Understanding Sexual and Gender Minority Privacy

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ABSTRACT

This panel presentation is a summary update of the recent research from the 2021 ALISE Research Grant Competition Award: *Educating for Equity?: Sexual and Gender Minority Privacy in Library and Information Studies Education*. This session aligns with the conference theme, "Go back and Get It: From One Narrative to Many" by illustrating the ways in which "privacy" is a polysemous concept, and information professionals grappling with privacy from a policy perspective must be prepared for its multi-faceted nature and the distinct privacy needs of different communities.

New library and information professionals are expected to uphold a number of ethical principles, often in contexts of incredible complexity, wherein principles may well be in conflict with one another. One of the major tools by which organizations may navigate such conflicts is policy. Indeed, "[f]or current and future information professionals to be truly prepared for the far-reaching impacts of policy on their careers and their institutions, LIS educators need to make a commitment to teaching information policy" (Jaeger et al., 2015, p. 175). That education should approach information policy in a holistic manner, as "an interrelated set of issues that comprise a larger entity" (Jaeger et al., 2015, p. 175), rather than a discrete set of issues such as privacy and intellectual freedom. Educating students in information policy becomes even more urgent when one considers how much of the ecosystem in which users participate through libraries and other information institutions is outside of the direct control of the institution itself, mediated by contracts and policies.

In order to explore this larger question of information policy education for LIS students, this project proposed to examine a specific case: library policy addressing the privacy of sexual and gender minority (SGM) people (also often referred to by some variation of LGBTQI2SA+ people). This case sits at the confluence of several areas of discrete policy concern within LIS, including diversity, equity, and inclusion, equal access to information, privacy, and intellectual freedom. Therefore, this project provides a good opportunity to explore if and how LIS students are being equipped to deal with policy questions as "an interrelated set of issues." This is also a case of incredible urgency, as COVID-19 has deepened existing inequities facing sexual and gender minority people in the United States.

This project examined whether students are equipped to handle complex questions of information policy by examining the urgent information problem facing libraries: the privacy of SGM individuals in the face of COVID-19 surveillance. Sexual and gender minorities face significant information risks that differ from those of cis-gender, heterosexual people; improper information disclosure can lead to the loss of employment, housing, access to health care, and social support for SGM due to outing. Because of the risks of outing and discrimination, privacy concerns are of special concern to LGBTQ+ people in the face of pandemic surveillance, particularly digital surveillance. While privacy rights have been a point of controversy and uncertainty for all in the face of digital surveillance and the exigencies of the pandemic, sexual and gender minorities may well struggle to assert even those rights to which they are unquestionably entitled. However, even those who choose to advocate for their communities and assert their rights often do not realize that libraries are a potential place of risk. This study asked, "Are LIS programs preparing their students to meet the needs of LGBTQ+ patrons and stakeholders from a policy perspective in the workplace?" We have answered that question through a mixed-methods study, including a survey of LIS faculty, a content analysis of ALA-approved masters programs' learning outcomes and syllabi, a document analysis of the privacy policies of a purposive sample of libraries, and interviews with library employers. The panel will share the insights gained from this study in order to expand the understanding of the privacy of marginalized groups within libraries, and provide direction for future research into information policy education within LIS.

The panel will also discuss how this research has led to collaborations with other colleagues including Dr. Ghosh around development of a mini-track for the 56th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences which focuses on human-centered digital privacy solutions for digital and social media. The burgeoning growth of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) solutions, the ubiquity of social media and digital repositories, and cross-platform data usage have raised the stakes of addressing digital privacy. Semi-structured digital records, like emails, and unstructured text, like social media posts, present a significant threat of privacy breaches. The enormity of data presents an uphill task to identify and mitigate private information on digital and social media platforms. The focus of this new line of research is to bridge the gap between algorithmic development (automated decision-making systems, fair, accountable, and transparent systems) and human-centered approaches (usability studies, surveys, user interviews). Lastly, through engagement with participants, probing questions will be asked of the audience to brainstorm and collect ideas. Panel attendees will be active participants, working with the panelists in breakout groups, considering how find privacy solutions that are responsive to the legal and regulatory, social, cultural, and technical dimensions that we encounter within LIS education and beyond.

Reference

Jaeger, P.T., Gorham, U., Taylor, N.G., & Bertot, J.C. (2015). Teaching Information Policy in the Digital Age: Issues, Strategies, and Innovation. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science, 56*, 175-189. https://doi.org/10.3138/jelis.56.3.175

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

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AUTHOR KEYWORDS

information policy; information privacy; LGBTQ+; sexual and gender minority; digital privacy.