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Leisure and Hobby Information and its User

Jenna K Hartel



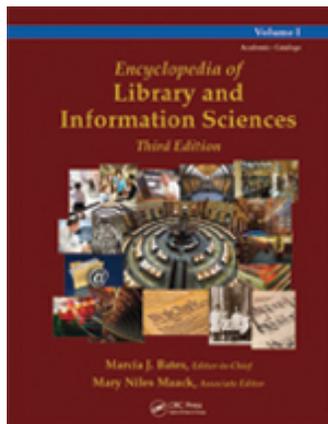
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Jenna Hartel ^a

^a Faculty of Information Studies , University of Toronto , Toronto , Ontario , Canada

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Leisure and Hobby Information and Its Users

Jenna Hartel

Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Abstract

This entry examines leisure in North America and western Europe with a focus on its information activities. To start, leisure is located as a research topic in different information science specialties. Then, a theoretical framework of leisure, the *serious leisure perspective*, is introduced as a means to systematically discuss three different forms of leisure and some of the information activities they harbor, drawing upon illustrations from the literature of information science. To conclude, future directions for research into leisure and the implications for the information sciences are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

For most people leisure is a cherished and important part of life. The central institutions of the information sciences—libraries, archives, museums, and the Internet—are tools or destinations for leisure experiences. On a daily basis, and especially on weekends, people seek and use information for leisure purposes. For these reasons leisure merits consideration by the information sciences. This entry examines leisure in North America and western Europe with a focus on its information activities, meaning, actions primarily directed toward information such as seeking, searching, sharing, organizing, and using information. To start, leisure is located as a research topic in different information science specialties. Then, a theoretical framework of leisure, the *serious leisure perspective*,^[1] is introduced as a means to systematically discuss three different forms of leisure and their information activities, drawing upon illustrations from the literature of information science. This entry, with a few exceptions, showcases research from information science that is focused on leisure, and does not aim to organize insights from broader studies of information which may contain some leisure-related findings. To conclude, future directions for research into leisure and the implications for the information sciences are discussed.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF LEISURE IN THE INFORMATION SCIENCES

The place of *leisure* in the information sciences has varied over time and per research specialty and institution. More than a century ago, public libraries in North America and the UK adopted the mission to provide print resources to citizens for education and moral direction, *not* leisure. Since then, there has been a long-running debate over the extent to which materials and programs are offered to

inform and educate, *vs.* to entertain.^[2,3] Today, this original pedagogical purpose has evolved, and public libraries embrace their role in leisure fulfillment. Public libraries feature rich fiction collections, book clubs, music, and videos, Internet access, exhibits, and on-site cafes. Other evidence of this change includes increased academic research into pleasure reading (the topic of reading is addressed comprehensively in Ross),^[4] as well as renewed attention to the library service of readers' advisory.^[5]

The major specialties in information science of bibliometrics, information retrieval, information architecture, and scientific communication originated in the mid-twentieth century to address issues within scientific literatures and contexts, *not* leisure. For the most part, today these specialties remain centered on academic and work realms. As an exception, in the 1970s the study of scientific communication broadened in scope to explore information activity more generally. Following this trend, in 1995 the phrase *everyday life information seeking* (ELIS) was coined by Savolainen^[6] to demark a branch of user studies that examines information activities in daily life. Simultaneously, new research areas such as social informatics, community informatics, critical studies, and museum studies emerged that explore upbeat and recreational aspects of life.

In the past decade, mainly under the banner of ELIS scholarship, leisure has emerged as a research subject in information science. Proponents assert that information activities in leisure are distinct, and inquiry into leisure leads to a more complete understanding of information in the human experience. As evidence, a landmark paper by Ross^[7] concludes that during pleasure reading information is discovered “without seeking,” challenging the long-standing tenet that information seeking is purposive and launched by a question.

A first theoretical statement on leisure from the perspective of information science was published in the *Journal of Information Science and Technology* by Kari

and Hartel.^[8] They proposed a contextual research area devoted to exploring information within the “higher things in life” namely the “pleasurable or profound phenomena. . .that transcend the daily grind.” Advocating holism and brio in information science research, they ask, “Where is all the fun and playfulness that is part and parcel of living with information?”^[9] Their literature review reports that information activities within pleasurable and profound settings are “teeming with ‘anomalies’” such as information seeking that is non-utilitarian and more versatile than previously believed.^[10] The annual meeting of the American Society for Information Science and Technology featured a first panel devoted to leisure in 2006,^[11] and the first special issue of *Library Trends* about leisure appeared in 2009.^[12] As of the writing of this article, leisure is a small, growing stream of inquiry in information science. The predominance of research is exploratory and employs naturalistic methods; many ground-breaking papers are by graduate students.

In this effort to survey information activities within leisure, it makes sense to look to the field of leisure science, and sources such as *Journal of Leisure Science*, *Leisure Studies*, or *World Leisure & Recreation* for insights. This literature explores the practices, social psychology, sociality, or social construction of leisure and is a critical resource for understanding the leisure realm. However, there appears to be no consistent approach to information activities within this scholarship. Discussions of the topic usually function as illustrative of other social aspects of leisure and are not clearly demarked or theorized.

