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An Interdisciplinary Platform for Information Behaviour Research in the Liberal Arts Hobby

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Abstract

Purpose – The liberal arts hobby is a leisure pursuit that entails the systematic and fervent pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the liberal arts hobby as a setting for information behavior research.

Design/methodology/approach – The method of interdisciplinary translation work is used to relate existing research from the specialties of leisure studies, adult education, and information behavior. Drawing from leisure studies, the liberal arts hobby is presented within the context of the serious leisure perspective, a theoretical framework of leisure. Also, relevant research.

Findings – The basic informational features of the liberal arts hobby and adult learning project are discussed in terms of three issues of current interest within information behavior scholarship. The issues are: first, social metatheory and the ideal level of analysis; second, time and information behavior; and third, information behavior in pleasurable and profound contexts.

Research limitations/implications – Research into everyday life, serious leisure and hobbies is extended and methodological tools are provided.

Practical implications – Information professionals, such as public librarians or systems designers, will have a better understanding of the information experience of a popular hobby group and be better able to meet their information needs.

Social implications – Awareness and understanding of the liberal arts hobby will be increased across the field of information science, thereby creating a better alignment between the field and society.

Originality/value – The paper is the first to establish an interdisciplinary starting point for information behavior research in the liberal arts hobby.

Keywords Learning, Individual behavior

Paper type General review

Most of us know a person who is passionate and well informed about a subject unrelated to his or her work and who is eager (maybe overeager) to talk about it. He or she displays expertise derived from learning about the interest, from books and other media, for example, and by actively engaging with the people and events in its affiliated social world. Possessing the habits and sensibility of a scholar (though in nearly all cases not employed as one), his or her enthusiasm and knowledge manifest in animated conversations at parties, writings in a blog, or presentations at a library or school. An extreme instance of this archetype might be considered eccentric, but more often he or she is appreciated as an aficionado, buff, connoisseur, devotee, lifelong-learner[1], armchair scholar, or “the one who knows *everything* about [...]” Empirical research in the social sciences provides a profile of the activity and actor anecdotally sketched here. From the field of leisure studies and the theoretical framework of the serious leisure perspective (SLP) (Stebbins, 1982), the phenomenon at hand is a liberal arts hobby, a leisure pursuit that entails the systematic and fervent pursuit of knowledge for its own sake (Stebbins, 1994a).

To date, the concept of a liberal arts hobby *per se* has not appeared in the information behavior literature, but that may soon change. The vast majority of 10,000



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studies of information behavior have focussed on academic, work, or problem scenarios, not leisure pursuits; however, in the past decade there has been increasing attention to everyday life and its information dimension. As evidence of a trend, the 1996 Information Seeking in Context conference included four reports on everyday life topics and the 2008 event featured ten (Vakkari, 2008).

Although the phrase “liberal arts hobby” is new to information behavior discourse, there is a well-established tradition of research into pleasure reading (Ross *et al.*, 2006) which is a signal practice of this hobby; and there is ample research into information behavior in genealogy (Duff and Johnson, 2003; Yakel, 2004; Fulton, 2009a; Molto, 2010), possibly the most widespread liberal arts hobby. Case studies of information behavior in the context of personal development (Kari and Savolainen, 2007), environmental activism (Savolainen, 2007), and paranormal interests (Kari, 2001) also qualify as liberal arts hobbies, although they have not been cast as such.

For several reasons, the liberal arts hobby is worth consideration as a collective and a site for information behavior research. First, liberal arts hobbyists patronize information institutions such as libraries, archives, museums, and the internet; therefore, they constitute an important population for information studies, and its associated professions, to understand and embrace. Second, liberal arts hobbyists are prolific producers of information, an aspect of information behavior that has been neglected in information behavior research to date. Third, in the liberal arts hobby, the acquisition and expression of knowledge – usually seen as a problem or work-driven scenario – has been turned into an enjoyable form of leisure. This provides a setting to examine an upbeat, affective dimension of information behavior, and it fulfills a call to action for the study of information behavior in pleasurable and profound contexts (Kari and Hartel, 2007).

To introduce the liberal arts hobby to the information behavior research specialty, this paper applies the method of interdisciplinary translation work (Palmer and Neumann, 2002), that is, a process of appropriating, defining, interpreting, and redefining new information from outside fields. Like conceptual analysis, translation work does not involve original empirical research or fieldwork; rather it entails a close reading of existing scholarship, with an emphasis on relevant ideas that may be scattered across disciplines. Translation work involves “retaining essential elements of the original context while revising and reapplying it” (p. 107) for new purposes. In that manner, the liberal arts hobby is presented in the context of the SLP, a theoretical framework native to the field of leisure studies. Then, additional insights are drawn from the specialty of adult education and the related concept of the adult learning project (Tough, 1971). From these resources, the informational features of the liberal arts hobby are gleaned and linked to three significant issues within the information behavior literature. The issues are: first, social metatheory and the ideal level of analysis; second, time and information behavior (Savolainen, 2006); and third, information behavior in pleasurable and profound contexts (Kari and Hartel, 2007). The ultimate goal is to translate and integrate existing scholarship from leisure studies and education into a platform for future information behavior inquiry into the liberal arts hobby.

