BiblioComprehension: Are Canadian Public Libraries Communicating Privacy Concerns about BiblioCommons to Patrons?

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Abstract

Increasingly, public libraries are incorporating interactive, collaborative, and user-centred social discovery tools into traditional library services with the goal of better serving their patrons. These tools are designed to encourage communication and interaction between library patrons and staff by providing a platform for patrons to evaluate, comment on, create, and share personalized lists of their favourite items in a library's collection. BiblioCommons is one example of a discovery tool that has been embraced by public libraries and their patrons to this end. Yet, while tools such as BiblioCommons offer many benefits to library patrons, relying on these tools to deliver core library services may violate patron privacy and confidentiality. Using the American Library Association Code of Ethics and the Library Bill of Rights as a framework, we explore the websites of Canadian public libraries that use BiblioCommons to discover how these libraries communicate privacy concerns associated with the use of this service to their patrons. Based on our findings, we argue that libraries are largely failing in their ethical responsibility to alert patrons to the privacy and confidentiality concerns associated with BiblioCommons.

Keywords: privacy; BiblioCommons; ALA Code of Ethics; ALA Library Bill of Rights; discovery tools

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What is BiblioCommons?

Increasingly, public libraries are incorporating interactive, collaborative, and user-centred social discovery tools into traditional library services with the goal of better serving their patrons. By providing a platform for patrons to evaluate, comment on, create, and share personalized lists of favourite items in a library's collection, these tools are designed to encourage communication and interaction between library patrons and staff. One such discovery tool that has become especially popular among public libraries and their patrons is BiblioCommons, a cloud-based service that facilitates users' interactivity and creativity characteristic of discovery tools. In fact, 42 public libraries in Canada have replaced their traditional Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) with BiblioCommons.

To use BiblioCommons, library patrons must have an existing library membership. Patrons use the card number associated with their library account to register with BiblioCommons, and they are then prompted to create a username. The patron's BiblioCommons account is directly linked to their library account, meaning that patrons can use BiblioCommons software to perform many actions associated with their library account, including placing holds, renewing materials, and paying fines. Library patrons can also use BiblioCommons to track, rate, and review materials they have checked out from the library. Even without logging into BiblioCommons, users of the library's website can see BiblioCommons account holders' usernames, reviews, and lists, unless account holders have made their "My Shelves" feature private. The public library associated with each username is also displayed, making a BiblioCommons

user's library card number one of the few pieces of information that is not visible by default.

BiblioCommons and Privacy Concerns

While tools such as BiblioCommons offer many benefits to library patrons, relying on these tools to deliver core library services may violate patron privacy and confidentiality. This is chiefly because BiblioCommons and similar platforms are dependent on the collection and aggregation of patron data. However, librarians have a long history of protecting patron privacy, with some libraries going so far as to destroy the type of data that BiblioCommons collects and shares. Incorporating BiblioCommons into regular library services thus has the potential to disrupt the ethical norms of librarianship.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

For this study, we use the American Library Association (ALA) Code of Ethics and Library Bill of Rights as a framework to determine whether public libraries in Canada are upholding their ethical obligations to inform their patrons of the potential privacy violations associated with using BiblioCommons. Our aim for this study was to discover whether and, if so, how Canadian public libraries communicate the privacy risks of using BiblioCommons with their patrons. Other researchers have examined the privacy risks posed by third party discovery tools, the ethical duties of librarians when implementing these tools, and the adoption of BiblioCommons in American public libraries. These themes, however, have not yet been examined within the Canadian context. To begin to address this gap, we investigate the use of BiblioCommons in Canadian public libraries, with a specific focus on the following research questions:

RQ1: Are Canadian public libraries communicating to their patrons the potential privacy risks posed by incorporating BiblioCommons into existing library services?

RQ2: Similarly, are libraries providing patrons with information regarding possible privacy concerns within BiblioCommons? For example, are patrons informed about the “My Shelves” feature, the visibility of usernames, and the privacy implications of stored reading histories, other data storage, and BiblioCommons’ server location? Are libraries providing information about who to contact for more information, both inside and outside the library organization?

RQ3: If such communication does exist, how accessible is it to library patrons? How many clicks are required to find the document or webpage, and is it appropriately named?

