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UNDERSTANDING THE INFORMATION NEEDS, SOURCES, AND BEHAVIOURS OF COMIC LIBRARIANS IN TORONTO

Abstract

This poster presents findings from a thesis study characterizing the information needs, sources, and behaviours of librarians in the Greater Toronto Area who work with comic and graphic novel collections across academic, school, and special library contexts. This project extends Sonnenwald's information horizon interview (IHI) methodology, considering how work and leisure contexts influence information behaviours. This poster describes data collection with 11 participants; outlines findings from thematic analysis that identify common information needs and sources; discusses information behaviours within the frame of Hektor's information activities; and showcases information world maps created by participants.

Introduction

Comic and graphic novel collection-related work is rarely carried out by people in "comics librarian" roles. Instead, comic collections are developed and maintained through a mixture of personal interest and professional passion. Minimal work has been done to characterize how librarians seek and use comics-related information. This thesis project investigates the information needs, sources, and behaviours of librarians in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) who work with comic and graphic novel collections. Participants have experience across academic, school and special library contexts. This research aims to understand how librarians seek and interact with comics-related information in work (professional) and leisure (personal) contexts.

A secondary aim of this project is extending the information horizon interview (IHI) methodology proposed by Sonnenwald et. al (2001) to study information behaviour. This research presents method for collecting and analyzing multiple information horizon maps from each participant to compare information behaviour in distinct personal and professional contexts. During a semi-structured interview, each participant was asked to create graphic representations of their "information world" for personal and professional contexts. The resulting maps represented diverse experiences with comics-related information in personal and professional lives as distinct or overlapping contexts, strictly professional endeavours, or experiences best communicated verbally.

Research Questions

This project explored the following questions:

1. How do comics librarians engage with comics-related information at work and outside of work?

2. What are the information needs of comics librarians?

3. What sources of information are used by comics librarians?

4. How do comics-related information behaviours and activities in work and leisure contexts compare?

Methodological Question

5. Can participants verbally and graphically articulate distinct information worlds for work and leisure contexts?

Background

Comics Librarianship

Comics librarianship has a short history, with Will Eisner (1974) recognized as the first prominent cartoonist in the field to call for the inclusion of comics in libraries 50 years ago. Another important milestone was Randall William Scott's (1990) *Comics Librarianship: A Handbook*, which details the idea of comics librarianship as a specialty (p. 11) and discusses the process of acquiring (p. 27), storing, preserving (p. 43), and cataloging (p. 59) comic books and strips. In North America, the history of the American Library Association (ALA) Graphic Novels & Comics Round Table (GNCRT) highlights the evolution of comics librarianship and its inclusion in ALA initiatives. The recent and growing acceptance of comic materials in library collections is evidenced by the push for graphic novel publishers to appeal to libraries (MacDonald, 2018); the call for critical analyses of academic comic collections (Piepmeier & Grimm, 2019); and an increasing number of guides produced for librarians unfamiliar with the medium (Cornog & Perper, 2009; Goldsmith, 2010; Tsene, 2022; Vitella, 2022).

Information Behaviour Research

This project is situated within human information behaviour research. "Information behaviour" refers to "the many ways in which human beings interact with information, in particular, the ways in which people seek and utilize information" (Bates, 2017, p. 2074). This study is rooted in a desire to understand the information behaviours of comics librarians at an individual level, highlighting their personal experiences within institutions and the wider comics community.

Information Horizons
Context provides meaning for human information behaviour (Dervin, 1997). The information horizon interview (IHI) is a methodology for studying information behaviour. Sonnenwald (1999) introduced the idea that "within a context and situation is an 'information horizon' in which we can act" (p. 176). The IHI utilizes semi-structured interviews with a drawing activity to have participants verbally and graphically articulate an information horizon for a particular context and situation (Sonnenwald et al., 2001). This study aims to extend the IHI protocol and have participants create multiple information horizon maps to represent distinct contexts.

Information world mapping (IWM) (Greyson et al., 2017) is an arts-informed extension of the information horizon interview that emphasizes participant creativity and freedom. The technique aims to emphasize interpersonal relationships and personal information practices. Advantages of using IWM as a method of graphical elicitation include the low barrier to use, dynamic nature of the activity to reduce participant fatigue during interviews, and the control participants, particularly marginalized groups, have over the creation and interpretation of their map (p. 154). Disadvantages include the time required for interviews, possible resistance to drawing, and possibility of maps and interviews to go in unexpected directions (pp. 154-155). This study draws upon this flexible and creative iteration of the IHI, reflecting the value of creativity and appreciation for non-textual information within comics librarianship.

Significance and Relevance
A growing acceptance of comic materials in libraries has resulted in guides produced for librarians unfamiliar with the medium (Cornog & Perper, 2009; Goldsmith, 2010; Tsene, 2022; Vitella, 2022). Understanding the experiences of librarians in academic, school, and special library contexts provides a perspective on how librarians have navigated the creation and maintenance of comic collections, often without such guidance. This research aims to identify information needs and sources that can be incorporated into resources for librarians working with comic collections.

Methodology
This project had two main phases of data collection: a preliminary online questionnaire and a semi structured information horizon interview, producing a dataset including interview transcripts and information horizon maps drawn by participants for both personal and professional contexts. Analysis for this project involved multiple techniques to integrate the visual and textual data collected. Textual data, including questionnaire responses, interview transcripts, IHI maps, and field notes, were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2019; 2022) reflexive thematic analysis technique. Since thematic analysis for visual data has not been widely used, Sonnenwald et al.'s (2001) process of quantifying map elements utilizing a matrix was utilized alongside Engelhardt's (2002)

classification of map and graphic types. Information behaviours are categorized and discussed based on Hektor's (2001) model of information activities.

Poster Content

This poster describes data collection with 11 participants with experiences across a range of academic, school, and special library contexts in Toronto. An overview of identified information needs, preferred information sources, and observed information behaviours is presented alongside samples of the maps drawn by participants.

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