THE SERIOUS LEISURE PERSPECTIVE

The topic of leisure information activities will be viewed through the lens of the *serious leisure perspective* (SLP), a theoretical framework of leisure in development since 1974 and spearheaded by sociologist Robert A. Stebbins. Founded on Stebbins’ concatenated ethnographic field studies of numerous leisure realms, it has grown into a multidisciplinary and international research program. For an introduction, see *The Serious Leisure Perspective*^[13] which includes basic concepts, a current bibliography, a list of active researchers, and a full text digital library. In this framework a shorthand definition for leisure is “uncoerced activity engaged in during free time.”^[14] A central feature of the SLP is that all leisure has a *core activity* that qualifies as one of three main forms: *casual*, *serious*, or *project-based*. The perspective characterizes these forms and their subtypes, provides sensitizing concepts, and altogether functions as a map of the leisure universe (Fig. 1). Drawing largely from scholarship in North America, the SLP is a current snapshot of all known Western types of leisure. For the study of non-Western leisure see Stebbins.^[15]

The SLP was introduced into information science by Hartel^[17] as a means to extend research in the field into the realm of leisure. She asserts that the SLP fills in social and psychological background on leisure, helps information researchers to operationalize key leisure concepts, and points to the forms of leisure that are most information-intensive and those that are less so. Next, drawing from the SLP and existing research in information science, information activities will be discussed within casual, project-based, and serious leisure, in turn.

Casual Leisure

Casual leisure is “an immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable core activity, requiring little or no special training to enjoy it.”^[18] Put another way, casual leisure is “doing what comes naturally” in one’s free time. More people participate in this form of leisure than any other. In essence, casual leisure is *hedonic* and results in sensations of pleasure and enjoyment. This kind of leisure helps people to rejuvenate following stretches of obligatory activity, and there is a natural inclination to pursue casual leisure during breaks, after work, and on weekends. Eight types of casual leisure have been identified: *play*, *relaxation*, *passive entertainment*, *active entertainment*, *sociable conversation*, *sensory stimulation*, *casual volunteering*, and *pleasurable aerobic activity*. Often a few of the eight types occur simultaneously, for instance, an episode of casual leisure can include eating and drinking (sensory stimulation), chatting with friends (sociable conversation), and watching a sports event on television (passive entertainment). The nature of information and information activities varies across the eight types of casual leisure.

Play involves child-like, light-hearted behavior such as frolicking with a dog or a non-competitive game of tennis. While play is an occasional leisure mode for adults, and not a central concept of information science, it is the mainstay of children’s leisure and development. Children’s interaction with books and each other in a library setting resembles play in many respects, and libraries provide children “. . .puppets and their theaters, games, storytelling and other activities more associated with playgrounds in nursery schools.”^[19] McKenzie and Stook^[20] illuminate the mechanics of children’s play during storytime at a Canadian public library, revealing a complex orchestration of literacy, information, and caring work by library staff and caregivers.

Relaxation entails a release from mental or physical tension, especially by recreation or rest. Casual leisure of this kind includes strolling, napping, or daydreaming, among many other moments of bliss. The release from mental tension that marks relaxation suggests it is not information intensive. However, relaxation is a venue for the information activity of *contemplation*, the reflective