Based on our findings, we argue that libraries are largely failing in their ethical responsibility to communicate with patrons about privacy and confidentiality concerns with the use of BiblioCommons. We begin by discussing the significance of privacy as a professional value in librarianship and outlining the framework used in this analysis. From there, we consider the benefits and costs of implementing social discovery tools to better understand why such platforms are so popular among public libraries. We then describe our methodological approach and discuss our findings. Finally, the article concludes with our recommendations for how libraries can use BiblioCommons without compromising their ethical responsibilities, primarily through ensuring open communication with their patrons regarding privacy in the library.

Privacy and the American Library Association

Traditionally, privacy has been understood in terms of personal dignity, individual autonomy, and freedom from distraction or physical aloneness (Flaherty, 1989). It has also been defined as “a measure of the access others have to a person through information, attention, and physical proximity” (Gavinson, 1980, as cited in Min & Kim, 2015, p. 839). In the online environment, it is information privacy, or access to an individual’s information, that is of primary concern. Westin (1967) defines information privacy as “the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others” (p. 7). Therefore, online information privacy is linked to a website’s collection of users’ personal information, as well as users’ control over this collected information and awareness of how their personal information may be used (Min & Kim, 2015). Privacy concerns surrounding technology constantly shift due to changes and challenges created by big data (Mulligan, Koopman, & Doty, 2016). The lack of consensus on what privacy actually entails is indicative of the numerous ethical issues that can arise for librarians when introducing third party online services like BiblioCommons.

Within the library context, upholding patron privacy is considered a fundamental and long-standing ethical obligation. To protect the privacy of patrons, librarians rely on ethical standards and frameworks developed by the ALA to guide decision making. Since its first affirmation of privacy in 1939, the ALA has connected privacy with the right to intellectual freedom, which is considered another cornerstone of ethics in librarianship (ALA Council, 2017). As Kritikos and Zimmer (2017) have argued, intellectual freedoms “are threatened in an atmosphere in which library use is monitored

and individual reading and library-use patterns are available to anyone without permission” (p. 24). The commitment of librarians to patron privacy as well as strong policies governing the collection, retention, and destruction of patron records ensure that patrons’ rights are upheld.

In the Code of Ethics, the ALA has codified the values and ethical responsibilities of libraries and librarians (ALA Council, 2008). With regard to privacy, librarians must commit to “protect each library user’s right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted” (ALA Council, 2008, n.p.). Library policies should also reflect these principles. For instance, patron data collected in the course of administering library services should not be kept longer than it is needed, and it should not be shared with third parties.

Patrons’ rights to privacy and confidentiality are similarly invoked in the Library Bill of Rights’ guarantee of freedom of access and expression, which also links privacy and intellectual freedom. According to the ALA, “In a library (physical or virtual), the right to privacy is the right to open inquiry without having the subject of one’s interest examined or scrutinized by others” (ALA Council, 2017, n.p). In physical and virtual library spaces alike, the right to privacy is essential to ensuring patrons’ intellectual freedoms. Additionally, “users have the right to be informed what policies and procedures govern the amount and retention of personally identifiable information, why that information is necessary for the library, and what the user can do to maintain his or her privacy” (ALA Council, 2017, para. 6). Therefore, librarians must ensure open

communication with library users as to how their privacy is taken into consideration when providing library services.

Discovery Tools

Discovery Tools: The Upsides

To better understand the potential privacy risks of using BiblioCommons, one must first understand what this service does, how it was developed, and why libraries are incorporating it into their systems. BiblioCommons is a social discovery tool that allows users to create content by sharing book lists; reviewing, rating, and tagging items; and following other users to gain recommendations (Cahill, 2011, pp. 274-275). Although research on the use of BiblioCommons specifically is relatively scarce, much literature exists on the presence of discovery tools in libraries. In general, library and information science literature considers introducing discovery tools into public libraries a positive development (see, e.g., Anttiroiko & Savolainen 2011; Cahill 2011; Calhoun, Cantrell, Gallagher, & Hawk, 2009; Deodato, 2014; Hoffman, 2009; Pecoskie, Spiteri, & Tarulli, 2014; Spiteri, 2012). Carlin and Donlan (2007), for example, highlight a benefit of discovery tools in comparison with OPACs:

These products are technologies that work in conjunction with existing ILS (Integrated Library System) and data structures. Rather than replacing the entire data warehousing structure, these search engines float atop existing library catalog systems to create a front-end search interface that is more user friendly than the traditional OPAC (pp. 67-68).

