "there exists a genuine gap between the privacy protection that the users believe they can expect from the library and the preparedness of librarians for providing that protection." They reported that interviews of fourteen representatives of companies that market software to libraries responded that libraries only occasionally brought up the issue of privacy when ordering systems.

The issue of privacy has come up repeatedly with Web 2.0 sites. This is especially true of social networking sites which are "online place(s) where a user can create a profile and build a personal network that connects him or her to other users" (Lenhart and Madden 2007, 1). There have been multiple instances where sexual predators have located victims through these sites (Barnes 2006). Many companies look at potential employee's profiles on these sites when deciding to hire someone for a job or internship (Colella 2006). Employers have turned down applications for internships (Finder 2006) and rescinded employment offers because of things potential employees have posted online (Irvine 2007).

Because of privacy concerns relating both to Web 2.0 and to libraries, it is only natural

that privacy would be brought up when libraries start taking advantage of Web 2.0 to offer what is known as Library 2.0 based services. Rory Litwin (Library Juice blog, posted May 22, 2006) lamented in his Library Juice blog that the central problem of Library 2.0 is privacy. A clear majority of people who responded to Litwin's posting thought that Library 2.0 offers the possibility of better and more customized services. However, they were also in agreement that privacy in Library 2.0 is a major concern. Many of the responses to the blog entry expressed a sentiment similar to Michael Casey (Library Juice blog, comment posted May 23, 2006) who commented that when libraries offer Library 2.0 services they should be only voluntary. Libraries should offer "varying and flexible degrees of openness" and should educate their patrons about privacy in the online environment.

## **Methodology**

Despite many articles about Library 2.0, including some that include cautions about privacy in this environment, there has not been much formal study into the area of librarian's attitudes about the issue of privacy in Library 2.0. This study hopes to begin to fill that gap. The study was conducted using an online survey that was announced on various Internet email lists. These mailing lists included Code4Lib (<http://dewey.library.nd.edu/mailling-lists/code4lib/>), NGC4Lib: Next Generation Catalogs for Libraries (<http://dewey.library.nd.edu/mailling-lists/ngc4lib/>), and Web4Lib: Web Systems in Libraries (<http://lists.webjunction.org/web4lib/>). One of the limitations is that the survey sample was self-selected and, thus, not scientific. The survey consisted of six demographic questions and twenty one questions about experience, attitudes, policies, and procedures relating to privacy and Library 2.0. There was no attempt made to confirm that survey participants accurately answered questions about policies and procedures at

their respective libraries. Informal personal interviews of librarians who have implemented Library 2.0 applications at their institutions were performed before the survey was announced in order to gather background information and to help formulate the questions asked.

## **Findings**

There were a total of 110 responses to the survey. Ninety-nine of the responses came from the United States, five from Canada, two each from Germany and Australia, and single responses from Spain and the United Kingdom. Just over 59% of the respondents worked in academic libraries while 25.5% worked in public libraries. There were no more than five respondents from any other type of libraries.

Although an overwhelming majority of respondents (84.5%) indicated that they thought privacy was important or of high importance, only thirty-eight of them said that their library had a privacy policy posted online. This was less than the forty-two who answered that the library where they work did not have a policy posted. Scott McNealy of Sun Microsystems proclaimed in 1999 that "You have zero [online] privacy anyway" and that people should "Get over it" (Sprenger 1999). 15.5% of the respondents in this survey appear to agree with this sentiment when applied to librarians. Another 24.5% were neutral to the statement that "There is no privacy online, so librarians should just get over it." Academic librarians (20.0%, n=65) were slightly more likely to agree with this statement than other librarians.

Libraries have a significant investment in databases that are housed by commercial vendors outside of the library. These commercial vendors may not have the same privacy concerns and policies as the library, however very few libraries warn patrons about this when they link to remote sources on their Web site. Only 8.2% of the respondents said that they warn

patrons "when they follow a link from [their library's] site to an outside resource (such as a journal database)."

A clear majority (75.5%) of the respondents agreed (45.5%) or strongly agreed (30.0%) that "as part of information literacy instruction, librarians should teach patrons about issues relating to privacy." Respondents who said that they had the most experience with social software were more likely to strongly agree (44.4%, n=18). Likewise, technical services librarians were more likely to strongly agree (46.7%, n=15) than either public services librarians (23.5%, n=34) or systems librarians (21.4%, n=38).