The liberal arts hobby

The liberal arts hobby (Stebbins, 1994a), or LAH for short, is a concept that emerged within the SLP, a theoretical framework of leisure centered on the field of leisure studies. Development of the SLP began in the 1970s with sociologist Robert A. Stebbins’

exploratory research into a variety of leisure pursuits and communities (a complete intellectual history is available in Stebbins, 2007a, Chapter 6). These investigations yielded an abundance of empirically grounded insights on the psychological and social nature of leisure. Today, the SLP is a banner over a research program with more than 50 engaged scholars around the world and across the social sciences. In information studies, Hartel (2003, 2005, 2010a) has championed the framework as a way to organize information behavior research into everyday life and leisure. The web site www.seriousleisure.net serves as a nexus for the SLP research program and includes pages on the main concepts, history, resources, active researchers, a bibliography, and a full-text digital library, among other materials.

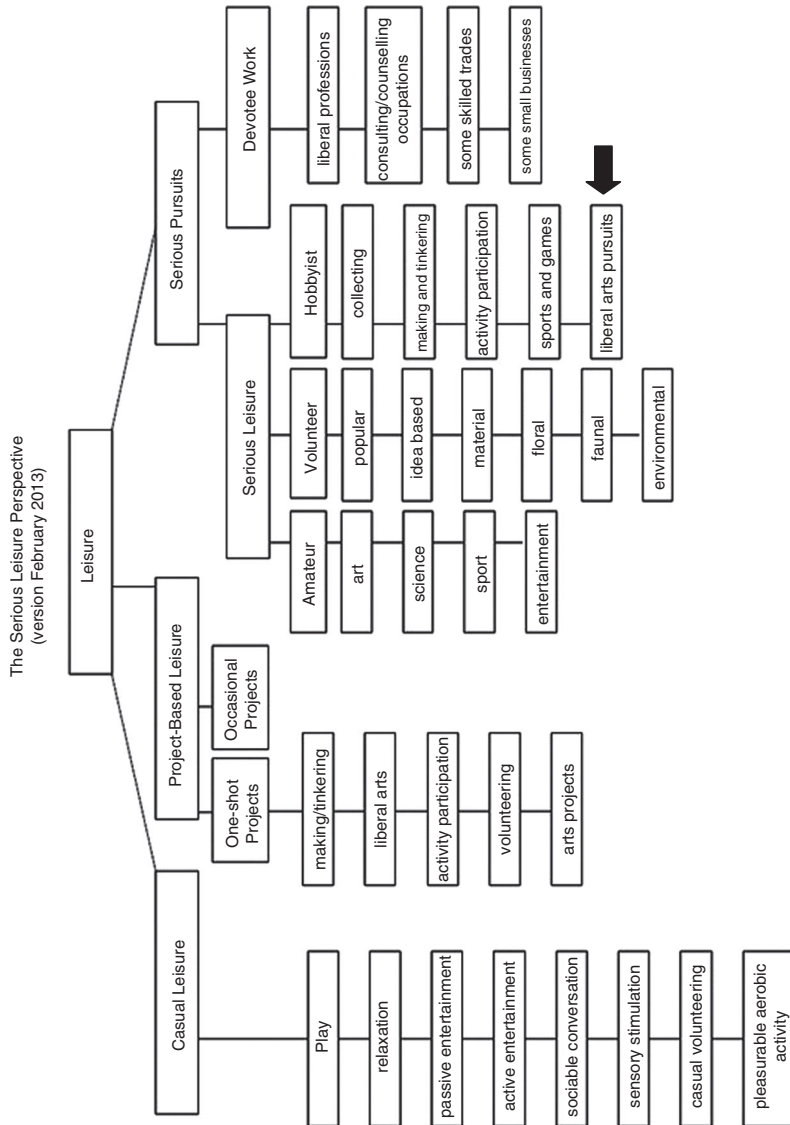
The SLP is distinguished from other theoretical frameworks of leisure by its focus on what people do as leisure, referred to as a “core activity.” The classification scheme, illustrated in Figure 1, groups together similar core activities to form a map of the leisure universe in North America. In this framework, every core activity is contextually sensitive and can qualify as different types of leisure. For instance, a core activity of “watercolor painting” may be casual, serious, or project-based leisure depending on the personal and social context. While there is mainly consensus around the SLP classification, there is also a lively debate that proposes leisure experiences are better represented along a continuum (Shen and Yarnal, 2010).

The classificatory element of the SLP divides leisure core activities into three main forms: casual leisure, serious pursuits, and project-based leisure. Casual leisure is “a relatively short-lived, pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it” and is engaged in for the significant level of pure enjoyment found there (Stebbins, 1997, p. 17). Project-based leisure entails “a short-term, moderately complicated, creative undertaking carried out in free time” (Stebbins, 2005, p. 1). Serious pursuits include serious leisure, that is “the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that is highly substantial, interesting, and fulfilling and where, in the typical case, participants find a career in acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience” (Stebbins, 1992, p. 3). Casual leisure, project-based leisure, amateurism, volunteering, and devotee work (Stebbins, 2004) will be placed aside to focus on serious leisure in the form of hobbies and the topic of this paper: the liberal arts hobby (marked with a star in Figure 1).

