

Librarians in the Forefront of Information

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In recent decades, public libraries have been adopting new ways of providing information to their patrons. Due to technological innovations, the Internet, and the World Wide Web, patrons have been able to access information quickly and communicate with librarians in remote parts of the world. For some it is hard to imagine libraries without internet access to perform everyday tasks. The internet has become an integral piece in the lives of many Americans and the services libraries provide for them. Some libraries are seen as tech hubs by patrons that come in to seek help in understanding their devices and how to navigate the internet. But these innovations in information access have also produced setbacks in regards to protecting patron private information. Despite libraries being at the forefront of broadening access to information, technological advancements, hyper-connectivity, and government intrusion have threatened user privacy and anonymity. Now more than ever, it is critical that librarians preserve core values of librarianship to continue advocating for patron's rights when using library resources to access information.

In *We Are Anonymous*, author and journalist Parmy Olson relates the complexities of internet privacy and subgroups of hackers and hacktivists from LulzSec and Anonymous. Most of the information in the book is sourced from interviews of key players involved in some of the most controversial cyber-attacks from 2003 to 2012 who brought down multinational corporations, exposed cyber-security vulnerabilities, and stood up to government censorship. However, not all members in the world of Anonymous were interested in hacktivism. Some

RUNING HEAD: LIBRARIES IN THE FOREFRONT OF INFORMATION

created havoc while meeting up in the popular online image board 4chan, exchanging ideas and information.

A major theme in the book is the power of anonymity. What made 4chan popular was that it did not require users to enter their personal information to use it. This created an online world of anonymity where users had no personal characteristics like gender, race, and class. 4chan created a collective community, a sense of purpose, and many expressed themselves without filters. Anonymous was created in 4chan and many users used the name to bring fear to the masses. The splinter group that broke off from the Anonymous group (Kayla, Topiary, Sabu, and Tflow) created the group LulzSec. This group carried out more involved cyber-attacks on Sony and FBI.

Some hackers in the group had elaborate online identities. For example, Kayla's real name was Ryan Mark Ackroyd who claimed to be a 14year old girl for many years. These online identities protected them from people finding out their true identity. Choosing online identities was a liberating yet safe way for members to carry their agendas. As a result, many of the attacks carried out by Anonymous and LulzSec had activist components. The attacks like the one carried out on PayPal, Visa and MasterCard was to avenge WikiLeaks. Many hackers saw WikiLeaks as a source of free information and reacted negatively when the companies redacted their funding. The power of anonymity, hacktivism, and online identity are major themes seen in *We Are Anonymous*. While much of the book informed us of the dangers of the online world, the themes can also be interpreted as a positive view on on current and future generations to come.

The themes addressed in the book also extend to issues libraries have been standing up to or have been involved through the advancements of the internet and technology. Patron privacy

RUNING HEAD: LIBRARIES IN THE FOREFRONT OF INFORMATION

in the library has always been a major topic for librarians in the digital age, as enforced by the Library Bill of Rights. Adopted by The American Library Association in 1939, it outlined the importance for everyone to have freedom of access, freedom to read text and view images, and freedom of truth and expression (American Library Association, 2017). The Library Bill of Rights gives an important stance for librarians looking for direction when it comes to issues on privacy.

In order for patrons to truly feel free to browse and inform themselves, they must know that their actions are not being monitored and recorded. In an article by Zimmer (2014), librarians and information professionals were surveyed to measure their views on privacy rights and protecting library users' privacy. The survey received 1,866 responses the importance of this study was that it builds from a previous survey conducted by ALA in 2008. The results indicate librarians and information professionals strongly agree with being able to control access and use of personal information as well as valuing user privacy (Zimmer, 2014). This reflects the work librarians do every day to provide the best service in terms of respecting patrons privacy and maintaining librarian ethics present. Specifically, librarians follow professional ethics protecting patron privacy by engaging in approaches such as limited tracking of user activities, instituting short-term data retention policies, and generally enabling the anonymous browsing of materials (Zimmer, 2014). The study also reported 97 percent of librarians and information professionals agreeing that a court order should be made present when asking for personal information, circulation, and internet records of patrons.