Discovery tools, including BiblioCommons, are search interfaces “with a little something special” (Caplan, 2012, p. 109). This “something special” is what allows users to create

and share their own content, in addition to interacting with other patrons and library staff.

Web 2.0, a term that emerged in the early 2000s, has been defined as technologies and services that are “collaborative in nature, interactive, dynamic, and the line between creation and consumption of content in these environments [is] blurred” (Shahnaz, Veisi, & Zadeh, 2013, p. 367). For libraries, the integration of Web 2.0 technologies has enabled staff to collaborate with their patrons. Through adopting the Web 2.0 model, libraries can also encourage “purposeful and regular changes [and invite] users to participate in the creation of both the virtual and the physical library services they desire” (Shahnaz et al., 2013, p. 367). Discovery tools are a key part of libraries’ adoption of Web 2.0 (referred to as Library 2.0), with the goal of making services like the catalogue more accessible and appealing to today’s users (Kritikos & Zimmer, 2017).

Calhoun et al. (2009) conducted a study to determine how users interact with library catalogues and how they would like the catalogue to work. They found that the “end users’ preferences and expectations are increasingly driven by their own experiences with search engines like Google and online bookstores like Amazon [and] they expect their searches to find materials on exactly what they are looking for; they want relevant results” (Calhoun et al., 2009, p. 14). Discovery tools like BiblioCommons aim to address these user expectations by facilitating the creation and sharing of content based on a library’s collection.

Another advantage of implementing such systems in the public library environment is that the user-generated content derived from discovery platforms can be

a significant boon for readers' advisory (RA) services. Pecoskie et al. (2014) explored potential applications of discovery tools and user-generated content to RA services, such as compiling recommended reading lists and making book recommendations to patrons. They found that discovery tools are essential to the "creation of a community of users who can engage actively not only with library staff, but with fellow library users" (Pecoskie et al., 2014, p. 451). Discovery platforms were found to facilitate user-generated content that offer more insights into a book that readers were interested in than the MARC bibliographic record in the OPAC (Pecoskie et al., 2014).

Indeed, discovery tools emerged because the traditional library catalogue has a fundamental flaw: cataloguers do not get a chance to know their users and therefore cannot adapt the catalogue to better serve them (Deodato, 2014; Hoffman, 2009; Spiteri, 2012). This is problematic because "helping users by organizing materials and providing access to information is a fundamental purpose of librarianship and cataloging" (Hoffman, 2009, p. 632). As many scholars have argued, even if it were possible to create a catalogue that would better meet the needs of library patrons, the time and money required makes such an achievement highly unlikely (Anttiroiko & Savolainen, 2011; Cahill, 2011; Calhoun et al., 2009; Deodato, 2014; Hoffman, 2009; Spiteri, 2012). Therefore, the popularity of discovery tools like BiblioCommons is largely due to the improved services they provide to library users, without the library having to take on the task of developing such systems itself. Libraries clearly understand the need to update their services to make their online catalogues more patron friendly, and in order to accomplish this, many libraries incorporate discovery tools into traditional library services.

Discovery Tools: The Downsides

Yet, in their haste to provide users with an experience comparable to Amazon or Google, libraries may be overlooking the degree to which discovery tools can infringe upon patron privacy. While discovery tools like BiblioCommons enable librarians to interact with their patrons outside the library walls, these tools have “substantially diminished the library’s ability to control patron privacy” (Pekala, 2017, p. 48). Furthermore, in digital spaces such as BiblioCommons, details about how user information is obtained and used may not be easy for users to find or understand.