There are six distinctive qualities (Stebbins, 2001a, pp. 6-7) to all serious leisure:

- (1) the occasional need to persevere;
- (2) finding a leisure career in the activity;
- (3) the application of significant personal effort based on specially acquired knowledge, training, experience, or skill;
- (4) eight durable benefits or outcomes (self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, regeneration or renewal of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, social interaction and belongingness, and lasting physical products of the activity);
- (5) a strong identification with the chosen pursuit; and
- (6) a unique ethos embodied in a social world (Unruh, 1979).

We will return to the distinctive qualities as they apply to the liberal arts hobby and information behavior later in this paper.



Notes: The topic of this paper, the liberal arts hobby is denoted with an arrow and can be located as follows:
leisure > serious pursuits > serious leisure > hobbyist > liberal arts hobby

Source: Diagram formulated by Jenna Hartel

Figure 1.
This diagram displays the major forms of leisure in the serious leisure perspective (SLP)

The SLP has steadily expanded over the past 35 years, as new insights emerge from exploratory research (Stebbins, 2001b) by Stebbins and others; it is perpetually considered a work-in-progress. Additions are made when empirical research suggests that some leisure phenomenon is unrecognized in the framework. For example, the perspective has been further elaborated through the introduction of occupational devotion (Stebbins, 2004), project-based leisure (Stebbins, 2005), and a typology of serious leisure volunteers (Stebbins, 2007b).

The liberal arts hobbies were added to the SLP in 1994 (Stebbins, 1994a). Until then, hobbies were grouped into four categories: collectors, makers and tinkerers, activity participants (in non-competitive, rule-based pursuits), and players of sports and games (in competitive, rule-based activities with no professional counterparts). Following insights gained from fieldwork (Stebbins, 1994a) with francophones in Calgary who relished reading about French culture, Stebbins realized that some hobbyists favored learning about a topic more so than practicing it in any other way. In these cases, the process of becoming knowledgeable was the core activity of the hobby, not a means to some other end.

Based upon this insight, Stebbins (1994a) defined the liberal arts hobby as a fifth hobby category: exhibiting, “the systematic and fervent pursuit during free time of knowledge for its own sake” (p. 175). To illustrate, a liberal arts hobbyist interested in Japanese cookery would explore the history, culture, and social world of the cuisine but not attempt to master its preparation techniques. Or, a liberal arts hobbyist enchanted with butterflies would go to great lengths to learn about the creatures but not perform any scientific activity such as fieldwork to see and collect the creatures. Within the SLP, a typology of the liberal arts hobbies has not yet been formally proposed, but Stebbins (p. 175) offers a list that spans classical and popular topics related to arts, sports, foods, languages, cultures, histories, sciences, philosophies, or literary traditions.

In his introductory statement, Stebbins sketches the information behavior of the liberal arts hobbyist. He explains that the knowledge obtained during the pursuit is broad and humanizing, rather than narrow, applied, or technical. *Habitué*s actively learn mainly by reading. In addition to knowledge acquisition, they also relish knowledge expression. These practices will be revisited in terms of information behavior later in this paper.

The liberal arts hobby may be the most ubiquitous hobby type since the four other hobby categories (collecting, sports and games, activity participation, making and tinkering), by definition, include knowledge acquisition, as well. Stebbins (1994a) asserts that despite the commonality of knowledge acquisition across all serious leisure and hobbies, it is advantageous for researchers to see the LAH as a distinct group that may sometimes complement other serious pursuits (p. 183). Perhaps because of this ambiguity, the LAH has been the least examined hobby category within the SLP research program. In popular culture, the term and concept of the liberal arts hobby concept are also nascent and probably referred to by participants and observers in the terminology used earlier (aficionado, buff, connoisseur, devotee, lifelong learner, armchair scholar, or “the one who knows *everything* about [...]”). However, there is a wealth of relevant research under a different banner from the field of education and the specialty of adult education.

Adult learning projects

In the middle of the last century, the field of education broadened its scope from pedagogy, that is concerned with children’s learning, to include andragogy, “the art

and science of helping adults learn” (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). In contrast to children’s learning, adult learning has these features: it flourishes when there is a strong motivation to learn; it draws upon what is already known; and it is directed (as much as is allowed) by the learner (Illeris, 2010). Another important distinction is that most adult learning happens outside of classrooms and takes the form of self-directed learning. The specialty of adult education exists to further examine the distinct features of adult learning and to institutionalize and champion educational opportunities for adults.

In the late 1960s, the Canadian scholar Allen Tough produced the first detailed description of informal adult learning. Tough interviewed 66 adults in Canada about their whole range of learning experiences. He employed an innovative, persistent probing technique to gather accounts of learning that are sometimes difficult for people to recall and that had previously been undocumented. Tough’s graduate students at the University of Toronto’s Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) replicated his method across diverse groups, creating a body of ground-breaking research on informal adult learning.