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(insert figure 2 here)

In a response to Rory Litwin's Library Juice blog post on privacy and Library 2.0, Mark Rosenzweig (comment posted May 23, 2006) strongly questioned whether or not the level of customization of Web 2.0 applications in libraries and the "infotainment" aspect of these applications fit into the mission of the library. Only a few librarians in this survey agreed (11.8%) or strongly agreed (1.8%) that "It is not necessary to offer patrons the ability to customize Web based services such as the library catalog and online databases." This is further supported by a majority of the respondents which reported that their library used social software and Web 2.0 technologies, including 57.5% using blogs, 49.1% using RSS feeds, 38.2% using instant messaging, and 36.4% using wikis. Litwin and Rosenzweig both observed that it appears that younger librarians are more likely to use Web 2.0 applications and advocate for Library 2.0 technologies. There has been speculation that millennials and others who frequently take advantage of Web 2.0 technologies are less likely to be concerned with online privacy. This survey showed that just over one quarter of respondents agreed that "younger librarians are less



concerned about patron privacy than older librarians."

In almost all questions, the responses did not vary significantly by the type of library that a respondent worked in or by their role in that library.

## **Conclusions and Future Research**

The results of this study show that librarians are overwhelmingly concerned about privacy in the online environment. This might not be surprising news, but despite these concerns, many libraries still do not have privacy policies posted on their Web site, and in the case of out-sourced automation systems and databases, previous research shows that librarians do not make privacy a high priority when selecting systems vendors (Strurges, et al. 2003). While many librarians believe that librarians should teach patrons about privacy, more librarians reported that they do not have a privacy policy posted online than did. Even if libraries have these policies posted, do patrons know about them and understand them? A survey of students at Iowa State University showed that only 6 percent were "very familiar" with the university's Code of Computer Ethics (Johns and Lawson 2005, 490). Are these numbers similar when it comes to privacy policies, and when it comes to online privacy threats?

Except in a few areas, there appears to be little difference in the attitudes of librarians that work in different types of libraries or have different roles. While a few librarians believe that extra services such as "My Bookbag" and shopping cart options amount to an invasion of privacy, and that the ability for patrons to customize services is not necessary, a vast majority believe the customizations and other services offered by Library 2.0 are worthwhile. However, what percentage of patrons think these services are worthwhile despite the possible privacy implications?

Because this survey was not a random sample, it is not possible to generalize the results. A survey that uses a more scientific approach might allow greater generalization. While this study showed that a noticeable percentage of librarians agree that younger librarians may be less concerned about privacy than their more seasoned counterparts, the survey did not ascertain the age of the respondents, and thus is unable to determine if the responses vary with age. However, the study did show that those who were most familiar with social software were more likely to believe that librarians should instruct patrons about online privacy issues. If one is to assume, as Litwin, Rosenzweig, and many others do, that younger librarians are more familiar with these technologies, then this result would seem to question the belief of some that younger librarians are less concerned with privacy. However, further study in this area is needed to determine if different age groups of librarians generally have different attitudes towards privacy.

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## Appendix - Survey Questions and Responses

<b>Table 1. Responses to Demographic Questions</b>		
Questions	Responses	N=110
Country (The survey also asked for the State/Province, but this is not reported here due to space considerations)	United States	90.0%, N=99
	Canada	4.5%, N=5
	Other (Australia (N=2); Germany (N=2), Spain (N=1), United Kingdom (N=1))	5.5%, N=6
What type of library are you from?	Academic	59.1%, N=65
	Public	25.5%, N=28
	School	1.8%, N=2
	Special	4.5%, N=5
	Not currently employed in a library	2.7%, N=3
	Other	4.5%, N=5
	Not Answered	1.8%, N=2
How would you classify the size of your library?	Small	20.9%, N=23
	Medium	47.3%, N=52
	Large	24.5%, N=27
	Other	3.6%, N=4
	Not Answered	3.6%, N=4
Which best describes your role in the library?	Dean/Director/Head of Library	4.5%, N=5
	Systems Librarian	25.5%, N=28
	Public Services	30.9%, N=34
	Technical Services	13.6%, N=q5
	Access Services	1.8%, N=2
	Other	21.8%, N=24
	Not Answered	1.8%, N=2