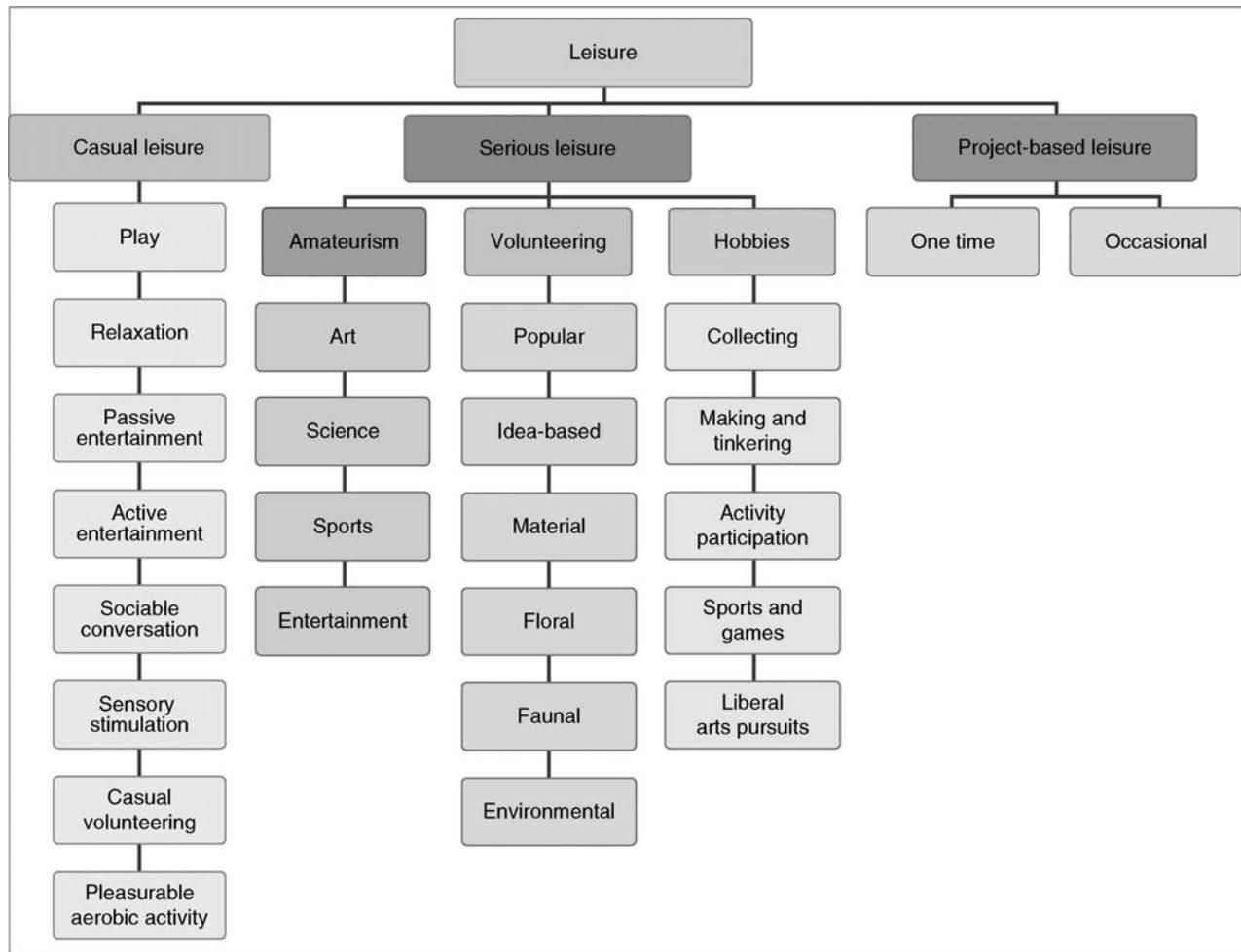


Fig. 1 The SLP as a map of the leisure universe, showing three main forms of leisure, their types and subtypes.

Source: From *The serious leisure frontier in library and information science: Hobby domains*, by J. Hartel. In *Knowl. Organ.* 2003, 30 (3/4), 232.^[16]

assimilation of information, intuition, and ideas. Great scientific discoveries as well as keen personal insights come during relaxation and perhaps it deserves more consideration by the information sciences for its role in information processing. In a few cases, relaxation is centered on documentary practices, such as the restful act of writing in a diary. Moreso today than ever, libraries aim to satisfy visitors seeking relaxation by providing areas with comfortable seating and soothing lighting. As an oasis from the high energy and noise of campus life, the undergraduate library is a place some students choose to enjoy a relaxing nap.

Passive entertainment occurs when “diversion or amusement is delivered to its consumers, where the principle action required of them is to arrange for its delivery” which may be turning on the television, inserting a musical disk into a device and pressing play, or opening a book.^[21] Watching television is an example of passive entertainment and ranks as the most popular leisure

activity above all others. Passive entertainment is non-analytic and content is engaged for diversion, not study.

A main charge of the public library, pleasure reading,^[4] qualifies by definition as passive entertainment—which is launched upon opening a book. Pleasure reading is treasured by many as a means to unwind. At the same time, it can be a source of transformative insights. Ross^[22] reports that avid readers find awakenings, models for identity, comfort, community, courage, acceptance, and understanding of the world in their favorite books—evidence of the virtues of casual leisure and a challenge to its characterization as *casual* or *passive*.

Surfing the Internet is another example of passive entertainment. Thirty percent of Internet users go online for non-purposeful or *idle* Web surfing aimed at having fun or passing time, suggesting that the most apt metaphor for the Internet is not *library* or *shopping mall* but “destination resort” dedicated exclusively to pleasure.^[23] When passive entertainment involves greater levels of

concentration and engagement it becomes *active entertainment*. Word and number games, shooting pool, and playing checkers are examples of active entertainment, a category not well explored by the information sciences.

Sociable conversation is the amiable, democratic, non-instrumental exchange of words between people. It can occur face-to-face, by telephone, or through the technologies of text messaging or chat. This type of casual leisure can happen spontaneously during other tasks, such as waiting in line at a grocery store, or as a separate planned rendezvous. In the information sciences, the first reports on scientific communication practices revealed the importance of informal conversation in scholarly productivity. Sociable conversation is at the heart of Pettigrew's concept of *information grounds*, "environment[s] temporarily created when people come together for a singular purpose but from whose behavior emerges a social atmosphere that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information."^[24]

Participants in *sensory stimulation* experience bodily arousal, whether by creature pleasures, displays of beauty, or thrills of movement. These are leisure activities such as sex, eating, drinking, touching, smelling, or feeling coolness or warmth, for instance enjoying a sauna, firework display, or roller coaster ride. Drug use and stimulants like alcohol and caffeine can enhance the effects. This variety of leisure is centered on the body and as a result has not attracted much attention in information science, with a few exceptions. Studies have shown that sex is one of the two most common search topic categories among the public,^[25] and that online search sessions for sexual topics last longer and view more pages than for other subjects.^[26]

Pleasurable aerobic activity is physical activity that requires effort sufficient to cause marked increase in respiration and heart rate.^[27] A game of beach volleyball, a hike, and children's frolic like hide-and-seek are examples. In tone, these activities are fun, and are not disciplined efforts to get in shape or gain prowess. On account of their simplicity, little information is required during these activities. However, information can be critical to getting started. For instance, among recreational hikers in Colorado, 75% always obtain information beforehand, mainly from friends or relatives, printed materials, maps, and the Internet.^[28]

Summarizing casual leisure and its information phenomena

Casual leisure is universally coveted and important; it generates renewal in a work-intensive age and brings people together for simple pleasures and merriment. Some types of casual leisure, such as pleasure reading, idle Web surfing, and writing in a diary, are foremost information activities. Periods of relaxation provide an opportunity for contemplation, which is information-rich in its own way. The information sciences play a critical

role in accessing casual leisure, by enabling storage and retrieval of fiction, Web pages, music, film, images, recipes, and other non-work related genres. Further, according to Stebbins, "Casual leisure appears to be the main source of serendipity in modern life, the quintessential form of informal experimentation, accidental discovery, and spontaneous invention."^[29] Hence, casual leisure is a fertile site for *information encountering*, "an unexpected discovery of useful or interesting information."^[30]