An outcome of the research was a book, *The Adult’s Learning Project* (Tough, 1971), one of the most cited and enduring concepts of adult education. An *Adult Learning Project*, or “learning project” for short, is “a major, highly deliberate effort to gain certain knowledge and skill (or to change in some way)” (p. 1). Most learning projects occur outside of educational institutions and are planned by the learner. An expectant mother eager to know about childbirth, a hobby woodworker mastering a new tool or technique, an executive aiming to improve public speaking skills, and an avid traveler planning and then taking a trip, are examples.

According to Tough, learning projects are highly deliberate undertakings. During a learning project, the actor’s primary motivation is to learn; he or she has a clear sense of the knowledge and skill to be gained; and he or she wishes to retain the knowledge for at least two days. Importantly, these criteria distinguish learning projects from other forms of learning in everyday life that are more routine and tacit. For example, reading the newspaper every day is not a learning project when the primary motivation is to relax. Getting driving directions is not a learning project when the objective is successful transport. Also, figuring out how to assemble a piece of furniture from a manual is not a learning project when there is no intent to retain the technical skill upon completion. The crucial distinction of the learning project is the actor’s consciousness of and primary interest in learning and retaining the knowledge.

Learning projects were found by Tough to be common, with a 98 percent participation rate. On average per year, Canadians executed eight learning projects spread across 700 hours. People reported that these growth experiences had enormous personal, familial, and social significance. In Tough’s (1971) opinion, an adult engaged in a learning project resembles “an organization that maintains and increases its effectiveness by devoting 10% of its resources to research and development” (p. 4). Following Tough’s exploratory investigations of Canadians, a more extensive, quantitative survey of Americans was conducted by University of Pittsburgh library scholar Patrick Penland (1979); he reached the same conclusions of their prevalence, cementing the learning project as a feature of adult life in North America.

What do adults make highly deliberate efforts to learn? According to Tough (1971) and Penland (1979), the vast majority of learning projects are motivated by the problems, tasks, or decisions related to job, home, or family life. Tough described six

types of learning projects (33-38), shown below, and one to four are clearly occupational and practical:

- (1) preparing for an occupation and then keeping up;
- (2) specific tasks and problems on the job;
- (3) learning for home and personal responsibility;
- (4) improving some broad area of competence;
- (5) learning for interest and leisure; and
- (6) curiosity or a question about certain subject matter.

The fifth type, “learning for interest and leisure,” refers to the acquisition of knowledge and skill that underlie serious pursuits like volunteering and hobbies. Tough draws upon research by Johnstone and Rivera (1965) for examples such as “lessons in golf, swimming, bowling, tennis, skiing, sailing, scuba diving, surfing, curling, squash, or some other athletic activity [...] (or learning) [...] some decorative art or craft such as ceramics and flower arranging (or trying to improve) [...] painting, drawing, sketching, or photography [...] (or learning) to play a musical instrument, take singing lessons, or take dancing lessons” (pp. 36-37). In all of these examples, learning occurs to enhance the core activity of a serious leisure pursuit.

The sixth type of learning project is centered on a “curiosity or question about certain subject matter” (p. 37). This type of learning project embodies the spirit of the liberal arts hobby. Of this kind, Tough elaborates:

Many learning projects begin with a question, a feeling of puzzlement or curiosity, or just a general interest in a certain body of subject matter. Some people, for example, want to understand the physical or geographical world, and do so by learning about various regions and perhaps by traveling. Others study the behavioral or social sciences in order to understand society or human nature. Other common areas of learning are English literature, the physical or biological sciences, political science and politics, current events, and economics (p. 37).

To restate, of Tough’s six types of adult learning projects, the majority pertain to problems, tasks, or decisions related to job, home, or family life; only a minority occur in the context of leisure and qualify as a liberal arts hobby. Still, his research provides valuable insights for information behavior scholars interested in leisure, serious leisure, and hobbies. Of note, Tough’s research from the late 1960s was replicated by scholars at OISE in *The Changing Nature of Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL)* study from 2003 to 2007; the WALL project included a telephone survey of the informal learning practices of 9,063 Canadian adults (Livingstone, 2007). The WALL survey determined that Canadian adults devote, on average, five hours per week to informal, general interest learning (not related to a job, housework, or volunteer position), that is, adult learning projects in the context of leisure, confirming that adult learning projects remain a feature of adult life.

Interdisciplinary translation work

This section performs interdisciplinary translation work (Palmer and Neumann, 2002) between leisure studies, adult education, and the information studies’ specialty of information behavior. To this end, the liberal arts hobby and adult learning project are linked to major metatheories, theories, models, and concepts of information behavior. A comprehensive translation of all information phenomena associated with the liberal

arts hobby and adult learning project is not possible. Instead, three broad issues of current interest within information behavior scholarship serve as foci to facilitate researchers who wish to take studies of information behavior in the liberal arts hobby forward. The issues are: social metatheory and the ideal level of analysis; time and information behavior (Savolainen, 2006); and information behavior in pleasurable and profound contexts (Kari and Hartel, 2007).

1. Social metatheory and the ideal level of analysis

Information behavior research designs often feature a social unit of analysis; for instance, Case's (1986) study of social scientists and humanists or Sundin's (2002) study of nurses identify information patterns across occupational groups. This perspective on information behavior reflects the application of a social metatheory (Bates, 2005), variously called sociocognitivism (Jacob and Shaw, 1998), collectivism (Talja *et al.*, 2005), or domain analysis (Hjørland and Albrechtsen, 1995). In these metatheories, the social, cultural, historical, and epistemological dynamics of a community of practice are seen to shape information behavior. To date, not much attention has been given to the methodological task of determining which social collectives merit information behavior research and then identifying their boundaries and constitution for research.