**Table 2. Responses to Web 2.0 and Library 2.0 Experience Related Questions**

Questions	Responses	N=110
On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most experience, how much experience do you have using Social Software?	1 –No experience	4.5%, N=5
	2	10.0%, N=11
	3	32.7%, N=36
	4	33.6%, N=37
	5 – Experienced	16.4%, N=18
	Not Answered	2.7%, N=3
Which of the following technologies does your library use? (Please check all that apply)	Blogs	57.3%, N=63
	Wikis	36.4%, N=40
	Instant Messaging (IM)	38.2%, N=42
	RSS feeds	49.1%, N=54
	Podcasts	16.4%, N=18
	Social Bookmarking	11.8%, N=13
	Other	4.5%, N=5
Which of the following technologies do YOU use outside of the library? (Please check all that apply)	Blogs	80.9%, N=89
	Wikis	69.1%, N=76
	Instant Messaging (IM)	58.2%, N=64
	RSS feeds	71.8%, N=79
	Podcasts	51.8%, N=57
	Social Bookmarking	55.5%, N=61
	Other	7.3%, N=8
Does your library have a profile on MySpace, Facebook, Friendster, or another social networking site?	Yes	21%, N=19.1
	No	70.0%, N=77
	Not Sure (3.6%, N=4) /No Answer (1.8%, N=2)	5.5%, N=6
	Other	5.5%, N=6

**Table 3. Responses to Patron Privacy Related Questions**

Questions	Responses	N=110
On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most important, how important do you think protecting patron privacy is?	1 -Low importance	0.0%, N=0
	2	1.8%, N=2
	3	10.9%, N=12
	4	30.9%, N=34
	5 - High importance	53.6%, N=59
	Not Answered	2.7%, N=3
Does your library web site warn patrons about privacy issues when they follow a link from your site to outside resources (such as a journal database)?	Yes	8.2%, N=9
	No	77.3%, N=85
	Not Sure	10.9%, N=12
	Other	0.9%, N=1
	Not Answered	2.7%, N=3
Some libraries offer patrons extra services if they login or provide an E-mail address. These services include things like saved searches and My Bookbag/My Shopping Cart options. In your opinion, do these extra services amount to an invasion of privacy?	Yes	7.3%, N=8
	No	77.3%, N=85
	Not Sure	6.4%, N=7
	Other	6.4%, N=7
	Not Answered	2.7%, N=3



**Table 4. Responses to Electronic Reference Related Questions**

Questions	Responses	N=110
What type of electronic reference service(s) does your library offer? (Please check all that apply)	E-mail	84.5%, N=93
	Instant Messaging	35.5%, N=39
	Web Forms	64.5%, N=71
	Specialized E-reference software	27.3%, N=30
	No E-reference offered	10.0%, N=11
	Other	7.3%, N=8
If your library offers e-reference, how long do you keep/archive e-reference questions?	We don't offer e-reference	11.8%, N=13
	Only until question answered	23.6%, N=26
	Up to one month after answered	4.5%, N=5
	Up to one year after answered	3.6%, N=4
	Indefinitely	27.3%, N=30
	Other	20.0%, N=22
	Not Answered	9.1%, N=10

**Table 5. Responses to Data Retention Related Questions**

Questions	Responses	N=110
Does your library keep circulation records?	We don't keep any circulation records (even while the item is checked out)	1.8%, N=2
	Only until item is returned	10.0%, N=11
	Only until the item is returned and all fines and fees have been cleared	57.3%, N=63
	From one day to one month after item is returned	3.6%, N=4
	From one month to one year after item is returned	0.9%, N=1
	Indefinitely	8.2%, N=9
	Other	14.5%, N=16
	Not Answered	3.6%, N=4
Does your library keep any of the following information about patrons? (check all that apply)	Phone and/or address]	84.5%, N=93
	Social Security Number	7.4%, N=8
	Driver's License Number	11.8%, N=13
	Other Government Issued ID Number	11.8%, N=13
	Fine History	36.4%, N=40
	ILL requests	28.2%, N=31
	Credit Card information	1.8%, N=2
	Age/Birth date	30.9%, N=34
	Sex	24.5%, N=27
	Other	18.2%, N=20

**Table 6. Responses to Agree/Disagree Questions**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Answer
As part of information literacy instruction, librarians should teach patrons about issues relating to privacy	30.0% N=33	45.5% N=50	20.0% N=22	0.9% N=1	0.9% N=1	2.7% N=3
Libraries and schools should block access to social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook because the sites intrude on people's privacy	0.0% N=0	0.0% N=0	10.0% N=11	25.5% N=28	61.8% N=68	2.7% N=3
There is no privacy online, so librarians should just get over it	0.0% N=0	15.5% N=17	24.5% N=27	34.5% N=38	22.7% N=25	2.7% N=3
Privacy is unimportant, community is important	0.0% N=0	0.9%, N=1	21.8%, N=24	50.0% N=55	25.5% N=28	1.8% N=2
Librarians are more concerned about patron privacy than patrons are.	16.4% N=18	56.4% N=62	14.5% N=16	9.1% N=10	1.8% N=2	1.8% N=2
It is not necessary to offer patrons the ability to customize web based services such as the library catalog and online databases.	1.8% N=2	11.8% N=13	0.0% N=0	38.2% N=42	31.8% N=35	16.4% N=18
Younger librarians are less concerned about patron privacy than older librarians.	2.7% N=3	23.6% N=26	37.3% N=41	23.6% N=26	10.9% N=12	1.8% N=2
The computer department at my institution is less concerned about privacy than the library.	5.5% N=6	16.4% N=18	27.3% N=30	30.9% N=34	17.3% N=19	2.7% N=3
Computer programmers are less concerned about privacy than librarians.	4.5% N=5	18.2% N=20	34.5% N=38	28.2% N=31	12.7% N=14	1.8% N=2