At the same time, as hedonic activity that is essentially "doing what comes naturally" many casual leisure experiences are devoid of information activities of interest to the information sciences. In fact, the innate ability to partake and temporary respite from mental challenge afforded by casual leisure appear to be some of its redeeming features. Many types of casual leisure exist outside a contested boundary the information sciences draw between information and entertainment. For more on this boundary see Case^[31] and Hektor.^[32]

Project-Based Leisure

A second major form of leisure, *project-based leisure*^[33] is "a short-term, moderately complicated, either one-shot or occasional, though infrequent, creative undertaking carried out in free time."^[34] Leisure projects can require considerable planning, effort, and sometimes skill, and are therefore not casual leisure; yet they do not entail the sustained commitment of serious leisure (discussed next). Leisure projects are creative and generate a new object or experience, for instance, a Halloween costume or road trip. Project-based leisure can occur when convenient, and fits well into the lifestyles of retirees, home-makers, or those with heavy workloads.

The theoretical elaboration of this form of leisure within the SLP is relatively recent, and two types of leisure projects have been identified thus far: *one-time* and *occasional*. One-time projects are executed in a single iteration and generally deploy talent and knowledge on hand, for example assembling a photo album or planting a flowerbox. Sometimes a small amount of background preparation comes from books, an instructional video, a short-course, or a conversation with a more experienced friend. Occasional projects are repeated and often tied to seasonal events; common examples are to decorate one's house for the holidays or throw a birthday party. These types of leisure projects can become routine and once mastered, require minimal new information.

In information science, the most developed treatment of project-based leisure appears in Hektor's study of Internet and information activities in everyday life.^[35] Based upon interviews with 10 Swedish citizens and analysis of their activity diaries, Hektor proposes a broad model of information activities in which a project is an important organizing concept.^[36] Projects require a blueprint or plan that spurns information need, and serve as

immediate context for 10 possible information activities. In Hektor's schema, projects are *generic* (common to all people) or *specific* (unique to a person), and one class of generic projects is *reflection and recreation*, namely, leisure. Citizens in Hektor's study describe instances of specific leisure projects such as writing a poem for a gift, recording compilations of music, installing a swimming pool, and reading books while on holiday.

Building on Hektor's conception of projects, Savolainen^[37] examined how 18 Finnish citizens position the Internet vs. other information sources and channels in the context of self development projects. He reports that in such endeavors, networked information sources ranked third in preference, after human sources and print media.

Summarizing project-based leisure and its information phenomena

Project-based leisure is an opportunity for people to enjoy diverse, creative, and often novel experiences within bounded stretches of free time, and without a long-term commitment. Different types of projects (whether one-time/recurring; or generic/specific) likely manifest distinct informational patterns, yet to be documented by the information sciences. It can be deduced that the public library and Internet are prime resources for people engaged in leisure projects, since they are immediately accessible when the impulse for a project arises; what is more, they are free, an ideal cost-of-entry for an effort that is relatively modest in scale and short-lived. This form of leisure may place tenets of information activity, such as *satisficing* and the *principle of least effort*^[38] into a new and positive light. Information seekers pursuing leisure projects who settle for readily available information are acting logically in this context. Here is an information experience that is appreciable, yet *not* aimed at deep knowledge or expertise, in contrast to the third major form of leisure, discussed next.

Serious Leisure

Serious leisure is "the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that people find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a career centered on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience."^[18] The idea and phrase "serious leisure" comes from Stebbins' interviewees, who used the word "serious" to underline the extent of their passion for a favorite leisure activity. In this case, the term embodies positive qualities such as importance and sincerity, rather than negative traits such as gravity or anxiety. Whereas casual leisure supplies pleasure, and project-based leisure delivers a temporary reward, serious leisure generates deep and enduring sensations of fulfillment.

There are six defining characteristics to all serious leisure.^[39] First, there is the occasional need to *persevere*, as when mountain climbers push through exhaustion to reach a peak. Second, is that of finding a *leisure career* in the activity, with turning points and a sense of advancement. Third, serious leisure takes *significant personal effort based on specially acquired knowledge, training, experience, or skill*. In this quality, serious leisure is the opposite of its casual counterpart, which requires no expertise. Fourth, there are eight *durable benefits* or outcomes to serious leisure: 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. Fifth, serious leisure participants tend to *identify strongly* with their chosen pursuits, and may be quick to assert their affiliation. Sixth, a *unique ethos*, or spirit of the community, exists around each serious leisure activity.

There are three main types of serious leisure: *amateurism*, *volunteering*, and *hobbies*. Amateurs operate in the fields of art, science, sport, and entertainment. According to Stebbins, amateurism is best defined and understood macrosocially in its dynamic with professional counterparts.^[40] Since amateurism shares qualities with professional work, it has received some attention in information science and will not be addressed further in this entry. Exemplar information science research in this area is Cox et al.'s^[41] study of the use of the photo-sharing Web site *Flickr* by amateur photographers. Volunteering entails uncoerced help offered either formally or informally with no, or at most, token pay and is illustrated in information science research by Gibbs and Linley.^[43] The entry at hand focuses on the most prevalent form of serious leisure, hobbies.