Though they lack some of the recognizable social features of occupational groups, liberal arts hobbies are collectives that can be approached through a social unit of analysis. Per the sixth distinctive characteristic of serious leisure, a hobby is a social world (Stebbins, 2001b, p. 7; Unruh, 1979). Stebbins has proposed that studying any hobby at the level of its social world is a mesostructural level of analysis (Stebbins, 2001b, pp. 21-26). The discussion that follows establishes the role of information in a hobby social world and then recommends an ideal mesostructural level of analysis for information behavior research therein. This recommendation draws upon my own experience with research design and my oversight of dozens of exploratory studies of the liberal arts hobbies by students in a dedicated course on the topic at the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto. I recommend focussing on a moderately narrow LAH social world, mirroring Fry and Talja (2004), who advise the "specialism" as the best site for domain analytic research into information practices within academic social worlds.

A crucial starting point for information behavior researchers is that all hobby-related social worlds are information rich. Social worlds are loosely administrated and decentralized; therefore, they rely upon "mediated communication" (Stebbins, 2001b, pp. 6-7) as the primary mode of disseminating knowledge, namely through newsletters and other print publications, online vehicles like websites and mailing lists, and various informational "infrastructure" (Star, 1999). Although he does not refer specifically to the concept of a social world, Tough states, similarly, that during a learning project, "a whole world of expertise, technical terms, magazines and newsletters, meetings, like-minded people, standards of excellence, and competitions may suddenly open up" (Tough, 1971, p. 37).

In 1994, Stebbins (1994a) wrote that compared to the four other major hobby categories (collecting, making and tinkering, activity participation, sports and games), the liberal arts hobby generates a relatively weak social world (pp. 179-180) since the core activity, reading, is individualistic. He offered that liberal arts hobbies devoted to learning a language generate more robust social worlds, because they employ conversation partners and group activities such as trips. Writing early in the internet era, Stebbins probably underestimated the sociality of every liberal arts hobby.

Vibrant social worlds centered on all liberal arts topics have since been rendered visible in flourishing online communities and information sharing hubs such as Wikipedia.

Generally speaking, do the social worlds of the liberal arts hobby resemble any social worlds already well documented in the information behavior literature? Stebbins' (1994a) original statement reports that LAHs involve a search for broad knowledge, in contrast to detailed or technical knowledge; the knowledge sought is "humanizing" in which "we can gain a deep understanding and acceptance of a significant sector of human life [...] and the needs, values, desires, and sentiments found there" (p. 175). This characterization suggests potential similarities between information behavior in the liberal arts hobby and the academic realm of the humanities, as described by Bates (1996) and Wiberley (2010) among others.

Bringing the social world of a liberal arts hobby into focus for information behavior research requires consideration of the specificity of the liberal arts topic at its center, as charted in Table I and discussed next. The first column of Table I displays a spectrum of liberal arts topics, in descending degrees of specificity, associated with the liberal arts realm of "popular culture" (each topic is likewise a social world that attracts interested liberal arts hobbyists).

One area within popular culture is "conspiracy theory" which refers to the unproven theories related but not limited to clandestine government plans, elaborate murder plots, suppression of secret technology and knowledge, and other supposed schemes behind certain political, cultural, and historical events. The social world coalesced around conspiracy theory is a liberal arts hobby that upon closer inspection proves quite heterogeneous. It may include citizens skeptical of the American government's influence on the media alongside people who believe that humans have psychic powers. Any effort to study the informational patterns of the

Topic/social world/LAH	Definition of topic	Suitable level of analysis for information behavior research?
Popular culture	"Cultural activities or commercial products reflecting, suited to, or aimed at the tastes of the general masses of people" (dictionary.com)	Too broad
Conspiracy theory	The unproven theories related but not limited to clandestine government plans, elaborate murder plots, suppression of secret technology and knowledge, and other supposed schemes behind certain political, cultural, and historical events	Too broad
UFO conspiracy theory	Conspiracy theories which argue that evidence of the reality of unidentified flying objects is being suppressed by various governments around the world	Ideal
Roswell UFO incident	The Roswell UFO Incident refers to the recovery of an object that crashed in the general vicinity of Roswell, New Mexico, in June or July 1947, allegedly an extra-terrestrial spacecraft and its alien occupants. Since the late 1970s the incident has been the subject of intense controversy and of conspiracy theories as to the true nature of the object that crashed	Too narrow

Table I.
The left column displays a range of liberal arts hobbies under the banner of "popular culture" and increasing degrees of specificity; the middle column defines the liberal arts subject; and the right column includes a recommendation on the feasibility of the associated social worlds for information behavior research

conspiracy theory liberal arts hobby may be thwarted by the diversity of these topics and their respective information environments.