BiblioCommons prides itself on “continuously iterating on the details your patrons care about so that the BiblioCore catalog is more than the sum of its features” (BiblioCommons, n.d.a, Human Centered Design section, para. 1). This seemingly benign statement reveals that BiblioCommons actively collects and uses patron data (“details your patrons care about”) to create a better product. Kritikos and Zimmer (2017) explain that this type of data mining is common in discovery tools: “Many such platforms also aggregate patron usage and activity data to fuel algorithmic filtering, provide personalized content and recommendations, and help identify and analyze trends” (p. 24). The aggregation of such data is required to provide the services for which discovery tools are known. To do so, however, the software must track and analyze patron information that librarians have previously considered private and worth protecting. Granted, BiblioCommons claims that their system has “privacy controls [that] allow patrons to choose to share or keep their content private” (BiblioCommons, n.d.b, p. 4), but this only applies to what is shared publicly. Patrons and library staff are unable to inspect or control what data BiblioCommons mines or how it uses this private information.

Because “there are currently no open source options for web-scale discovery tools” (Pekala, 2017, p. 48), libraries are reliant on tools built and controlled by third party companies. This is problematic insofar as libraries entrust these companies with patron data but do not have the ability to ensure that these discovery platforms conform to library standards for information privacy. BiblioCommons maintains that by mining patron data, they are able to “build a sense of community around your catalog” (BiblioCommons, n.d.b, p. 4). However, this long term collection and analysis of patron data contradicts the ethics of librarianship, as outlined in the ALA Code of Ethics. Specifically, the Code of Ethics highlights patrons’ right to confidentiality when engaging in information seeking activities (Kritikos & Zimmer, 2017). Thus, libraries must find ways to balance the use of cloud computing and collection of patron data with their ethical responsibility to uphold patrons’ rights. Ultimately, discovery tools compromise patrons’ right to privacy by monitoring library use and making these patterns of use, along with personal reading lists, publicly available without patrons’ permission.

BiblioCommons International Privacy Statement

The same boilerplate privacy statement (“BiblioCommons International Privacy Statement”) appears on every library’s BiblioCommons page. Written and updated by BiblioCommons, the only customized element of the statement is the inclusion of the applicable library’s name. For example, the privacy statement on the Windsor Public Library website begins, “Windsor Public Library has entered into an agreement with BiblioCommons to provide an online service that will make it easier to track your holds and renewals and find the titles you are looking for” (BiblioCommons, 2015, para. 1). This statement lists what types of information “may be collected and stored on the

BiblioCommons service” (BiblioCommons, 2015, What types of information are collected by this service? section, para 1.). However, the statement does not inform patrons about how to limit the amount of data collected or shared about them.

Pekala (2017) has argued that this type of statement is not enough. Librarians must be the ones to actively communicate with their patrons about potential risks and ways to protect themselves in these new online environments. According to Pekala (2017):

Because information discovery in an online environment introduces new privacy risks, communication about this topic between librarians and patrons is paramount. Librarians should proactively discuss with patrons the potential risks to their privacy when conducting research online, whether they are using the open web or library discovery tools. It is ultimately up to the patron to weigh their needs and preferences in order to decide which tools to use, but it is the librarian’s responsibility to empower patrons to be able to make these decisions in the first place (pp. 54-55).

Unfortunately, the BiblioCommons International Privacy Statement provides little advice for those patrons wanting to engage with these new tools while still maintaining their privacy and confidentiality. In the absence of guidance from BiblioCommons, libraries must communicate directly with their patrons about how best to navigate these third-party systems. Additionally, libraries should make clear how they are actively monitoring and protecting patron privacy.

Research Methodology

For this study, we explored the websites of 42 public libraries across Canada to investigate our research questions and determine the degree to which public libraries using BiblioCommons communicate privacy concerns to their patrons. We chose libraries listed as BiblioCommons users on the company's website (see Appendix A for a list of the libraries selected). Of the 42 libraries investigated, we found that 13 provided some sort of information about BiblioCommons to their patrons, beyond the standard BiblioCommons privacy statement (see Figure 1). To find this information, we surveyed the library websites, used search features on library websites (when possible), and conducted Google site searches.

Figure 1. Canadian public libraries with privacy documentation.