Hobbies

A *hobby* is the systematic and enduring pursuit of a reasonably evolved and specialized free-time activity that leads to the acquisition of knowledge, skill, or experience.^[43] Unlike amateurism, hobbyists have no professional counterparts. A conservative estimate of the adults in the population who practice hobbies is 10–15%,^[44] while Stebbins estimates at least 20%.^[45] Social historian and authority on hobbies, Gelber, points out while hobbies occupy only 3–5% of the average person's leisure time, they are "...like sex, the amount of time spent thinking about the activity is probably a better measure of its importance than the amount of time spent doing it."^[44] The term "hobby" comes from a type of Irish pony but into the twentieth century referred pejoratively to an obsessive concern for a topic, a fixation. Hobbies emerged during the industrial revolution, when they were promoted as alternatives to forms of leisure, such as gambling and drinking, which were perceived as social

problems. Today, *hobby* has a neutral or even positive meaning as the mark of an interesting person.

The SLP identifies five classes of hobbies: *collecting, making and tinkering, activity participation, sports and games, and liberal arts pursuits*.^[46] All hobbies have a core activity that locates them into one of the five classes, though a hobby may have associated activities that resemble another class. To illustrate, the hobby of scrapbooking is a making and tinkering hobby because the core activity is the creation of scrapbooks; yet enthusiasts may also collect craft materials (this does not make scrapbooking a collecting hobby). To date, the mainstay of empirical research into hobbies in information science has explored individual hobbies as case studies, as opposed to the class level, with the exception of collecting. The next section introduces the basic features of each hobby class, deduces and generalizes information activities therein, and reviews exemplar case studies from the literature of information science.

Liberal arts hobbies

A liberal arts hobby is “the systematic and fervent pursuit during free time of knowledge for its own sake.”^[47] Participants strive for an understanding of, for example, arts, sports, foods, languages, cultures, histories, sciences, philosophies, literary traditions, or politics. This class is the home to sometimes eccentric aficionados of quirky subjects such as an obscure historical figure, certain make of motorcycle, or particular baseball World Series, among innumerable possible topics. In this type of hobby, information is not acquired to *do* anything other than learn; to illustrate, an enthusiast of World War II airplanes studies the subject devotedly, yet does not aim to fly or repair a plane.

This hobby class is exceedingly interesting territory for the information sciences because participants have turned the acquisition and expression of knowledge—usually seen as a problem or work-driven scenario—into leisure. Here, information activities are underway by free will and with an upbeat sensibility, providing clues to the features of ideal, flourishing information environments.

Stebbins reports^[48] that liberal arts hobbyists engage information in two main ways: *acquisition* and *expression*. In liberal arts pursuits, acquisition is active rather than passive, and resembles studying. Liberal arts hobbyists tend to favor information about their chosen topic that is broad and profound, not superficial or technical. Attentive reading, chiefly books, magazines, and newspapers, is the principal mode of this hobby. To this end, these hobbyists likely maintain a home office or study, and frequent libraries or coffee shops where they can work undisturbed. Learning also occurs by watching films, listening to audio tapes, participating in non-credit courses, or traveling.

Liberal arts hobbyists express their knowledge to others, mainly by talking, in order to fortify their understanding and to invite new serendipitous discovery. They may convey their expertise casually at social events, during regular

gatherings of a special-interest club, or more formally at advertised sessions such as a public slide show. These sorts are also likely to disseminate their ideas online, via email or at personal Web sites that display their erudition. Exploratory research in information science provides a glimpse of the information activities of liberal arts hobbyists in the areas of art, the paranormal, and genealogy.

One liberal arts hobby is the passion for art; enthusiasts seek a general knowledge of art or may focus on a style or era. Smith’s dissertation^[49] investigates the information experience of these sorts during visits to art museums. Her project, a qualitative meta-analysis of existing museum visitor studies, provides general principles of non-specialist art museum visitor information use, namely: viewers construct meanings out of many elements in the museum setting; viewers build art-viewing and museum-going information skills cumulatively; the artwork itself is the primary experience, overriding textual information; art viewing and interpretation are social; and viewers are ambivalent about art museum information.

Topics such as religion, spirituality, and the supernatural are profound matters that capture the imagination and can be engaged as a liberal arts hobby. Kari^[50] explores information activities in the context of the paranormal, defined as any experience beyond the scope of current scientific knowledge. This project is ground-breaking for considering information resources that are otherworldly. Interviews with 16 paranormal believers revealed that some people consult information sources which they regard as paranormal; information is mostly sought to address normal not paranormal matters; paranormal information is felt to be helpful and paranormal information activities have no clear beginning or end.

Genealogy is a liberal arts hobby with a sizable body of research in information science. Genealogy is addressed in the entry [Genealogical Literature and Its Users] in this encyclopedia. One exemplar study by Yakel^[51] investigates information use in genealogy through 29 interviews with genealogists. She concludes that the genealogist’s search for facts on ancestors is a profound experience that leads to finding coherence in one’s life. A distinctly social view of information seeking behavior in genealogy exists in Fulton’s report on information sharing among hobby genealogists.^[52] A dissertation underway by Veale^[53] examines, among other things, how genealogists use the Internet for publishing, interacting, transacting, and collaborating activities.

Making and tinkering

The making and tinkering hobbies^[54] depend on developing substantial specialized skill and considerable background knowledge, and can be highly artistic. Unlike many other hobbies, they lead to a durable end product. Stebbins, drawing from *A Guide to Avocational Activities* by Robert Overs,^[55] classifies these hobbies as: *cooking, baking, and*

candy-making; beverage crafts; decorating activities; inter-lacing, interlocking and knot-making activities; toy model and kit assembly; paper crafts; leather and textile crafts; wood and metal working activities; do-it-yourself activities, and raising and breeding animals. Making and tinkering hobbies are open to a vast range of people in many different societies, are not limited to one sex, and can appeal to a wide age range.