A more feasible and fruitful level of specificity for an information behavior study would be the narrower topic and social world of “UFO conspiracy theory.” Here, the shared focus on other-worldly visitors within an alternative-science milieu likely generates more meaningful informational patterns. For certain there exists a recognizable constellation of information resources, namely *UFO Magazine* and the web site www.ufoevidence.org. This liberal arts hobby also surely manifests distinct information behaviors, such as collecting and analyzing photographs purported to show UFOs and generating a master list of all reported UFO sightings. This degree of specificity applied to a liberal arts hobby would make an ideal masters or doctoral level thesis, or occupy a single scholar for a few years.

A still narrower topic or social world and liberally arts hobby therein would be associated with a singular event seen as a conspiracy theory. One example might be “the Roswell UFO Incident,” of 1947 in which the crash of a government surveillance balloon is believed by some to be a cover up of a UFO landing. In my opinion, this event-focussed topic is too narrow and ideographic to make a substantial contribution to information behavior research of a social nature.

Once an information behavior researcher has determined a specific liberal arts hobby to study, following the recommendations above, a great range of research designs are possible. Hjørland (2002) outlines 11 possible forms of domain analytic research, including a specific focus on information behavior or alternatively an analysis of the genres or information institutions in the social world. Ideally, the consistent use of the classificatory structure of the SLP by many information behavior scholars may allow for the beneficial accumulation and comparison of information behavior studies of leisure.

2. Time and information behavior

Time is a “fundamental attribute of a situation or context for information seeking” (Savolainen, 2006, p. 110) which can have “important implications for research into organizational and individual information behavior” (McKenzie and Davies, 2002, p. 1). Sense making is an example of an information behavior metatheory that orients attention to information seeking that unfolds in time, which is seen as emergent and fluid (Savolainen, 2006, p. 112). The berrypicking model (Bates, 1989), as well, displays how an information seeker moves through time, although it does not specify whether “berries” (information) are “picked” (retrieved) over hours, days, weeks, or longer periods. In contrast to the temporal ambiguity in some models of information behavior, Stebbins and Tough precisely, and quite differently, characterize the temporal dimension of the liberal arts hobby and adult learning project. Their temporal insights are discussed next to enable information behavior research that is calibrated to time as a context.

Long time horizon. According to Stebbins, the second of six defining features of serious leisure is that participants experience a leisure career (Stebbins, 2001b, pp. 9-10) and this holds true for the liberal arts hobby. The leisure career, a temporal concept, is the typical course taken through a serious leisure pursuit and it is marked by highs, lows, turning points, and a sense of advancement. Stebbins’ fieldwork has determined that the leisure career can last many years, decades, or a lifetime and identifies five stages. During the beginning stage, interest takes root; at development, the fundamental ideas are mastered; in establishment, learning moves beyond the basics

and the core activity becomes a routine lifestyle fixture; maintenance is the heyday when the hobby is enjoyed to its utmost; in decline, the core activity ceases often due to life circumstances such as aging.

An information behavior model and a few studies illustrate this *longue durée*. The integrated framework of information behavior by Sonnenwald and Iivonen (1999) proposes that information behavior unfolds within an “eon” (p. 436), which is a long, continuous period of time. Research into information phenomena within the hobby of gourmet cooking (Hartel, 2007, 2010b) explicates the leisure career and reports that early stages (beginning, establishment) of the career focus on knowledge acquisition and later stages (maintenance) feature knowledge expression, such as teaching loved ones to cook. Yakel (2004) describes the liberal arts hobby of family history as a “continuous process” of seeking social connections and meaning over a lifetime in which information seeking activities evolve along the way.

Medium time horizon. Tough’s (1971) use of the term “project” to name his concept signifies a much shorter time horizon. He argues that an adult learning project entails a minimum of seven hours of devoted activity within a six-month period (although it often takes longer); this demarcation eliminates more diffuse and lingering learning experiences. In the accounts of his interviewees, the typical learning project lasts 100 hours and is spread over several days, weeks, or months and most often continued for about a year. On average, Canadians in his study conduct eight learning projects per year with frequent new beginnings and endings. To Tough, adult learning projects are dynamic, multifarious, overlapping, roughly year-long initiatives which contrasts with the singular, dedicated and lifelong nature of Stebbins’ leisure career within a liberal arts hobby.

In harmony with Tough’s vision, the concept of the “project” factors importantly into recent conceptions of everyday life information behavior. In a study of information use by Swedish citizens, Hektor (2001) draws from the field of time geography to establish that everyday life is organized around projects that are generic, specific, change, or pursuit in nature. The latter, a pursuit project, resembles both the liberal arts hobby and adult learning project, and it involves furthering an interest such as a “hobby of familiarizing oneself with the great classic works of world literature” (pp. 74-76). Projects are important in Hektor’s model, because they form the immediate context for information activities. Savolainen’s (2008) social phenomenological framework of information practice likewise features projects; he writes, “one’s life world consists of many different projects with varying temporal and spatial perspectives or horizons. Everyday information practices are constitutive of these projects and ultimately these projects give information practices their meaning” (p. 53). Similarly, the integrated framework of information behavior mentioned earlier (Sonnenwald and Iivonen, 1999) refers to a project-like “interval” as a temporal information behavior context that is shorter than an eon but longer than a single incident.

