

Quid Pro Quo: Information Sharing in Leisure Activities

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ABSTRACT

This article explores information sharing in the context of amateur genealogists researching their Irish ancestry. Information sharing is an important feature of this hobby, with individuals networking with others to supplement information they have found when searching sources. Because of the nature of the hobby, reciprocal sharing behavior may be significant in this process. This study adopted a multi-case, exploratory approach to learning about amateur genealogists' sharing behavior associated with their information seeking. Twenty-four amateur genealogists from around the world participated in semi-structured telephone interviews about their hunt for their Irish ancestors. Data were transcribed and analyzed to identify patterns and conditions of information sharing between participants as they researched their genealogy. Participants in this study were avid information seekers, who prized information sharing as a means of advancing their research. The Internet played a central role in information sharing. Particular social norms surrounded the sharing of information that shaped interactions, including expectations of reciprocal information sharing. The findings of this study suggest that information sharing is an important feature of hobby participation for amateur genealogists, supporting learning as well as achievement in locating one's ancestors. Reciprocal information behavior strengthened social relationships between genealogists and multiple information sharing events solidified the network positions of individuals as information champions.

INTRODUCTION

Amateur genealogy may be characterized as *serious leisure*, that is, an amateur or voluntary activity in which the hobby forms a central life interest,

with participants actively acquiring and expressing special skills, knowledge, and experience (Stebbins, 1996, 1997). The information world of the amateur genealogist involves an intricate network of information, which the participant must navigate to follow an individual trail of ancestry. As a result, information seeking, acquisition, sharing, and evaluation are key features of genealogy. Because the goal of researching one's family tree is to learn about people connected by family relationships, people as sources figure prominently in the process of this hobby. This article explores the role of information sharing and reciprocal information exchange in the hobby of amateur genealogy.

INFORMATION SHARING

Information sharing is recognized as a significant feature of information behavior in our field. In an early library and information science (LIS) study involving information sharing, Clarke (1973) distinguished between information sharing and information seeking; he referred to information sharing as information that is given to others within a social group, whereas information seeking involves intentional exploration for information outside one's circle. Clarke found that sharing information may occur between people exploring the possibility of information exchange that could draw them closer together, unlike information seeking where the balance of information lies with one of the individuals and the other seeks to elicit that information from this person.

More recently, Erdelez and Rioux (2000) have examined the sharing of information encountered on the Web, a form of sharing Talja (2002) has called *social sharing*. Erdelez (2005) described *information encountering* (IE), a specific form of opportunistic acquisition of information (OAI), as "an instance of accidental discovery of information during an active search." The experience of encountering information is shaped by the characteristics of the individual, the information environment, and the encountered information. When information is encountered, the individual notices potentially relevant information to a background information problem separate from a current problem in the foreground, interrupts the original search process to examine the encountered information, selects and saves information, and then returns to the original search and information problem (Erdelez, 2005). In the context of sharing, the encountered information is then shared with others.

Rioux (2004, 2005) offered a framework for information acquiring-and-sharing (IA&S), identifying a "highly social and pleasant" information behavior in which individuals store and recall the information needs of others, associate the acquired information with an individual, and share this information. According to Rioux (2004), cognitive, affective, motivational, and procedural needs lead people to acquire and share information. Rioux (2004) identified four specific themes in this process:

- Theme 1: Respondents perceive a relatively low awareness of the cognitive states they experience during the process of sharing acquired information.
- Theme 2: A quick cognitive evaluation state is evidenced.
- Theme 3: Respondents experience a varied mix of positive affective states during the process of sharing acquired information.
- Theme 4: Respondents do occasionally experience negative affective states during the process of sharing acquired information.

His resulting IA&S revealed a combination of information behavior and processes in which Rioux (2005) stated that an individual:

- cognitively stores representations of other people's information needs;
- recalls those needs when acquiring (in various contexts) information of a particular type or quality;
- makes associations between the information that s/he has acquired and someone s/he knows who s/he perceives to need or want this information;
- shares this information in some way.

Using McMillan and Chavis' (1986) model of community, Hersberger, Rioux, and Cruitt (2005) explored information sharing in online environments as community building in the context of Rioux's IA&S framework. In their analytical framework, community is defined by four basic elements: membership, influence, integration, and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection, all of which are connected dynamically. In addition, Hersberger, Rioux, and Cruitt (2005) place information exchange as a specific tier of the pyramid of community building for online communities, a point at which, for the virtual world, textual information forms communication. More encompassing than information exchange in their modelling is information sharing, and it is at this point of this holistic view of community building that they have asserted IA&S behaviors facilitate the development of relationships in virtual communities.

Talja (2002) offered group sharing as an alternative to focusing on individual sharing. Basing her ideas on a study of scholarly sharing, Talja (2002) divided information sharing into four categories in the academic information world:

- *Strategic sharing*: information sharing as a conscious strategy of maximizing efficiency in a research group
- *Paradigmatic sharing*: information sharing as a means of establishing a novel and distinguishable research approach or area within a discipline or across disciplines
- *Directive sharing*: information sharing between teachers and students
- *Social sharing*: information sharing as a relationship- and community-building activity

While her study involved a particular information community and did not address how the Web affects information sharing among scholars, this classification framework may have potential for exploring information sharing in other contexts. Importantly, Talja (2002) referred to information sharing as a holistic act that must be understood by examining the community. Her approach is supported by researchers, such as Haythornthwaite and Wellman (1998), who have advocated for examining networks, as opposed to individual actions, to understand how people respond according to social norms inherent in a community.