Participants in this hobby class must have a talent for following often complicated instructions and paying attention to detail. For information science, these hobbies are opportunities to examine the nature of technical knowledge, the process of instruction, and the acquisition of manual skill. Some making and tinkering hobbies generate their own distinct documentary genres, such as recipes, patterns, and models; others manifest apprentice style learning environments. In information science, researchers have explored the making and tinkering hobbies of gourmet cooking and fiber arts.

Hartel's dissertation^[56] examines the information activities and resources in the hobby of gourmet cooking. Taking an ethnographic approach, she interviewed 20 gourmet cooks about the practice of the hobby and then photographed and analyzed their personal cookbook and recipe collections. Among other things, her results illuminate the role of information in a hands-on cooking episode,^[57] and how cooks create and manage a *personal culinary library* (PCL): a customized constellation of culinary information resources based in the home.

Prigoda and McKenzie^[59] offer an account of information behavior within a women's knitting group that gathers weekly in a Canadian public library. Taking a collectivist approach, they situate information activities as practices that occur within the social dynamics of the group, the act of knitting, and the context of the public library. Through participant observation and semistructured interviews their analysis leads to a model of the multiple forces shaping information behavior in this particular leisure setting (Fig. 2). Their findings challenge the distinctions the SLP and other leisure frameworks draw between casual leisure, serious leisure, and work. This investigation builds on McKenzie's other studies of everyday life and leisure contexts, making her a pioneering researcher and theorist in the area. It will be interesting, in the future, to contrast the model of knitting to work-in-progress by Fulton,^[60] who is exploring the social information habits of elderly Irish lace makers, another fiber art hobby.

Collecting

While many citizens of affluent societies are pack rats who accumulate stuff, true hobbyist collectors^[61] usually assemble one or a few classes of objects for the purpose of study, comparison, or display. A collecting hobby can be organized around a *topic* or theme (i.e., anything purple), or focus on a particular *item* (i.e., all thimbles).

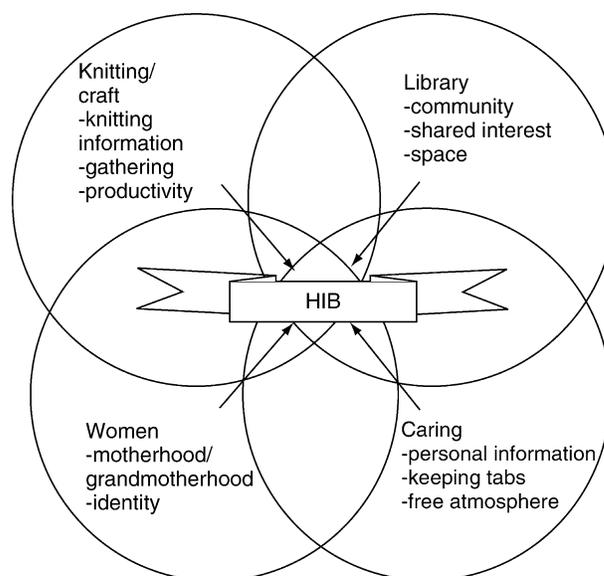


Fig. 2 Factors affecting human information behavior in the public library knitting group.

Source: From Purls of wisdom: A collectivist study of human information behaviour in a public library knitting group, by E. Prigoda and P.J. McKenzie. In *J. Doc.* 2007, 63 (1), 90–114.^[59]

Collectors can acquire new objects in one of two ways: *passively*, as through gifts, or *actively*, by shopping around.^[62] Stebbins, drawing from Overs,^[55] proposes a classification of collecting hobbies as: *poster collections*, *coin*, *currency*, and *medal collections*; *stamp collections*; *natural objects* (fossils, butterflies); *model collections*; *doll collections*; *collections of art objects*; *antique collections* and *contemporary popular culture collections*.

The collecting hobbies are a leisure-time analog to the information sciences, for both have a mission and passion to gather and catalog artifacts. Much of the information in this realm is taxonomic and used to identify and classify. Many collectors also aim to understand the historical and contemporary use, production, and significance of their favored objects. Communities of collectors bring people together for buying, selling, and information exchange. Lee and Trace^[63] report, “the primary role of information in collecting is to help build interpersonal relationships and to help with the acquisition of pleasure and joy-bringing objects.” In information science, two ethnographic studies illuminate information activities associated with the collecting of coins and toy rubber ducks.

Coin collecting is one of the most popular collecting hobbies. Through a literature review and participant observation at sites of coin-collecting activity, Case^[64] describes the information resources of this area, namely: printed guides, serials, auction catalogs, photographs; special libraries; associations and clubs; Internet Web sites and discussion boards. He reports how hobbyists catalog their coin collections, and how trust is maintained despite the prevalence of counterfeits and fakes.

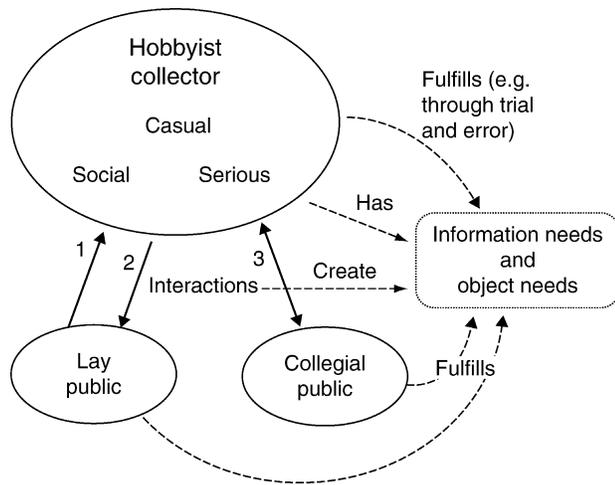


Fig. 3 Information behavior in the social world of a collecting hobby.