Library	Webpage/File Name	Content Type
Burnaby Public Library	<i>New catalogue help</i>	Webpage
Fort St. John Public Library	<i>Your Privacy and Sharing with the Library Community</i>	Webpage
Fraser Valley Regional Library	<i>Frequently Asked Questions</i>	Webpage
Innisfil ideaLAB & Library	<i>Community-Social Media Policy</i>	PDF
Nelson Public Library	<i>Explore BiblioCommons</i>	Webpage
Okanagan Regional Library	<i>Your New Online Experience is Here</i>	Webpage
Orangeville Public Library	<i>Log In/ My OPL</i>	Webpage
Perth East Public Library	<i>Catalogue</i>	Webpage

Richmond Public Library	<i>RPL's Library Catalogue User Guide</i>	PDF
Stratford Public Library	<i>Library Catalogue</i>	Webpage
Strathcona County Library	<i>Policies and reports: Your personal information</i>	Webpage
Vancouver Island Regional	<i>BiblioCommons has updated their Terms of Service and Privacy Statement</i>	Webpage
Windsor Public Library	<i>Ways to track your reading</i>	Webpage

The design of this study was informed by the work of Kritikos and Zimmer (2017), who performed a similar analysis to determine how American public library policies and practices changed after implementing BiblioCommons. While Kritikos and Zimmer (2017) relied on “open records requests” (p. 30) to review internal policy documents, our study focuses on the communications that were publicly available to patrons on library websites as of December 2017. After locating the privacy documentation, we performed a content analysis. Using the following criteria, we coded the information taken from the 13 library websites with documentation about BiblioCommons.

1. General information

- a. Type of content
- b. Name of webpage or file
- c. Accessibility of information, as determined by the number of clicks from the library homepage

2. Content of documentation

- a. Link to BiblioCommons help section?
- b. Contact at the library if patrons have questions?

- c. Information on different types of possible privacy violations?
 - i. Sharing of “My Shelves”
 - ii. Reading history
 - iii. Data storage and server location
 - iv. Creation of usernames

Findings and Discussion

1. Existence, Type, and Accessibility of Documentation

As displayed in Figure 2, 31% of the libraries included in this study provided some type of public facing information on their websites about privacy concerns relating to BiblioCommons. This information was most often presented on a webpage, but two libraries made the information available as PDF files. Notably, the majority of libraries did not provide any information beyond the standard privacy policy written and updated by BiblioCommons. As previously noted, relying solely on BiblioCommons to provide users with this information is concerning. Patrons should expect libraries to provide some sort of documentation on this subject, and the Library Bill of Rights includes patrons’ right to be informed of how and why their information is used (ALA Council, para. 6).

Ultimately, libraries should provide privacy information to their patrons, and the information should be easy to find. Documentation on how patrons can protect their privacy when using BiblioCommons is, after all, only useful to patrons if it is discoverable. To answer the third research question, we counted the number of clicks required to get from the homepage to the BiblioCommons documentation and noted the presence (or lack thereof) of a website search feature. Much of the documentation we

found was buried deep in the libraries' websites and required a number of clicks to find. To find each library's documentation, we relied on the library website's search feature. Of the 42 library websites we examined, 31 included an option to search both the entire website and the catalogue. When this option did not exist, as was the case with the Perth East Public Library's website, we used Google site searches to try to locate BiblioCommons documentation. In such cases, if users do not know how to perform a site search in Google, they would be unlikely to find the information.

Figure 2. Percentage of Canadian public libraries currently using BiblioCommons that provide patrons with additional documentation about the service.

The libraries included in this study also used inconsistent naming conventions for their webpages and files detailing additional information about BiblioCommons. Only two of the webpages and files contained "BiblioCommons" in the title, which made it difficult for us to determine the relevance of the information therein. If the name of the webpage or file is not clearly related to BiblioCommons or patron privacy issues, it may be difficult for patrons looking for this information to find it. For example, Windsor Public

Library's (2015) webpage titled "Ways to Track Your Reading" explained that the "My Shelves" feature in BiblioCommons is public by default. However, the title of the webpage did not indicate that it pertains to BiblioCommons. Therefore, it could easily be overlooked. A library that provides information about privacy and BiblioCommons but does not make it easily accessible for their patrons, is only slightly less culpable than the libraries that do not provide any information at all.

Figure 3. Inclusion of specific content in BiblioCommons documentation.

