VOL. 25 NO. 4, DECEMBER, 2020

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What's fun got to do with it? What fun-life contexts teach us about the bounds of context

Melissa G. Ocepek, Gary Burnett, Eric Forcier, and Yazdan Mansourian.

This panel will appeal to scholars interested in fun-life contexts, positive information science, and everyday life. While the focus of the panel is on fun, anyone interested in the bounds around context in the information sciences will find something to engage with in this panel.

Format

The panel will be presented in three parts. For the first part, as a 10-minute introduction, each panellist will briefly present key contexts where they have observed fun in their research. Audience members will be invited by the moderator to share where they have observed an interaction of fun and information. The second part will take one hour, and will include a 7-minute presentation from each panellist, followed by 10 minutes of audience prompts. The first three panellists will each define a relevant term (fun, serious, and context) before inviting feedback from the audience. The fourth panellist will introduce the question, what can we learn from the bounds of fun-life contexts to studying information behaviour? Rather than finishing with audience prompts, the last presentation will immediately segue into the third part: a 20-minute discussion of the central question that includes the panel and audience, and led by the moderator. The discussion and panel will conclude with a review of the themes, a Q&A, and what comes next.

Purpose

The purpose of this panel is to explore the concept of context through the examples of the bounds of fun-life contexts. Fun is an often used but rarely defined term. Instead many scholars such as Hartel (2003) have used terms like serious leisure to articulate a specific context of interest to Library and Information Science scholars. This panel will explore the bounds of fun and fun-life contexts to explore what context means and how important are our definitions and boundaries.

Summary of content

Each panellist will present a 7-minute talk on a term or question followed by discussion.

Fun

As a concept, *fun* signals a hedonic response to the experience of an object or activity. Feelings of pleasure and enjoyment are commonly associated with fun. Some objects and activities are defined by the perceived experience of *fun*, such as leisure activities, games and entertainments (e.g., Kari and Hartel, 2007; Taylor, 2019). The formal characteristics of play are also interconnected with the concept of fun (Caillois, 1961). The actual, subjective experience of play, entertainment or leisure activities are not, however, uniformly pleasurable; rather than hedonistic, our experience of fun-life contexts may be more accurately described as *eudaimonic*, meaning happiness or fulfilment achieved in pursuit of a life lived well. This presentation will explore the boundaries in how we perceive fun and the ways it manifests as information behaviour in daily life.

Serious

The concept of seriousness has at least four facets including significance, authenticity, tenacity, and meaningfulness. Any serious matter is significant in one way or another and requires careful consideration. It also should be authentic with some meaningful implications. Furthermore, a serious matter usually needs persistence and should entail specific meanings in a particular context. Fun, as a general concept, is a serious matter. Having fun has a high level of significance in our wellbeing (Lee and Hwang, 2018), represents a genuine part of human nature and is relevant to almost all arenas of life. In this presentation the seriousness of fun as a fundamental part of an authentic life will be explored and the role of information in this context will be discussed.

Context

Context is an often used and rarely defined term in the Library and Information Science literature (Agarwal, 2018). Context has been described as an environment, container, setting, role, and situation. Contexts are '*complex, multiple, overlapping, and dynamic... elements of which include sociality, culture, institutional rules and resources, technological change, and power relations, and that are in turn shaped by information actors*' (Courtright, 2007, p. 291). In this brief presentation, the role of context will be explored with examples from the history of the term in Library and Information Science and how it is defined in recent research on fun-life contexts.

What can we learn from the bounds of fun-life contexts to studying information behaviour?

While *fun* is, in many contexts, conceptualised as extracurricular or even anathema, members of *fun*-oriented information worlds engage in directed information practices that, like those in more *serious* worlds, are pursued with the utmost seriousness, and the information relevant in those worlds is perceived to be of great importance and value by community members (see Jaeger and Burnett, 2010). A good example is the world of *Deadheads* (fans of the rock band the Grateful Dead) where, although the main source of fun – Grateful Dead shows – ended in 1995, information activities have radically expanded over the past 25 years, resulting in the rigorous documentation of every aspect of the deadhead experience, both musical and cultural. By examining these kinds of *fun* information contexts – by thinking about how and why people engage in information practices that are every bit as focused and rigorous as those found in more *serious* contexts – we can understand more about the meaning and importance of information in our lives and about how what is serious can be fun and how what is fun can be serious.

About the Organisers

Moderator & Panellist – Melissa G. Ocepek is an Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois in the School of Information Sciences. Her primary research area is everyday information behaviour, and much of her work addresses the intersection of food, information, and culture.

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Panellist – Gary Burnett, a Professor at Florida State University's School of Information, focuses on theoretical work related to information, social contexts, individual characteristics, and practices of

signification. He is a long-time member of the *Grateful Dead Scholar's Caucus*, an interdisciplinary group of researchers.

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Panellist – Eric Forcier is a doctoral candidate at Swinburne University of Technology and a student member of the Centre for Transformative Media Technologies. His doctoral research explores the information-related activities of media fans in postdigital everyday life.

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Panellist – Yazdan Mansourian is a lecturer in the School of Information Studies at Charles Sturt University in Australia. His research interest is information behaviour in serious leisure. Yazdan explores the role of joy and pleasure in engaging people with hobbies, amateurism and volunteer activities and what inspires them to seek, share, use and produce information in this context.

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How to cite this paper

Ocepek, M.G., Burnett, G., Forcier, E., & Mansourian, Y. (2020). What's fun got to do with it? What fun-life contexts teach us about the bounds of context. In *Proceedings of ISIC, the Information Behaviour Conference, Pretoria, South Africa, 28-30 September, 2020. Information Research, 25*(4), paper isic20xx. Retrieved from http://InformationR.net/ir/25-4/isic2020/isic20--.html (Archived by the Internet Archive at...)

Appendices

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