Figure 1

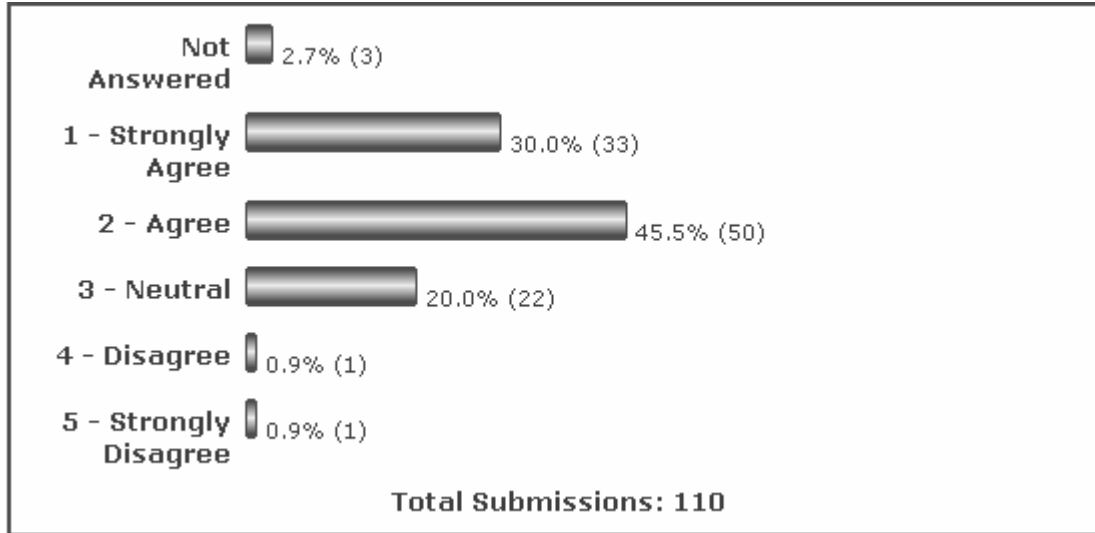


Figure 1. Survey responses to the question “As part of information literacy instruction, librarians should teach patrons about issues relating to privacy.”

Figure 2

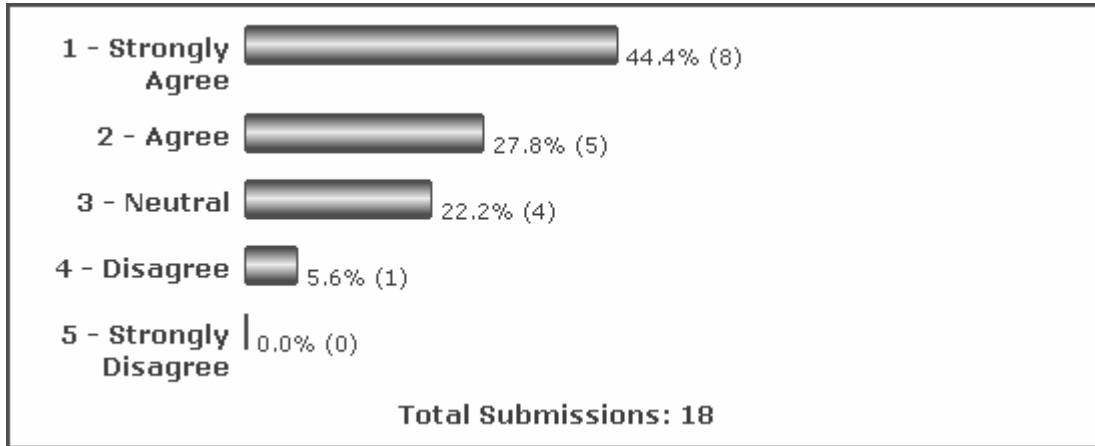


Figure 2. Responses to the question “As part of information literacy instruction, librarians should teach patrons about issues relating to privacy” by those who indicated that they were most experienced with social software.