2. Content of the Documentation

In addition to naming conventions and the accessibility of documentation about BiblioCommons, the content of the documentation should help patrons understand what privacy issues are at stake. To address the second research question, we accessed the available documentation to determine whether libraries included a link to the BiblioCommons help section and library contact information for patrons seeking more information (see Figure 3). Libraries are expected to “protect each library user’s right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted” (ALA Council, 2008, n.p.). In order to succeed in this role and fulfill their ethical obligations to facilitate open communication about privacy in the library, librarians must ensure that patrons are able to communicate any questions they may have. The existence of comprehensive privacy documentation is important, but it is not enough; librarians must also provide a way to receive patron feedback about library privacy policies.

Through our analysis of BiblioCommons, we ascertained three main sites of potential patron privacy violations: the public sharing of patron usernames, the tracking of information through the “My Shelves” and “Recently Returned” features, and BiblioCommons’ server location and data storage agreements. Thus, we specifically analyzed whether the library documentation provided patrons with information about these concerns. Because each of these points fundamentally affect current patron privacy standards in Canadian public libraries, we believe they are essential information to communicate to patrons.

Username

In BiblioCommons, usernames are attached to users' comments and shelves, as well as being "indexed into Google or other search engines" (Burnaby Public Library, n.d.). That is to say, if a patron decides to use a personally identifiable username, their choice has the potential to interfere with their privacy in and outside the digital library space.

Providing username guidance to patrons is, therefore, essential to protecting user privacy and confidentiality. In addition to detailing the ethical responsibilities of librarians, the ALA states that patrons must work to protect and respect the privacy of other users (ALA Council, 2017). However, when a patron's identity, behaviours, and interests are publicly accessible, respecting the privacy of others becomes impossible. Five of the 42 library websites provided information about the public facing nature of usernames in BiblioCommons and explained the importance of creating a non-identifying username. These statements were written in one of two ways: either libraries presented this as a choice for their patrons to make, or they stated that patrons must create non-identifying usernames. Okanagan Regional Library's (2016) webpage, for example, provided users with a choice: "If you'd prefer to be anonymous on the BiblioCommons site, try to select a username that does not personally identify you" (Privacy settings section, para. 3). Other libraries simply stated that patrons should create a username that keeps their information private. Orangeville Public Library's (n.d.) webpage suggested, "You'll want to create a username that doesn't personally identify you (e.g., don't use your name, birthday, or your email address" (n.p.).

Anonymous usernames are an essential part of ensuring patron privacy and confidentiality when using BiblioCommons, and many of the libraries included in this study are failing to inform their users of this.

Reading History

A patron's reading history can be stored in BiblioCommons in two separate ways:

1. "My Shelves" is a feature that allows patrons to add or remove titles to a list, meaning that the list is not generated from patron records. Unlike the "Recently Returned" feature, "My Shelves" is made public by default. To make their shelves private, patrons must go into their settings and opt out of this feature.
2. "Recently Returned" is an opt-in feature that automatically tracks all checked out and previously checked out titles.

Using "My Shelves," patrons can add titles to three separate categories: "Completed," "In Progress," and "For Later." Although these are user generated lists, it is not immediately evident that they are publicly accessible. This was the privacy issue that libraries most often included in their BiblioCommons documentation. In all, seven libraries provided information about this potential privacy risk to patrons, including how to turn this feature off. For example, Richmond Public Library (2014) provided the following information to their patrons about the feature: "Remember: By default, your shelves and lists are public, so anyone can see them! If you want to make your shelves private, go to your Settings at the top right of the screen, then find your Privacy Settings" (n.p.). In our view, all seven libraries provided adequate information to patrons regarding "My Shelves." However, the 35 libraries that did not provide any information about the privacy concerns associated with "My Shelves" are potentially compromising patron privacy.

The "Recently Returned" feature is a potential site of ethical concern because although patrons must opt in to activate it, they may not fully understand the potential

implications of storing their reading history. Six libraries provided some level of information on “Recently Returned.” While most indicated that this feature needs to be turned on, two libraries make no mention that this feature is a disruption to traditional library practices of not retaining reading history data. Because the addition of this feature may cause patrons to question whether “the subject of one’s interest [is being] examined or scrutinized by others” (ALA Council, 2017), libraries must provide information about how and why this information is collected. Nelson Public Library (n.d.) addressed this concern by stating, “Nelson Library staff cannot access your ‘Recently Returned’ list” (Save Your Browsing History section, para.1). Similarly, Fraser Valley Regional Library’s (n.d.) documentation assured patrons that “the content on your Recently Returned page is visible only to you” (Is there a way to track my borrowing history? section, para. 1). It is important to note that while six of the 42 libraries did provide some sort of information related to the “Recently Returned” feature, no library stated whether BiblioCommons can access or use this information.