Source: From *The role of information in a community of hobbyist collectors*, by C. Lee and C. Trace. In *J. Am. Soc. Inform. Sci. Technol.* (under review).^[63]

Lee and Trace explore information activities in an online community of toy rubber duck collectors.^[63] Because these hobbyists are not so common and geographically distributed, they find fellowship at the *Duckplanet* Web site. Through interviews and observation of *Duckplanet's* bulletin board activity, Lee and Trace propose a typology of rubber duck collectors as *social*, *casual*, or *serious*, and each type exhibits different informational habits. They introduce an holistic model of the relationships in the hobby social world and its information dynamics (Fig. 3), and outline 12 types of information needs common to rubber duck collectors, such as “the care and repair of rubber ducks” and the history of rubber ducks.

Activity participation

The activity participation hobbies^[65] require systematic physical movement that has intrinsic appeal and follows a specific set of rules. These pursuits are challenging and demand good physical conditioning, but are non-competitive. The many different varieties in this class are grouped by Stebbins as follows: *nature activities* are experienced outdoors and include nature appreciation such as hiking, bird-watching, and snorkeling; *nature exploitation* like fishing, hunting, and mushroom-gathering; and *nature's challenges*, for example ballooning, flying, and alpine skiing. *Corporeal activities* focus on conditioning the body, such as swimming, the martial arts, and body-building. Less prevalent are *folk arts*, non-commercial creative endeavors such as barbershop singing and square dancing.

This class of hobbies provides an opportunity to examine information activities in diverse and dynamic settings such as a dance hall or the wilderness. In such places,

information can be critical to survival; trail maps, weather reports, or a guide to edible mushrooms can prove deadly if unavailable, incomplete, or inaccurate. In information science, research exists on the folk art of senior dancing and the nature activity of backpacking.

A dissertation by Esquer-Ramirez^[66] examines the information needs of senior citizens who are social dancers, estimated at 15% of the U.S. population. Using ethnographic methods he determines, among other things, that senior dancers require information to create dance goals and to enter new dance environments. These active elders learn by interacting with fellow dancers, dance instructors, and coaches, and by using printed and audiovisual material. Beyond the informational requirements of the hobby, social dancing helps seniors to achieve security, and to reach personal development and well-being goals.

Chang and Su^[67] report on the information search process of a popular nature activity, backpacking. Through interviews with 30 Taiwanese backpackers they discovered, among other things, that the information search process occurs before, during, and after the trip, and that different information sources are favored per stage. The trip planning stage had seven distinct informational tasks, tied to key questions such as “where to go?” and “where to stay?”

Sports and games

The sports and games hobbies^[68] differ from the last mentioned class of activities because they are competitive. There are two kinds of sports: *team sports* such as softball, ultimate Frisbee, and volleyball; and *individual sports* like darts, long distance running, and ping pong. Sports and games differ in that sports are based upon physical skill, while games entail a large degree of chance (though some games such as chess, checkers, and video games require mental skill). Stebbins classifies games as: *table and board games*; *electronic games*; *knowledge and word games*; *card games*; *role playing games*; and *miscellaneous games*. The more physically demanding sports in this hobby class suit younger populations, while many games are enjoyed by people of all ages.

Using citation analysis, Virgona^[69] sought to define “sports information” as a research front and found no articles from the information sciences. Hence, the sports hobbies are relatively unknown and here their informational characteristics will be tentatively deduced. A central information form in sports and games are the *rules* that define competitive action. Rules are codified in handbooks and learned by all participants to maintain fair play. In sports, knowledge is embedded in physical experience and the body; though enthusiasts seek and use information about technique, nutrition, equipment, history, and lore of their favorite sport. From this hobby class, online role playing games have garnered the most analytical attention,

and a graduate student provides a view of information in miniature war-gaming.

A dissertation by Adams^[70] explored the information behavior and meaning making in the virtual play space of the online role playing game, *City of Heroes*, and is the cornerstone of her ongoing research in this area. Her dissertation focuses on the social dynamics in the online world of the game and applied theories of play and dramaturgy. Through participant observation and analysis of the Web sites relating to *City of Heroes*, Adams learned that the social aspects of the game were not as important as hypothesized; further, she discovered parallels between the play space and elements of everyday life information seeking.

Hobbies are appealing research projects for students of information science, who can leverage their passion for a favorite hobby to complete a course assignment. As one example, Mosbey^[71] investigated the information activities of miniature war gamers, who create and stage accurate representations of famous battles using tiny pewter soldiers. Mosbey surveyed members of the Colorado Historical Gamers and discovered they conduct extensive research into the dress, equipment, terrain, and war strategies of different battles and periods. War gamers begin their research in their own files or bookshelves, and then proceed to the Internet; the library, and friends. Two-thirds of war gamers utilize the library, but find the military history resources lack adequate depth. Further, these hobbyists rely upon maps, photographs, and paintings; gather information at gaming stores and conventions; and delight in sharing their expertise.

