Book Review

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

Kevin Adams, *Alfred University*

ABSTRACT

Review of Hartman-Caverly, S., and Chisholm, A. (Eds.). (2023). Practicing Privacy Literacy in Academic Libraries: Theories, Methods, and Cases. Association of College and Research Libraries. 390 pp.

KEYWORDS

privacy literacy, privacy education, privacy protection, privacy advocacy

SUGGESTED CITATION

Adams, K. (2024). Review of *Practicing privacy literacy in academic libraries: Theories, methods, and cases* by Hartman-Caverly, S., and Chisholm, A. (Eds.). *Journal of New Librarianship, 9*(2), 115–119. https://doi.org/10.33011/newlibs/17/14

Introduction

Librarians and students alike find themselves living in a world where maintaining their digital privacy feels nearly impossible. Alaxandria Chisholm and Sarah Hartman-Caverly open one of their workshops asking attendees to consider where they have recently left data tracks. Answers might include map apps, dating apps, workout apps, streaming websites, or even library databases. These tracks create data shadows that are used for advertising, training algorithms, and even creating data dossiers that can be sold to law enforcement. There is an inherent tension between the commitment to privacy that librarians hold as a core value and the academic library's drive to integrate new technologies. As libraries have pushed the line of privacy by engaging with social media, negotiating contracts with database vendors that collect patron data, and participating in learning analytics, academic librarians are increasingly aware of the existential threat posed by what Shoshana Zuboff calls *surveillance capitalism*. As librarians seek to educate themselves to better understand the ways in which the traditional library commitment to privacy fits into increasingly omnipotent government, corporate, and now academic surveillance apparatuses, librarians are faced with feelings that are commonly expressed by patrons and students regarding privacy: overwhelm and resignation. In *Practicing Privacy Literacy in Academic Libraries,* an edited volume, editors Chisholm and Hartman-Cavalry successfully capture the urgency that the existential threat of surveillance structures pose to humanity, while presenting work that will allow librarians to start contemplating and integrating privacy into their professional practice. Central to Chisholm and Hartman-Caverly's edited volume is a human focused approach that follows their teaching philosophy: "privacy is about respect for persons, not about protecting data." (x)

Overview

Chisholm and Hartman-Caverly's people-first approach imbues much of this book with thoughtful and critical approaches to privacy that guide the chapter contributions toward their stated goal: "to document academic library privacy literacy initiatives in their time of emergence, advance applications of privacy literacy as an expanding literacy in the field of academic librarianship, and contribute to the professional discussion about core library values and how they are reflected in current practice." (xvi) To this end, the structure of the book mirrors Article VII of the Library Bill of Rights, which calls for privacy advocacy, privacy education, and privacy protection.

The authors are both reference and instruction librarians at Penn State University Libraries. They began working together in 2018 with intersecting interests in privacy. Chisholm describes the duo: "She was the theory-wonk, and I was the pedagogical geek." (ix) Their pursuit of privacy literacy has led them to develop a central theory, the Six Private I's of Privacy, and yielded a four-part educational series, multiple academic publications and presentations. The author of this book review was lucky enough to attend a workshop led by Chisholm and

Hartman-Caverly at LOEX 2023. This book feels like the culmination of years of work, discourse, and pedagogical progress in the emerging field of privacy literacy.

Section Summaries

The book is divided into four sections which consist of chapters addressing themes of privacy literacy, privacy protection, privacy education, and privacy advocacy. The chapters use a variety of methods including pedagogical theory; case studies; overviews of programs, fellowships, courses, and lesson plans; student surveys; and pedagogical rubrics.

The opening section of the book, Part I: What is Privacy Literacy, provides the theoretical framework for the remainder of the book. This theoretical framework draws on theorists contributing to privacy conversations from within and without libraries, including surveillance capitalism as theorized by Shoshana Zuboff. Chapters address the ways in which surveillance and data collection erode the autonomy of the individual. In the opening chapter the co-editors introduce their theory of the Six Private I's, arguing that privacy protection preserves human identity, intellect, integrity, intimacy, and interaction/isolation.