Understanding social norms or normative behavior is critical to exploring sharing behaviors in communities. For instance, Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson (2008) have extended Chatman's Theory of Normative Behavior, asserting that normative behavior and small worlds provide a useful framework for understanding how the social attitudes particular to specific communities shape information access for members of those communities, as well as create an accepted understanding of social place of information within those communities. Taking cases of clashing groups and opinions of different small worlds, the authors applied Chatman's theories to social access of information, through which LIS professionals can use the concepts of normative behavior to understand differing values and norms and mediate between diverging social interests. Recently, Burnett and Jaeger (2008) have compared Habermas' macro-level concepts of lifeworlds with Chatman's micro-level concepts of small worlds and their combined potential for understanding information behavior in our "technology-advanced and interconnected information society." They have argued that small worlds and lifeworlds are complementary tools, which hold particular significance in understanding information behavior in our information society, where the Internet may influence not only how small worlds organize, communicate, and interact with other small worlds, but also how lifeworlds function.

The importance of information in genealogy means that information sharing among participants is not only a social, enjoyable activity, but also a serious activity, in which the actual sharing of information is emphasized, as well as the quality of the information shared. Community members may be categorized by members according to perceived usefulness and helpfulness of the information they share and select for further interactions based on this categorization. In addition, information sharing may extend beyond one's immediate social, familial, or genealogical circles to the broader genealogical community and other areas of one's life.

RECIPROCAL INFORMATION BEHAVIOR

Reciprocal altruism refers to sharing information with the expectation of information being shared in return. Dohmen, Falk, Huffman, and Sunde (2006) have defined reciprocity as "an in-kind response to friendly or hos-

tile acts.” They have further distinguished between *positive reciprocity*, or the rewarding of kind actions, and *negative reciprocity*, the punishing or sanctioning of unkind actions. An anticipated reciprocation of information is not necessarily immediate; however, should the recipient of information not provide information in return at some point, then the original sharer may decide to withdraw further support. In addition to concepts of *kin altruism*, or familial sharing, and *reciprocal altruism*, Gintis, Bowles, Boyd, and Fehr (2003) have identified a third form of sharing, *strong reciprocity*, which is a “predisposition to cooperate with others and to punish those who violate the norms of cooperation, at personal cost, even when it is implausible to expect that these costs will be repaid either by others or at a later date.”

Dohmen, Falk, Huffman, and Sunde (2006) found that positive and negative reciprocity are behaviorally different. They described people as positively reciprocal, negatively reciprocal, or both, with each determined by different factors. They also found that gender plays a significant role in reciprocity: women tend to be more positively reciprocal, and men more negatively reciprocal. In addition, they found that age influences reciprocity, with older adults more likely than younger people to reward kind behavior, and less likely to punish unkind behavior. As people age, they become more positively reciprocal, possibly reflecting an accumulation of experiences, acceptable social behaviors, or biological changes. Overall, Dohmen, Falk, Huffman, and Sunde (2006) concluded that positive reciprocity promotes networks of friendships and leads to greater happiness and life satisfaction, while negative reciprocity is associated with lower levels of happiness.

LEISURE, AMATEUR GENEALOGY, AND INFORMATION BEHAVIOR

Leisure is a diverse area, which individuals may define in different ways. For instance, although some researchers connect leisure with a type of time, others have expanded on this concept to define leisure as more of a kind of experience (Roberts, 1997). Stebbins (1996, 1997), internationally known for his long-term research interest in all aspects of leisure, has defined leisure as non-work time and activity, which may further be categorized as “casual,” “serious,” and “project-based” leisure. Stebbins (2007), basing his analysis on his own research, as well as collaborative work with others, further identified and conceptualized the various facets of leisure under a theoretical framework he calls The Serious Leisure Perspective. Within this framework, individual forms of leisure are defined. For example, casual leisure is “immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it” (Stebbins, 1997). Serious leisure refers to amateur or voluntary activity, in which the hobby forms a central life interest, with participants

actively acquiring and expressing special skills, knowledge, and experience (Stebbins 1996, 1997). Gillespie, Leffler, and Lerner (2002) have simply referred to serious leisure as "both fun and not-fun," since participants in a given hobby may or may not derive satisfying identities from the experience and since the hobby may invoke clashes with the "real world" and generate politics within the world of the hobby. Finally, project-based leisure refers to leisure that is neither serious, nor casual, but more occasional leisure, such as holidays, sporting events, or festivals, which involve creativity, planning, skills, and effort (Stebbins, 1996, 1997).