According to ALA, "Privacy, Surveillance, and Cybersecurity", librarians have been defending privacy rights against government attempts to obtain patrons borrowing information

RUNING HEAD: LIBRARIES IN THE FOREFRONT OF INFORMATION

and records without a warrant (American Library Association, 2011). Government policies like the United States Patriot Act impeded on librarian ethics by granting access via the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). This policy ultimately permitted access patron's private information without court order (Matz, 2008). In *We Are Anonymous*, hackers greatest fear was to be "doxed," which meant to find out and reveal their true identity (Olson, 2013). Many would create stories of made up lives and identities just to protect what they thought was crucial to their existence. Privacy for them was of great importance and relates to the constant struggle libraries face in protecting rights that have been established since the Library Bill of Rights was formed.

It is crucial for librarians to continue educating and providing a stance on privacy rights because of further developments in internet-connectedness. According to "Library of the Future: Center for the Future of Libraries," individuals view on privacy will change due to mobile technologies, phone and tablet applications, and internet connected objects. Feelings on privacy appear to already be shifting. When librarians and information professionals were surveyed on if they should play a role in educating general public on potential privacy rights risks in internet access, 49 percent of respondents strongly agreed in 2008 where in 2012 only 31percent strongly agreed (Zimmer, 2014). This decrease in also noted in a question asked about their concern if search engines are sharing personal information and records to the government. In 2008, 65 percent of respondents strongly agreed where in 2012, only 44 percent strongly agreed. Despite the apparent increase in hyper-connectivity, librarians are showing less concern for privacy threats.

Libraries serve as institutions patrons trust to seek information and provide the most accurate and trusted sources. The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) has

RUNING HEAD: LIBRARIES IN THE FOREFRONT OF INFORMATION

Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression committees that promote information rights in libraries. The IFLA ensures libraries are actively educating and advocating in defense of intellectual freedom, access to information, quality library and information services (IFLA, 2017). Major efforts of libraries to promote freedom of information have been established by their transparency as an institution and clearly defined core values. Hacktivists like Sabu and Tflow in *We Are Anonymous* leaned toward a stance of defending freedom of information and democracy (Olsen, 2013). For example, in Operation Tunisia, government websites were taken down as hackers shared scripts to circumvent government web snooping (Olsen, 2013). One of the Core Values of Librarianship is democracy, as cited in the ALA website “Democracy presupposes and informed citizenry” (Core Values of Librarianship, 2017). Libraries can provide information that can be trusted by their users and provide that extension to the transparency that patrons may seek in institutions. This can be observed through John Carlo Bertot’s evaluation and measurement of social inclusion in library systems (Thompson, 2014). He explains the history of the internet, the world wide web, and how libraries became connected. To have access to internet and information is part of a social inclusion that libraries try to bring to its patrons. A major focus of librarians is then to adapt to information innovation and to provide digital forms of information in a democratic way.

In *We Are Anonymous*, many of the cyber-attacks were performing under the name of Anonymous or LulzSec. In the world of anonymous hackers, people were able to express themselves in any way and not be accountable in the real world. In “Anonymity versus Perceived Patron Identity in Virtual Reference Transcripts”, Roper and Sobel (2012) analyze virtual reference transcripts to find out what patrons disclose about their identities and their needs.

RUNING HEAD: LIBRARIES IN THE FOREFRONT OF INFORMATION

Important findings in this article demonstrate that anonymity does not diminish the quality of an instant message reference transaction. Tenopir, (2004) identifies instant messages as a way to help patrons dealing with shyness and be able to ask reference questions without the pressure of walking to the reference desk in person. Anonymity helps patrons in libraries seek out information that they might not dare to if their identities were being announced. The Library of the Future declared anonymity as a “long hallmark of communication on the internet” (“Anonymity” American Library Association, 2014). The importance of anonymity in libraries has always been connected with free speech and intellectual freedom. It is clear that anonymity is a trend that library professionals will be involved in navigating because there are people that are weary of sharing information.

In *We Are Anonymous*, Parmy Olsen interviewed hackers and hacktivist she discovered these individuals had never meet in person but had preform some major cyber-attacks on multinational corporations and governments in other parts of the world. Anonymous formed a community and a name where people felt safe to create online identities where they could be whoever they wanted. Not only was privacy important for them it was the only thing that separated them between the online world and the real world. Privacy is also very important for libraries and librarians to uphold because it is associated with freedom of speech and intellectual freedom. The power of anonymity extends to patrons in libraries browsing the stacks and being able to read what they want. It has also created a less invasive way of asking reference questions in virtual reference. As technology innovations and hyper-connectivity increases librarians will find a way to continue providing the best service and maintaining their core values flexible to advocate for patron’s rights.

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RUNING HEAD: LIBRARIES IN THE FOREFRONT OF INFORMATION

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