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Digital Initiatives Symposium

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Privacy and Anonymity in a Reference Librarianship Digital Archive

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Privacy and Anonymity in a Reference Librarianship Digital Archive

Presenter 1 Title
Scholarly Communications Librarian

Session Type
Poster

Abstract
This poster will discuss the ethical concerns with the processing, digitizing, and organizing of the Pacific Library Partnership's System Reference Center (SRC) reference question archive, which contains material artifacts of complex reference questions from 1972-2004.

Reference services, a core librarian responsibility, centers on connecting users with answers, materials, and the information that will satisfy their research needs. With the proliferation of online materials and ubiquity of search engines, the nature of reference services has changed dramatically over the last decades.

The archive is comprised of questions submitted for reference librarian review by other reference librarians who had exhausted local resources and capabilities. Thus, these questions offer a unique perspective on the nature of the questions that required expert searchers with extensive resources. Included in this collection's documentation are the originating librarian-patron consultation and SRC librarian answer, providing a detailed view of the intellectual approach and type(s) and quantity of resources consulted.

This poster will consider the privacy concerns for this particular archive, reference services, and librarians.

Location
Rotunda / Garden of the Sea

Keywords
Scholarly Communications, Archives, Reference Services, Digitization, Privacy

Privacy and Anonymity in a Reference Librarianship Digital Archive

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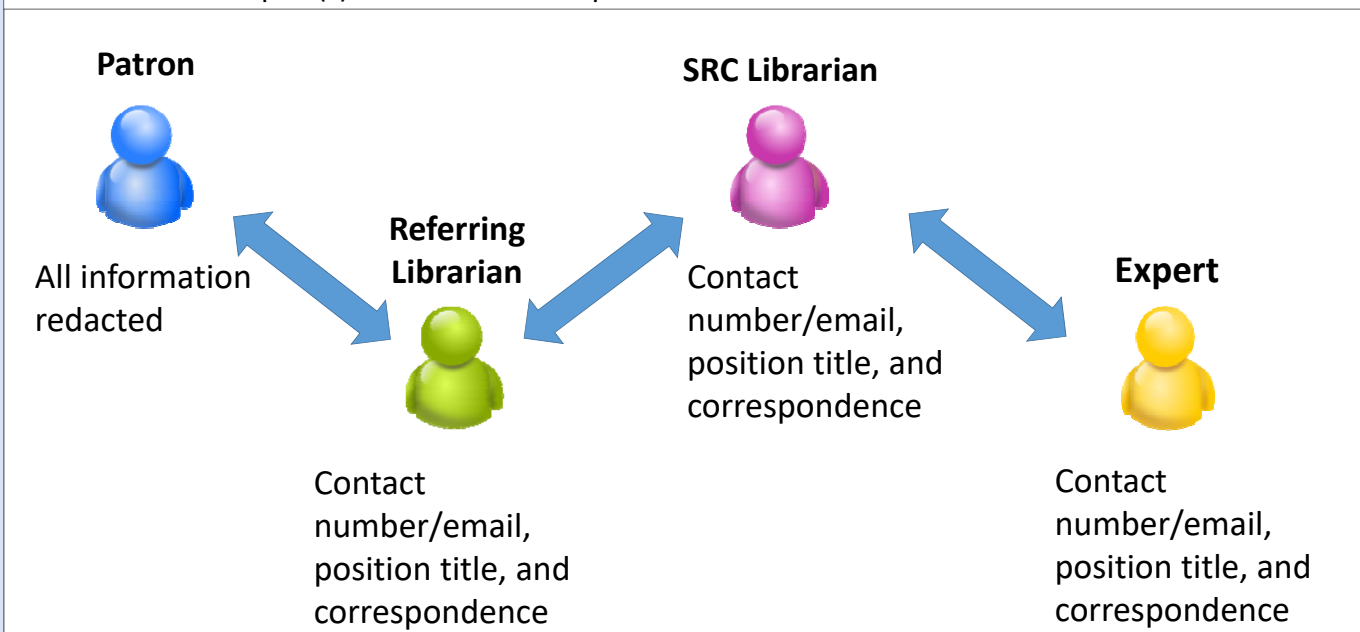**Fourth Annual Digital Initiatives Symposium, May 1-2, 2017**

Objective

Processing, digitizing, and describing the Pacific Library Partnership's System Reference Center (SRC) archive in an appropriate manner

The archive contains complex reference questions from 1972-2004. Participating libraries referred difficult reference questions to SRC after local resources and capabilities had been exhausted.

> *Do the librarians and individuals who helped answer these high level questions need to be anonymized for privacy?*

Patron poses a question to the Referring Librarian, who initially attempts to answer the question. The Referring Librarian sends the question to SRC and the SRC Librarian uses additional resources and may contact External Expert(s). All written correspondence is retained.

Patron
All information redacted

Referring Librarian
Contact number/email, position title, and correspondence

SRC Librarian
Contact number/email, position title, and correspondence

Expert
Contact number/email, position title, and correspondence

Considerations and Tensions

- Reference librarianship has a long history of being conducted in an anonymous manner
- Patron privacy is preserved because of the redaction and aggregation
- Time frame – questions are 13-45 years old; what is the potential for harm?
- One could analyze the question and materials as a form of unobtrusive observation

Value of the Archive

- Primary documentation of reference questions during a time of great change
- Evolution of reference librarianship
- Raising the visibility of librarianship

Next Steps

- Anonymize the librarian?
- Code the librarian(s) and expert(s)?

SJSU | KING LIBRARY

Further Reading

Ramey, M. A. (1994). Naming names, claiming names: A proposal for reference librarians' self-introduction. *RQ*, *34*(1), 15-20.

Mon, L., & Harris, L. E. (2011). The death of the anonymous librarian. *The Reference Librarian*, *52*(4), 352-364.