Research into information phenomena in gourmet cooking (Hartel, 2007, 2010b) also acknowledges the reality of a project, though uses the term “subject” instead. In the hobby of gourmet cooking, a subject is a topical mid-range phenomena that brings focus, structure, and dynamism to the hobby; examples are the cuisines of French and Japanese or techniques such as barbecue or sushi. In this study, cooks reveal their experience with subjects in statements such as: “That summer, I was *really* into French.” While pursuing “French” as a subject, the cook organizes his or her activities around the techniques, equipment, ingredients, and other elements of that cuisine. Eventually, the cook masters a subject and moves onto another one (Hartel, 2010b).

Short (real-time) time horizon. This discussion of time has yet to address how the liberal arts hobby and adult learning project unfold in real-time. Put as a question: what do participants actually do moment-to-moment and, specifically, what are the information activities? This is the temporal level that synchronizes with most studies of information behavior. Of course, Stebbins and Tough are not focussed on information behavior *per se* but each scholar provides illuminating descriptions and starting points for information behavior researchers. Due to space limitations and the complexity of the translation, this section does not attempt to systematically map Stebbins' and Tough's findings to any existing conception(s) of information activity within the information behavior literature.

According to Stebbins, the core activity of the liberal arts hobby involves gaining knowledge through active, not passive, learning. Mainly, this takes the form of reading that is supplemented by multimedia such as television, film, and radio. Writing in 1994, Stebbins did not mention the use of the internet, but it is likely an important activity and channel in the liberal arts hobby today. Furthermore, enthusiasts travel to learn about their liberal arts topic and visit information-rich attractions such as museums. Personal information management appears commonplace within the liberal arts hobby. According to Stebbins (1994a), the home of a liberal arts hobbyist typically has a study that is a quiet place to read and process facts and ideas (p. 181). As evidence, Yakel reports that in the liberal arts hobby of family history, "Information management is a core activity [...] Family historians and genealogists manage information from a variety of sources," and she goes on to describe the stories, archives, and pedigree charts created and kept by family historians.

Tough (1971) goes into greater detail about the structure of adult learning projects in real-time. He reports that a learning project is made up of individual "episodes" lasting 30-60 minutes each. In this context an episode is "a well-defined period of time that is held together by the similarity of intent, activity, or place of the thoughts and actions that occur during it. The episode has a definite beginning and ending, and is not interrupted for more than two or three minutes by some other activity or purpose" (Tough, 1971, p. 7). Tough illustrates how a person would pursue a learning project about India through three episodes:

In one episode he reads about the roles and relationships of men and women in India. In another episode he learns about the current economic and political situation from an Indian graduate student. In a third episode he watches a television program describing the life of an Indian child (p. 13).

These accounts of information acquisition by Stebbins and Tough are balanced by descriptions of information expression. Stebbins states that a signal activity within the liberal arts hobby is "expressing knowledge" (Stebbins, 1994a, p. 178), which helps to maintain what has been learned and also leads to new insights. The primary mode of expressing knowledge is through "talk [...] notably in casual, sociable conversations with friends and families." In addition to banter with acquaintances, liberal arts hobbyists may give slide shows and presentations in public settings such as schools and libraries. Similarly, Tough (1971) reports that adults do learning projects for the positive experience of "imparting the knowledge and skill" to others, which leads to a "speech, conversation, written article or report, lecture, broadcast, lesson, or demonstration" (p. 53). Yakel's (2004) study of family historians characterizes this as "giving back" which takes the form of lecturing, maintaining web-based resources, or volunteering at genealogical resource centers.

Savolainen's (2007) review of the concept of time in information behavior research concludes that temporality has been treated ambiguously, if at all by researchers. However, very recently information behavior scholars in the area of everyday life information seeking (Sonnenwald and Iivonen, 1999; Hektor, 2001; Yakel, 2004; Savolainen, 2008; Hartel, 2007, 2010b) have developed models and concepts that integrate well with the temporal structures within a liberal arts hobby or an adult learning project.

3. *Information behavior in pleasurable and profound contexts*

Information science as a field, and the information behavior area specifically, has traditionally conducted research into occupational, academic, or problem scenarios. A 2007 article in the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* voices a call to action for greater attention to "the higher things in life" meaning, "the pleasurable or profound phenomena, experiences, or activities that transcend the daily grind" (Kari and Hartel, 2007, p. 1131). The article lists examples of "the pleasurable" as entertainment, fun, hobbies, and leisure, to name a few; and "the profound" as creativity, human development, spirituality, and wisdom, among others. A framework is proposed in which pleasurable and profound contexts are examined for their information behaviors such as seeking, storing, organizing, using, and creating information (pp. 1141-1142). What follows characterizes liberal arts hobbies and adult learning projects as pleasurable and profound contexts and provides links to relevant information behavior research.

The Pleasurable. To Stebbins, a shorthand description of leisure is "*pleasurable* activity undertaken in free time." He expands upon the words people use to express the pleasurable experience of leisure: "fun" usually denotes finding amusement in something; "enjoyment" refers to an activity that gives delight; "satisfying" means contentment with reference to a particular need or want; and "fulfilling" points to the development of a person's gifts and character. In his view these terms form a continuum that ranges: fun – enjoyable – satisfying – fulfilling, and reflects the nature of pleasure across casual and serious leisure. Stebbins (2009) argues that casual leisure is inherently hedonic and more often described as fun or enjoyable whereas serious leisure is typically characterized as satisfying and fulfilling (pp. 90-93). From his analysis, we can glean that the liberal arts hobby is pleasurable in a meaningful (rather than hedonic) way.