Summarizing serious leisure and its information phenomena

As activity centered on the acquisition of knowledge, skill, and experience, serious leisure and its most prevalent type, hobbies, are exceedingly information-rich. Information activities in serious leisure are too diverse to summarize here, but two characteristics that underlie the informational dynamics are noteworthy.

First, serious leisure engenders a long-term commitment and enthusiasts embark on a *leisure career*, “the typical course, or passage that carries the person into and through the leisure role.”^[72] Stebbins’ exploratory research has shown that the usual serious leisure career has five stages: *beginning*, *development*, *establishment*, *maintenance*, and *decline*. The first two stages are focused on learning the fundamentals of the activity; the middle is a heyday marked by mastery; decline involves a deterioration of interest or a loss of the physical ability to continue. The serious leisure career is an important concept for the information sciences because it entails the development of expertise, and information activities likely vary along the career path.

Second, serious leisure activities generate *social worlds*, which are a “. . . constellation of actors, organizations, events and practices which have coalesced into a perceived sphere of interest and involvement for participants.”^[73] Social worlds are voluntary, can be geographically diffuse, have no formal boundaries, and develop their own history, discourse, and lore. This form of leisure sociality heightens the role of information and shapes information activity. The lack of a centralized bureaucracy and geographic distance between participants in social worlds embeds much of knowledge exchange in *mediated communication* such as books, magazines, newsletters, Web sites, chat rooms, newsgroups, bulletin boards, and the like. Urban^[74] points out how some serious leisure communities come together in multiuser virtual environments like *Second Life*. Hence, serious leisure realms are fertile crossroads of information and sociality, resembling other socially organized, information-rich domains such as the academic disciplines and professions.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Leisure is a relatively unexplored frontier in the information sciences, with innumerable unanswered questions. Existing research projects suggest promising trajectories for future inquiry.

Following the design of this article, one approach is descriptive and aims to characterize information activities within different types of leisure. This technique applies social and context-sensitive metatheories and parallels the strategy of most information behavior studies of non-leisure realms. A basic question is: What information activities exist within a form of leisure? Additional questions can target the information resources, systems, structures, or institutions at play. A theoretical framework such as the SLP is helpful to define the unit of analysis at any degree of resolution, and to make the effort cumulative across numerous exploratory studies.

To illustrate, a logical starting point is to examine information in *distinct leisure core activities*. There is still much to discover about information phenomena that underlie, for example, a crossword puzzle, folk art, or a special holiday party; these are inviting research projects for students of information science. Or, inquiry can be leveled more broadly at a *leisure sub-type or class*. For instance, information activities can be examined across any one of the five hobby classes. Precedents suggest each hobby class is a unique information environment, that is *humanistic* in liberal arts pursuits, *technical* in making and tinkering, and *taxonomic* in collecting. These leisure groups may harbor informational patterns akin to the academic disciplines, yet to be documented. Ultimately, still to be understood is the nature of information in each of the three main forms of leisure: casual, project-based, and serious. It is possible these represent three fundamental

leisure information paradigms, as robust as the epistemologies of the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. By working within a common framework like the SLP, studies can be compared and contrasted, and accumulate into a grounded theories of information activity.

A different tact for information research into leisure eschews frameworks like the SLP in favor of a critical lens. Such inquiry is not designed to detect informational patterns, but, generally speaking, illuminates the role of information in social and cultural phenomena. These approaches may employ discourse analytic metatheories and historical perspectives. In this vein, Prigoda and McKenzie's case study of knitting,^[59] reviewed earlier, models information behavior *and* recasts knitting from a quaint female craft to work with great personal, social, and creative value. In a similar spirit, Cox et al.'s^[41] study of amateur photographer's use of the photo-sharing Web site *Flickr* reveals the ethical and social dynamics that underlie *Flickr* technology and compares the social order of the online community to traditional amateur photography clubs. Critical approaches are effective means to unpack and challenge assumptions about leisure and society, such as the merit afforded serious leisure over casual leisure, and the contested divide between information and entertainment.

Another avenue for research utilizes leisure settings to bring fresh insights into established informational theories of concepts. In this design, leisure is not the focus per se but serves as a research site that can broaden or reinvent long-standing or imprecise conceptions in information science. For instance, Kari and Savolainen^[75] used the scenario of personal development (a largely leisure pursuit) to refine the idea of "information seeking in context." From interviews with 18 Finnish citizens about this activity, they reached an understanding of four ways to characterize information seeking in context as: detachment, unity, direction, and interaction. Do conceptions of *relevance*, *literacy*, or the *principle of least effort*, among many other major ideas, take on new meanings in leisure?

IMPLICATIONS

By focusing on information activities within leisure, the information sciences attain a more complete understanding of information in the human experience. In particular, leisure harbors new insights about information activities performed through free will and with an upbeat esprit. Leisure may reveal the habits of naturally effective information behaviors and the characteristics of organic, flourishing information environments—giving the information sciences a benchmark and target for its work. Such foundational insights are valuable as their own right, and have practical applications for information provision in a society that increasingly gains value and meaning from leisure pursuits.

CONCLUSION

This entry has surveyed leisure in North America and western Europe with a focus on its information activities. Over the past century, leisure has been unevenly considered across different specialties of the information sciences and today is a small, exploratory, proliferating line of inquiry mainly within the specialty of everyday life information seeking (ELIS). The theoretical framework of the *serious leisure perspective* provided a means to consider three main forms of leisure—casual, project-based, and serious—and some of the information activities they harbor. There are innumerable unanswered research questions on this frontier, with implications that can enlarge, balance, and enrich the field.

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