Connecting Students to Their Data: Data Doubles and the Student Voice in Library Learning Analytics

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Grant Overview

A student-centered, three-year research project to study student perspectives of privacy issues associated with academic library participation in learning analytics initiatives

- Phase One: Student Interviews
- Phase Two: Multi-institution Student Survey
- Phase Three: Scenario-Based Focus Groups
Background
What are Learning Analytics?

“measurement, collection, analysis, and reporting of [student and other data] for the purposes of understanding and optimising learning and the environments in which it occurs.”

To What Degree are Libraries Participating in Learning Analytics?

• **SPEC Kit 360: Learning Analytics**, a survey of Association of Research Library members (https://doi.org/10.29242/spec.360)

83%
Why is Student Privacy an Issue?
Why Care About Student Privacy as it Relates to Learning Analytics?

• Privacy is an important function of autonomy

• Others’ access to information about one’s habits, activities, opinions, feelings, aspirations, and the like can undermine the degree to which one acts or thinks for oneself

• “If learning analytics tends to push students in directions are not based on their own reasons, or promotes some values (e.g., careers) disproportionately to others, it conflicts with their autonomy interests and is not justifiable.”

• See Rubel and Jones, 2016
Phase One Methods: Student Interviews
Interview Sites

- Indiana University-Bloomington; Bloomington, Indiana
- Indiana University-Indianapolis (IUPUI); Indianapolis, Indiana
- Linn-Benton Community College; Albany, Oregon
- Northwestern University; Evanston, Illinois
- Oregon State University; Corvallis, Oregon
- University of Illinois at Chicago; Chicago, Illinois
- University of Wisconsin-Madison; Madison, Wisconsin
- University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Data Analysis

- Case Summaries
- Rough Themes
- Open Coding
- Closed Coding

169 Codes
4,176 Excerpts
Emerging Findings
Information Access by Institutions

- Students are generally unaware of the data and information to which their institutions have access when initially asked.

- Some students were able to identify that campus information systems were likely to track their digital behaviors.
“I don’t know what information [my institution] is necessarily taking from me.”

“[The LMS knows] every move a student is making.”
Information Restrictions

• Students expressed some nuanced arguments about when access should be restricted, especially concerning third parties.

• Some students recognized that their liberal perspective on information access should not determine the privacy rights of their peers.

• Some information is especially sensitive, and that information deserves rigorous access limitations.

• Students primarily referred to GPA, but there were other notable examples about healthcare records.
“So, me personally, I don’t search things that are really like too out there. I could see where someone else might do that and that would be like a problem; I definitely understand that. Maybe, for me since I personally don’t do anything that would embarrass me, I wouldn’t be worried about the school seeing; it’s not a problem for me… for other students who might not be able to do what I’m doing, give them some privacy. Because who knows if [when] they go home that they even have WiFi, so they come to the school to utilize WiFi and do whatever they do in their free time.”
Perceptions of Information Access by Libraries
Information Access by Libraries

- **MOST**: Students overwhelmingly believed that their library tracked which physical materials they checked out

- **SOME**: Yes to Major/College — but Not their course grades and grade point average (GPA)

- **A FEW**: Library Website/Database Tracking
Library Privacy

• Even though students were generally positive about library learning analytics, they did express a number of questions about the practices, *especially* since they had never been informed that their library had access to or was analyzing certain types of data.
“I guess it comes back to what type of data are they looking at? Is it more personal stuff or is it solely looking at, well, **what are they researching for this, or what are they doing?**”
Trust in Libraries

- Their concerns, however, were allayed in part by their trust in their library.

- Students expressed that libraries should have “protocols” and “data classifications” in place, which would define sensitive data types and guide data uses.
“And, I feel like since there’s kind of like a trust in libraries, like libraries should kind of like return that like gesture in a way. Like, I trust the institution of a library. I don’t trust Facebook. So, it’s like when you’re on Facebook, you know it’s kind of like the Wild West…. Yeah, so I feel like the types of data that like a university would collect is different, the purpose of it is completely different. The implicit kind of feeling that people have towards libraries, the library should not betray that trust. ”
A Brief Discussion

INFORMED CONSENT

trust
Privacy Literacy

• Students became more forthcoming with their perspectives and privacy expectations as they worked through interviews

• However, many students struggled to even come up with ideas regarding basic information to which their institution may have access and use for analytic purposes
A Lack of Awareness and Informed Consent

• The data indicate that students’ lack awareness about their institution’s data practices stems in part from the latter’s minimal—if not nonexistent—informed consent processes.

• By informing students of an institution’s data practices, protections, and their related privacy rights, student understanding of how particular data practices intersect with privacy issues is likely to increase.

• Treat informed consent as an educational process—not a policy burden.
Take-Aways
Take-Aways

• Students are generally unaware of the data and information to which their institutions have access

• Students expressed some nuanced arguments about when data access should be restricted

• Students expressed a number of questions about library data practices because they aren’t informed

• Students generally trust libraries

• There is little-to-no informed consent
What this Means for Library Data Management

• Local questions to ask:
  • What is happening with student data at your library?
  • Are students aware of library data use?
  • Would students still have trust in the library if made aware of library data use?
  • Lots of potential applications for data management
Questions?

- Follow our research progress at:

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