Data Storage and Server Location

Of the libraries surveyed, only one, Fort St. John Public Library, provided patrons with information about where BiblioCommons stores their information. Accessed in December 2017, their documentation stated: “Should you choose to create any Shared Content, which includes ratings, reviews, messages, lists and additions to My Shelves, that information may be stored on secure servers in the cloud outside of Canada” (Fort St. John Public Library, n.d., n.p.). Without this information provided and without independent research, patrons would not have a full understanding of how BiblioCommons operates. Patrons would be unable to make informed decisions on how to engage with the software in a manner that maintains their privacy and anonymity.

Emerging Library & Information Perspectives

Because data stored in the cloud is often subject to the jurisdiction of the location of the servers, disclosing server location information allows patrons to determine how best to protect their data. This is especially the case given that information stored in servers outside of Canada may be observed, gathered, or seized by another country. Many patrons may be unaware of these concerns when making decisions about what to share on their local library website.

Recommendations

Based on our findings, we recommend that all Canadian public libraries using BiblioCommons maintain documentation that details the privacy concerns associated with using this type of discovery tool. All libraries have an ethical duty to provide patrons with sufficient knowledge to be able to fully take advantage of library services without putting their personal information and privacy at risk (ALA Council, 2008). If patrons are not properly informed, librarians are failing to protect them from potential risks on their own library websites.

In addition to making such documentation available, we recommend that it contain the following information:

1. Library contact information for patrons to seek additional information, thereby facilitating conversations about privacy between library staff and patrons.
2. The public nature of certain BiblioCommons features, including usernames and “My Shelves.” We recommend that libraries provide a way to randomly generate usernames or demand that BiblioCommons incorporate this into the site design.

3. The potential ethical implications of the “Recently Returned” feature, specifically in terms of how it breaks with traditional library practices and how libraries are protecting patron information despite this conflict. Documentation should also explain how BiblioCommons uses or collects this information.
4. The (potential) location of all servers involved in activity related to BiblioCommons and the potential risks associated with these server locations. Libraries should also describe how patron information is stored and aggregated by both the library and BiblioCommons.

As well as providing the information necessary for patrons to make informed decisions, library documentation regarding BiblioCommons must be easily accessible. We recommend that libraries include a hyperlink to the documentation on their homepage and the BiblioCommons login screen. Because the documentation would then be linked to on multiple webpages, we recommend that libraries provide this information in a single PDF document to avoid providing links to old documentation or webpages that have moved.

According to the ALA Council (2017), “In all areas of librarianship, best practice leaves the user in control of as many choices as possible. These include decisions about the selection of, access to, and use of information” (Rights of Library Users section, para. 2). As such, we recommend that libraries clearly outline how patrons can protect their identity while engaging with discovery tools. This information is necessary to enable patrons to make reasoned decisions related to their own privacy. It is not our recommendation that libraries should discourage patrons from using such discovery

tools or move away from providing these innovative services to patrons. However, we strongly urge libraries engaging with third party software providers like BiblioCommons to thoroughly educate their patrons about the potential risks associated with such tools.

Limitations of this Study

The primary limitation of this study was that it did not involve direct communication with any of the 42 Canadian public libraries that have implemented BiblioCommons. Thus, we were unable to ascertain several key factors underlying the communication of privacy concerns related to BiblioCommons. Firstly, we did not obtain any information about whether library staff are being educated about the privacy implications of BiblioCommons, or whether any internal procedures are in place to inform staff responses to patron questions. Secondly, our research would have greatly benefited from questioning librarians about their negotiations with BiblioCommons and the decision of most libraries included in this study to rely on the standard BiblioCommons privacy statement rather than creating their own. Finally, if any of the libraries were in the process of creating documentation about privacy and BiblioCommons or updating their websites, that information was unavailable to us. Each of these limitations represents opportunities for further research.

