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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

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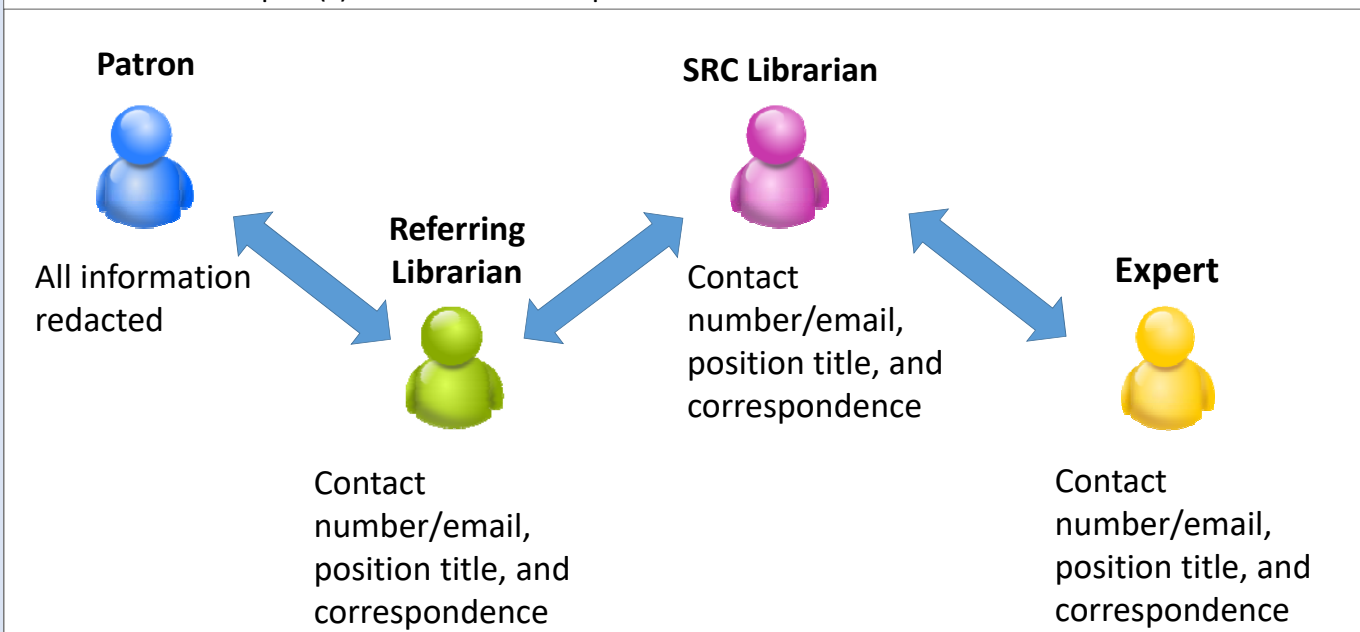
Objective

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.



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)?

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.