The second section of the book, Part II: Protecting Privacy, offers a combination of practical steps and theoretical critiques that seek to support librarians interested in protecting patron privacy. Chapters focus specifically on legal protection for privacy, integrating privacy into digital workflows, and examining ways that libraries engage with surveillance technologies especially considering vendors that double as data companies.

Like the second, the third section of the book, Part III: Educating About Privacy, utilizes a mix of theory and practice to address privacy pedagogy. This is the largest section of the book, and highlights include chapters about creating a theory informed privacy literacy program, lesson planning using price discrimination to understand privacy, and teaching about privacy in credit bearing courses and a semester long fellowship. Most chapters provide adaptable materials for developing exercises, lesson plans, or programs. These chapters will be most easily used by instructors that work closely with students in courses, programs, workshops, or fellowships, but some materials may be adaptable for one-shots.

The fourth and final section of the book, Part IV: Advocating for Privacy, consists of practically applicable case studies that advocate for privacy with students, librarian co-workers, and teaching faculty and librarians. This section contains some of the strongest and weakest chapters in the book. Highlights include a chapter that introduces a case study where librarians surveyed students about their privacy concerns and used the results to shape their privacy policies and a chapter about peer-led professional development that educates fellow librarians about privacy literacy.

The book concludes with a compelling call to action, encouraging readers to educate about, advocate for, and protect privacy.

Strengths and Weaknesses

This book has many strengths, but perhaps its single greatest strength is the underlying theoretical framework. In the opening chapter, co-editors establish a theoretical framework for understanding privacy literacy, the Six Private I's, which is built upon and expanded by contributors throughout the book. The most successful chapters that contribute practical applications of privacy literacy draw on this strong theoretical understanding of privacy literacy. One chapter that builds on the theoretical framework laid by Chisholm and Hartman-Caverly is Chapter 6: Libraries, Privacy, and Surveillance Capitalism: The Looming Trouble with Academia and Information Technology, in which Andrew Weiss examines the ways that libraries engage with surveillance technologies especially considering vendors that double as data companies. One of the strongest chapters that offer adaptable materials by building on a shared theoretical foundation is Chapter 13: Understanding Student Perspectives on Learning Analytics to Enable Privacy Advocacy and Policy Design, in which Michael Perry et al. share an open science framework, methods, and results of research that seeks to share student perspectives on learning analytics in order to inform privacy policies.

The weaknesses in this book can be found in chapters that do not engage the theoretical conceit of the book or that fail to provide applicable lessons. The chapters that do not approach privacy literacy from the same theoretical framework that underpins the strongest chapters suffer from a lack of criticality and in seeking to provide practical steps for librarians, reify established surveillance norms. These chapters tended toward teaching about digital security, protecting personal IP, or a reliance on corporate ethics without considering the larger privacy and surveillance pictures.

While the book makes many practical contributions and chapters offer an abundance of adaptable materials in the appendices, the book could benefit from more contributions addressing how to teach privacy literacy in a one-shot setting. Many of the examples in this book are in settings where the teaching librarian is deeply engaged with the students. While most examples are arguably adaptable for the one-shot, the book would benefit from a more explicit addressing of the teaching circumstances that most academic librarians find themselves in.

Conclusion

This book's strengths far outweigh its weaknesses. *Practicing Privacy Literacy in Academic Libraries* offers readers a new theoretical framework for understanding the urgency of privacy literacy in our society, with many practically applicable ideas and materials for privacy protection, education, and advocacy. The book continually emphasizes the importance of privacy and offers new language for advocacy. As Hartman-Caverly writes in her conclusion, "As long as people value the ability to explore ideas freely and draw their own conclusions, privacy matters." (360)

References

Hartman-Caverly, S., and Chisholm, A. (Eds.). (2023). Practicing privacy literacy in academic libraries: Theories, methods, and cases. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries.