Title

Review: *Privacy in the 21st Century: Issues for Public, School, and Academic Libraries* by Helen R. Adams, Robert F. Bocher, Carol A. Gordon, and Elizabeth Barry-Kessler

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Privacy in the 21st Century: Issues for Public, School, and Academic Libraries by Helen R. Adams, Robert F. Bocher, Carol A. Gordon, and Elizabeth Barry-Kessler. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2005. 247 pp. ISBN 1-59158-209-1

You are a media specialist in a high school. A parent, angry because he does not approve of a book recently checked out by his child, demands to see a list of all the books checked out by the child in the past six months.

You are an academic librarian. You have just learned that the company that provides access to your most popular full-text database is using its browser-based interface to track information about your students' searching behavior without obtaining their permission.

You are a public librarian. The branch librarian is considering replacing the bar codes on circulating items with radio frequency identification (RFID) tags and has asked for your input.

What would you do in these situations? How would you respond? Would you recognize and understand all of the privacy implications of your actions (or of your inactions)? Where would you turn for guidance?

One good place to start is *Privacy in the 21st Century: Issues for Public, School, and Academic Libraries*, a handbook and resource for librarians and educators. Helen Adams, Robert Bocher, Carol Gordon and Elizabeth Barry-Kessler have crafted an extremely useful and timely guide to the privacy issues and concerns encountered in libraries, and have situated them in a larger societal context. The authors' stated purpose, to "gather in a single volume information and further resources on privacy and confidentiality for public, school, and academic libraries" (p. xi), is fully realized in this thought-provoking and informative book.

Privacy in the 21st Century begins with an overview of the sources of the "right to privacy" assumed by many citizens of the United States, including federal and state privacy protections, as well as those guaranteeing privacy in the workplace. While these protections are not exclusive to libraries, it is important to understand the environment in which expectations of privacy in libraries have been fostered and developed.

At first glance, the chapter on privacy and emerging technologies may have readers questioning the connection and relevance of some of these technologies to libraries. For example, how is Computer Assisted Passenger Prescreening System II, used to screen airline passengers and discussed on pages 25 and 26, pertinent to libraries? A reader who is trying to find answers to thorny

library privacy issues may become frustrated by wading through descriptions of this and similar technologies not used in libraries. However, if we wish to fight the stereotype of the myopic *hysterical* librarian, who panics and focuses solely on libraries without seeing the bigger picture of national security concerns, we must be aware of all of the permutations and manifestations of privacy in society. Readers looking for a broad and comprehensive overview of the layers of privacy legislation will be served well by the authors' approach.

After a discussion of privacy in libraries in general, including a strong focus on American Library Association policy statements, state library privacy statutes, law enforcement interest (some may say interference) in libraries, and the USA PATRIOT Act, the authors address privacy issues in public, academic, and K-12 libraries in genre-specific chapters. Although there is some overlap of content among the three chapters (which the authors acknowledge), they make good encapsulated go-to sections that allow librarians who work in these settings to view the issues most relevant to them. The chapters provide an overview of pertinent issues in each setting, along with recommended privacy-related actions.

The authors' wide range of backgrounds informs and enhances their work. Adams has a background in school library media centers, Bocher is a consultant for public libraries, Gordon works in an academic library, and Barry-Kessler is an attorney experienced in issues of privacy and intellectual freedom. As a result, the book is well balanced and not dominated by a predilection toward any one type of library.

One quibble on format: snippets of information, surrounded by borders, are peppered unevenly throughout the book. They are used inconsistently and are more often perplexing than elucidating. For example, a box on page 81 intones: "Printers attached to public workstations are like public restrooms. They are messy and high-maintenance, and you never know what is happening inside them." The placement of this blurb interrupts the flow of the text, as only a passing mention of printers is made elsewhere on the page. Such bumper sticker formatting serves to distract from—rather than enhance—the authors' message. It would have been better to eliminate the blurbs entirely, or incorporate them into the text to show their relevancy.

The downside to the timeliness of the book's subject matter is the ephemeral nature of the material. Published in 2005, the book is already dated by its references to the "epic battle over the sunsetting of portions of the USA PATRIOT Act on December 31, 2005" (p. 66). This is unfortunate because, as the authors effectively point out, the struggle to protect privacy in libraries is not a new issue. Similarly, the explanations of emerging technologies will no doubt seem quaint and simplistic in the not-too-distant future, as all technologies age and morph and are eventually replaced by something newer and more cutting-edge.

This drawback emphasizes the changing nature of the issue of privacy and the need for librarians to educate themselves and stay on top of technological changes. Luckily, Adams, Bocher, Gordon, and Barry-Kessler have included a helpful chapter that lists articles, Web sites, blogs, and other resources to consult for further information. They also provide useful appendices containing core privacy policy documents, privacy audit guidelines and elements to consider, and samples of privacy and confidentiality policies. These sections provide a practical toolset for the librarian seeking to consciously review or implement privacy policies in their institutions.

Perhaps the book's greatest contributions are raising the awareness of privacy issues and trends in libraries and providing a handbook for navigating the sticky privacy issues that practicing librarians face every day on the job. *Privacy in the 21st Century* is an excellent resource, one to keep on hand for consultation and frequent referral.

Reviewer

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