Tough (1971) reports that adults experience pleasure throughout a learning project. By pleasure he means, "joy, feeling good, happiness, delight, satisfaction, enjoyment, or other positive emotions" (p. 48), and these rewards motivate people to continue learning. He identifies seven aspects of the pleasure that exists in learning projects: satisfying curiosity, puzzlement, or a question (and having feelings of ambiguity reduced); enjoyment from the content itself (books, for instance, can be very entertaining); enjoyment from practicing the (new) skill; the activity of learning itself (which can be fun); learning successfully; completing unfinished learning; and aspects unrelated to learning (a refreshing change in routine or new friends) (pp. 58-62).

After a long association with negative feelings of anxiety (Kuhlthau, 1991) and uncertainty (Anderson, 2010), information behavior is increasingly being tied to positive emotions. A comprehensive review of theories, method, and current research on emotions in information studies points to research about negative and positive feelings such as fun, satisfaction, and optimism (Lopatovska and Arapakis, 2011). Other examples include: Ross' (1999) investigation of pleasure reading; Fulton's (2009b)

“pleasure principle” associated with genealogical research by elders; and Kielty’s (2012) innovative explication of “pleasurable browsing” for pornography online.

The Profound. A “profound” experience entails “entering deeply into subjects of thought or knowledge” and may also refer to the nature of that subject as “great and broadly inclusive significance” (www.dictionary.com). Stebbins (1994a) emphasizes that the liberal arts hobby entails information that is “humanizing” and generates “a deep understanding and acceptance of a significant sector of human life and the needs, values, desires, and sentiments found there” (p. 175). Tough (1971) reports that most adult learning projects are practical and related to a job, some involve profound topics:

Sometimes a person wants to remember certain subject matter because it seems so important or significant. He may feel that knowing certain things about mankind, history, the universe, philosophy, or other nations is part of being human – or that this knowledge makes him “more human.” He may feel he is learning the most important things in the world: truth, reality, what the world is really like, a true and complete picture of mankind or of God (p. 56).

The profound nature of learning projects has important social implications. According to Tough, ALPs are a “means to a better future for that society” as well as a “crucial factor in achieving peace” (p. 4). Matching Kari’s and Hartel’s idea (2007) of the “higher things in life,” he argues that learning projects help mankind in “moving beyond material goals as *lower* order needs such as food are satisfied relatively easily [...] They are seeking the *higher* joys of gaining new knowledge and skills, or achieving better self-understanding, of learning to interact more sensitively and honestly with others” (p. 4). Research into information behavior in profound contexts include Kari’s work on the paranormal (2001) and spiritual information (2007); Latham’s (2009) dissertation about information encounters that are numinous; and Clemens’ and Cushing’s (2010) exploration of information behavior in “deeply meaningful contexts.”

Why study information behavior in pleasurable and profound contexts such as the liberal arts hobby and adult learning project? We argue, “The probability of discovering something truly novel would be higher if information scholars wishing to pursue innovative research went beyond the everyday realm, which has already become so well known from the angle of information phenomena” (Kari and Hartel, 2007, p. 1132).

Conclusion

This paper introduces the liberal arts hobby, a leisure activity that entails the systematic and fervent pursuit of knowledge for its own sake (Stebbins, 1994a). Unlike other hobby types, the core activity within the LAH is information acquisition and expression. The same practice has been characterized in the field of adult education as an adult learning project (Tough, 1971). The vast majority of North Americans engage in learning projects (Penland, 1979; Livingstone, 2007). Liberal arts hobbies and adult learning projects generate individual rewards and enlighten society by disseminating knowledge outside of formal educational channels. Existing research in leisure studies and adult education provides an excellent platform to launch explorations of information phenomena in these realms.

To study information behavior in an LAH social world, it is best to isolate a specific liberal arts topic of a mid range, such as “UFO conspiracy theory.” Since these pursuits sprawl across everyday life, it is advantageous to clarify the long, medium, or short

time horizon as captured in concepts such as “leisure career” and “project,” as well as precedent studies of information behavior in everyday life. Both LAHs and adult learning projects are pleasurable and profound experiences that can contribute to an emerging stream of information behavior scholarship on the “higher things in life” (Kari and Hartel, 2007).

A socially oriented research agenda for scholars interested in this new territory may include the following. First, characterize information behavior within exemplar LAH social worlds pertaining to the arts, sports, foods, languages, cultures, histories, sciences, philosophies, or literary traditions. Building on these case studies, next develop a comparative understanding of information phenomena in these settings in a way that resembles our current variegated understanding of information phenomena across the academic disciplines and professions. This strategy would provide some order and comparative power to research into everyday life information seeking and help to balance a research area that has traditionally focussed on professional and academic information environments.

Note

1. For a discussion of life-long learning as an element of leisure, see Stebbins (2012).

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