Canadian Journal of Academic Librarianship
Revue canadienne de bibliothéconomie universitaire

Practicing Privacy Literacy in Academic Libraries: Theories, Methods, and Cases, edited by Sarah Hartman-Caverly and Alexandria Chisholm

Carey Toane ⓘD

Explore this journal

Cite this review

Book Review: *Practicing Privacy Literacy in Academic Libraries: Theories, Methods, and Cases*

Carey Toane

University of Toronto

More than one chapter in *Practicing Privacy Literacy in Academic Libraries: Theories, Methods and Cases* reminds us that privacy is a core value of librarianship. Yet we as academic librarians don't always fully examine or address the ways in which our policies, praxis, and platforms conform to or contravene those values. That is the work of the emerging space of "privacy literacy," which editors Sarah Hartman-Caverly and Alexandria Chisholm invite us to explore.

Chisholm describes herself in the preface as the "pedagogical geek" and her teaching team partner Hartman-Caverly as the "theory-wonk" (ix). Early in their partnership – begun at Penn State University in 2018 – they identified a "theory-practice gap" in the privacy literacy instruction activities of academic librarians (329). Since then, they have produced a conceptual privacy framework and a toolkit of teaching materials, how-tos, case studies, and professional policy guidance previously accessible through their website, Digital Shred[1].

Some of that material is restyled here in three chapters contributed by the editors, providing a compelling, human-centred argument for the value of privacy which forms the backbone of this book. Translating that value into practice in academic libraries in the form of privacy protection, literacy education, and advocacy is the work of the remaining chapters, a dozen or so contributed essays that together form an accessible quick-start guide for academic librarians who wish to embrace this new

---

[1] https://sites.psu.edu/digitalshred/

Divided into four sections, the book begins with Hartman-Caverly and Chisholm defining privacy as an element of human respect and privacy literacy as a means to "focus on the benefits of privacy in the human experience" (4) as we attempt to "regulate information flows across personal, social, spatial and technological boundaries" (6). Their "Six Private I's" framework positions privacy in relationship with identity, intellect, integrity, intimacy, interaction, and isolation – the six Is – as a series of "concentric zones of information agency distinguished by boundaries of access and disclosure that each person negotiates in order to sustain a sense of self and to participate in a broad range of relationships" (5). This model integrates the ideas of law and technology scholar Julie E. Cohen, digital privacy scholar Yong Jin Park, information scientist Helen Nissenbaum, Dutch lawyer and philosopher Mireille Hildebrandt, early seminal contributions of Warren and Brandeis and Charles Fried, among others included in the chapter bibliography (21-24).

The following chapter by Caverly describes a privacy-digital wellness model that links the privacy needs outlined in that theoretical framework to the holistic wellbeing of users. The author takes a critical look at the prevalence of digital tools and spaces that negatively impact privacy, and by extension the physical and mental health of users through unwanted surveillance, collection and sale of personal data, and monetization of attention or engagement. Taken together, these chapters serve to both motivate readers to action and establish Hartman-Caverly and Chisholm as leaders in this emergent space in academic libraries.

Throughout the book, privacy is linked to various campus issues that academic librarians will recognize, from the degrading mental health of students to the prevalence of institutional and library assessment and analytics tools. Several case studies portray institutions or faculty as generally disengaged with privacy literacy in their curriculum or policy, and libraries as either toeing the institutional line or starting to explore potential solutions. This gap is positioned as an opportunity for academic librarians to take a leadership role in addressing privacy needs across all aspects of the library.

Contributed essays cover various aspects of academic librarians' work, from access services to course design and student engagement. However, librarians engaged in instruction and/or policy development will find the most to work with here. As with most emerging areas of interest, the cases presented here are often pilots or studies, first steps toward something more widely adopted. Several authors generously share checklists, workflows, course syllabi or survey instrument questions for readers to adapt. While the contributed chapters sometimes re-tread common ground regarding issues such as lack of robust privacy legislation, readers

As self-appointed defenders of intellectual freedom, academic librarians are tasked with walking a line that has become increasingly fraught. This is a book written in and about Shoshana Zuboff's age of surveillance capitalism; the editors credit the contributions of Zuboff and other scholars and activists like Ruha Benjamin, Cathy O'Neil and Safiya Umoja Noble who have thoughtfully illuminated the ways in which modern human identity and behaviour have been commodified and weaponized. Not neutral, unequivocating, the essays in this volume reject commonly swung-about tenets such as dataism, the claim that data is somehow objective, and technosolutionism, that problems created by technology can be solved with more technology, an approach that puts the onus on the individual in the absence of regulation or policy protections. Yet for the most part, the authors manage to maintain levelheadedness and avoid hyperbolic language.

Rather than decrying the present in favour of the past, this book looks to the future, asking us to consider what could be gained by embracing privacy literacy in our libraries and for our students and communities. Perhaps the most powerful rejection is of the apathetic epithet that "privacy is dead;" this book goes to great lengths to show that it is very much alive.