In addition, while outside the scope of this study, we did not incorporate any federal or provincial laws relating to privacy. Doing so would help make sense of how BiblioCommons and similar services may affect privacy concerns in a legal context. Further work could be done to determine how to use federal legislation, such as The Privacy Act, and provincial public library acts to inform library policy concerning the implementation of discovery tools.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to uncover how libraries communicate the privacy risks of using BiblioCommons with their patrons, if they communicate this risk at all. After reviewing the results of our research, we determined that libraries are not doing enough to make their patrons aware of the privacy implications of incorporating BiblioCommons into traditional library services. This lack of information affects patrons, whose private information may be collected and shared without their awareness or consent, and it also has consequences for librarians in terms of their ethical responsibilities. The majority of Canadian public libraries that have adopted BiblioCommons rely exclusively on the boilerplate privacy statement written by BiblioCommons. This reliance on BiblioCommons, a third-party technology provider with interests of its own, conflicts with the library's duty to communicate with library patrons about privacy issues, and this should be of great concern to librarians.

BiblioCommons clearly provides a service that was lacking in public libraries, and it has been embraced and celebrated by library users. Thus, we are not advising that public libraries discontinue using BiblioCommons or refrain from adopting this service. Rather, our primary concern is the manner in which libraries implement tools such as BiblioCommons. It is the responsibility of librarians to adopt new tools in such a way that they continue to uphold their longstanding dedication to the protection of patron privacy and confidentiality. We encourage librarians to embrace their ethical obligation and provide clear and explicit documentation for patrons about how to use BiblioCommons without jeopardizing their privacy and anonymity. In doing so, librarians can ensure their

patrons are equipped with the necessary information to make active decisions about how they will use BiblioCommons.

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Appendix A

List of Libraries Surveyed

Library	Website Homepage
Ajax	http://ajaxlibrary.ca/
Aurora	http://www.library.aurora.on.ca/
Brantford	https://brantford.library.on.ca/
Burnaby	https://www.bpl.bc.ca/
Calgary	https://calgarylibrary.ca/
Chinook Arch	http://www.chinookarch.ca/
Edmonton	https://www.epl.ca/
Fort Saskatchewan	http://www.fspl.ca/
Fort St. John	https://www.fsjpl.ca/
Fraser Valley Regional	http://www.fvrl.bc.ca/
Greater Sudbury	http://www.sudburylibraries.ca/en/
Hamilton	http://www.hpl.ca/
Innisfil	http://www.innisfil.library.on.ca/
Markham	http://www.markham.ca/wps/portal/Markham/RecreationCulture/Library
Nelson	https://nelson.bc.libraries.coop/
New Westminster	https://www.nwpl.ca/
North Perth	http://www.northperth.ca/en/ourcommunity/library
Oakville	https://opl.ca/
Okanagan Regional	http://www.orl.bc.ca/
Orangeville	https://www.orangeville.ca/orangeville-public-library
Ottawa	https://bibliootawalibrary.ca/en
Pemberton and District	https://pemberton.bc.libraries.coop/
Perth East	http://www.pertheast.library.on.ca/
Pickering	http://www.picnet.org/
Port Moody	http://library.portmoody.ca/
Red Deer	https://www.rdpl.org/
Richmond	http://rpl.yourlibrary.ca/
Shortgrass	http://www.shortgrass.ca/
Squamish	https://squamish.bc.libraries.coop/
St. Albert	https://www.sapl.ca/
St. Marys	http://www.townofstmarys.com/en/recreation-and-culture/Library.aspx
Stratford	http://stratford.library.on.ca/
Strathcona County	https://www.sclibrary.ca/
Surrey	https://surreylibraries.ca/
Vancouver Island Regional	http://virl.bc.ca/
Vancouver	https://www.vpl.ca/
Vaughan	http://www.vaughanpl.info/

West Perth	http://www.westperth.library.on.ca/
West Vancouver Memorial	https://westvanlibrary.ca/
Whistler	http://www.whistlerlibrary.ca/
Whitby	http://www.whitbylibrary.ca/
Windsor	http://www.windsorpubliclibrary.com/