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Building bridges: Papers from the FanLIS 2021 symposium

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[0.1] Abstract—This editorial gives background and context on FanLIS, a symposium series and research project run by CityLIS, Department of Library and Information Science at City, University of London, which seeks to explore the liminal spaces between fandom, fan studies, and Library and Information Science (LIS). It also introduces papers from the inaugural FanLIS symposium, which took place online on May 20, 2021.

[0.2] Keywords—Fandom; Interdisciplinary; Library and Information Science

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[1] Library and Information Science (LIS) is interested in informational activities and behavior in every aspect of our lives, beyond those traditionally associated with libraries and information services. LIS focuses on information processes in the workplace, education, research, and in our domestic lives.

[2] We would like to consider another significant but less often explored aspect of our lives—the parts of our lives that sometimes mean the most to us, that define who we are on a fundamental level. What about the things we choose to do in our leisure time, the things we find fun? More recently, with the work of Robert Stebbins and Jenna Hartel, LIS has begun to explore fun information work (Ocepek et al. 2018) and fun information behavior—referred to as "serious leisure" (Hartel, Cox, and Griffin 2016). Why not examine the information work of knitters, of runners, of motor sports enthusiasts, even rubber duck collectors? Are these interests, hobbies, activities no less important or significant to our everyday lives than the activities that we undertake in the workplace, in the school, in the university, in the library? Are they less important than the information work we do when we're ill, or buying a new house, or filing away our paychecks?

[3] Fun information work is important because it's what we choose to do. It is, hopefully, what makes us happy, relaxed, creative, fulfilled. Fun information work tells us about our informational activities when we are at rest, content, ready to play. It is perhaps the one time we engage with information solely for our own pleasure, our own satisfaction. From there we go from fun information work to fan information work. This we can characterize as being driven by love, passion, play.

[4] Part of fan identity is being completely literate in the fandom of choice: in taking advantage of all the latest technologies and affordances to seek out, share, create, and express personal fandom. As Henry Jenkins has noted, "Fans were early adopters of digital technologies" (2006, 138), and as Abigail de Kosnik said in her seminal text "Rogue Archives," "Media fans...were early developers and practitioners of both online archive building and archontic production" (2016, 11). From Usenet and dedicated homepages to deviantArt, Fanfiction.net, and LiveJournal, to AO3 and Wattpad, and now to social media, fans have migrated with the ever-changing landscape of technology to create and disseminate their fan works. Before that, they were extensive users of xeroxing, self-publishing, and zine-making, creating informal postal networks to exchange information in an age before the instantaneous affordances of the internet and the World Wide Web. Fans are curious, but they can also be innovative, and sometimes they are also digital pioneers. For example, while LIS has long wrestled with how to mitigate the inherent messiness of hashtags, AO3 has already solved the puzzle with their tag wrangling system—an innovation that largely seems to have passed under the radar for LIS.

[5] Fans are generous; they are participatory and collaborative. The way they handle information is informal, based in fantasy, play, and performance. Fans disregard traditional methods of bibliographic control for their own innovations. They favor creative freedom over copyright and intellectual property laws. They encourage mentorship and peer learning. But there is still so much more to explore, and this is where FanLIS hopes to open new avenues and discourse.

[6] LIS and fan studies are both fundamentally multidisciplinary. There are thus many methodological lenses through which we may investigate fandom—from perspectives as diverse as psychology and theology, second language learning, and queer and gender studies. Likewise with LIS. Information, after all—how we create it, organize it, manage it, share it, turn it into knowledge—permeates every aspect of all our lives. As human beings, we are made up of information—reflect on the code instantiated in our DNA. FanLIS, then, seeks to explore the rich, liminal seams where fan studies, fandom, and LIS intersect, and where opportunities for cross disciplinary learning and knowledge creation may exist.

[7] The first FanLIS symposium, held on May 20, 2021, was the start of that exploration. The following are a curated selection of papers that were delivered at the symposium. Topics include interdisciplinary methodology within fan studies; the fan as archivist and curator; the fan as author, reader, information worker, and practitioner; and the importance of authenticity in fanish information sources. Also covered is an interactive thought experiment on what academic data management might look like if we used fanish tools and platforms such as the Archive of Our Own (AO3).

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