Amateur genealogy represents a form of serious leisure, as a hobby in which individuals may pursue their ancestry or family history with some degree of determination and enthusiasm for a hobby. The hobby is often popular among adults who have retired or whose time is less constrained by childcare and the early years of career building. In genealogy, participants may bring certain information skills to their hobby, but equally they may develop further information skills as they require them to navigate the wide array of information sources and institutions they encounter, as well as technologies facilitating access to genealogy-related information. For instance, just as the Internet has become more popular as a source for hobbyists generally, it is also prominent in genealogists' research (e.g., Drake, 2001; Griffith and Fox, 2007; Madden, 2003). As a result, information skills development is central to the hobby and learning is part of information behavior in this context. Receiving information is particular to this process, and reciprocating may facilitate others in their research.

Various researchers have begun to explore the information behavior of genealogists. Duff and Johnson (2003) reported that archivists paid little attention to this group until the 1990s, although genealogists formed a major user group in archives. As Yakel (2004) has observed, previous research in archival and LIS literatures has approached genealogy from a managerial perspective, rather than information needs. Instead, Yakel (2004) asserted that family history is more appropriately viewed as a continuous process of seeking meaning.

Duff and Johnson (2003) defined three stages in genealogical research: first, collecting names of family members; second, gathering information about family members; and third, discovering the society in which one's family lived. Butterworth (2006) explained that family history often transforms into local history research, "as researchers exhaust their interest in 'data collecting' of births, deaths and marriages, and turn instead to researching the social conditions that their ancestors lived under." In the course of research, genealogists gather the names of relatives, place names and dates of life events, locating these details by becoming records experts. Genealogists also network with one another, sharing knowledge about records and approaches to research (Duff and Johnson, 2003). Yakel (2004) has further explained that genealogists develop these strong

networks, because they view their family research as an ongoing process and strong social networks support ongoing information needs.

METHOD

Networking for Leisure (Fulton, 2004) is an ongoing research initiative, which explores information behavior in everyday contexts, specifically, the relationship between information behavior and leisure. This article reports on one aspect of this research: the sharing information behavior of one particular group of leisure participants: amateur genealogists researching their Irish ancestry and their information activities in support of a leisure pursuit. Investigating information sharing behavior may facilitate understanding the motivations of older adults to explore their information environments and the impact of sharing on their social networking. To this end, this article asks what role does information sharing, and, in particular, reciprocal information sharing, play in the hobby of genealogy?

The umbrella initiative for Networking for Leisure employs a variety of methodological approaches and data collection techniques to explore the relationship between information behavior and leisure. The part of the study discussed in this article involved a multi-case study approach to obtain detailed data about the information world of the amateur genealogist. Semi-structured interviews permitted the construction of a picture of each participant's experience with the information seeking process and the ways in which they incorporate this activity into their leisure. In addition, amateur genealogists participated in a private online discussion group, where they could express their current search problems and locate and connect with others working on similar information problems.

PARTICIPANTS

A total of twenty-four amateur genealogists from the Networking for Leisure Project: Phase 1 participated in semi-structured telephone interviews. This number falls within the guidelines suggested by qualitative research experts (e.g., Miles and Huberman, 1994; Sandelowski, 1995). Responding to study advertisements (e.g., Cindi's List), participants took part in a short, online questionnaire, which provided background information about the participant's genealogical interests and invited them to participate in a telephone interview, lasting approximately thirty minutes on average. Telephone interviews facilitated access to participants who lived in areas distant from the study base in Dublin. Interview data were audio-recorded to preserve the interview and then transcribed and analyzed qualitatively to understand each person's engagement in genealogical inquiry and the genealogical community.

Interviewees originated in regions generally considered to be part of the Irish Diaspora, including mass migration destinations of Australia (4

percent), New Zealand (13 percent), Canada (17 percent), Mexico (4 percent), and the United Kingdom (8 percent), with just over half of interviewees coming from the United States (54 percent). All participants were looking for one or more Irish ancestors, with 88 percent of participants searching for Irish ancestors in both their maternal and paternal lines. Approximately 80 percent of interviewees were working alone, and the remainder worked in conjunction with a partner or other relative.

Three-quarters of participants were married; the remaining 25 percent were single or divorced. While one-quarter of participants reported an education level of secondary school or elementary school, the majority of participants had achieved a college or university education. About 21 percent of all interviewees had completed further postgraduate degrees. The majority of participants reported that they felt comfortable with performing genealogical research tasks.

All interview participants were aged above fifty: 29 percent were in their fifties, 46 percent in their sixties, 21 percent in their seventies, and 4 percent in their nineties. Participants were split between employed and non-employed persons. Forty-two percent of participants were employed full time and another 8 percent were employed part time; 50 percent of participants were retired, as is often the case in amateur genealogy.

Occupations varied, with participants holding or formerly holding positions in the private and public sector. All participants held or had retired from positions in fields, such as education, computer science, health services, and banking. Participants ranged in income, with lower end incomes often reflecting retirement or part-time incomes. About 21 percent had an income of less than 20,000 euro per annum. Fifty percent earned between 20,000 and 39,000 euro per annum. Four percent earned 40,000 to 49,000 euro per annum. The remaining 25 percent of participants earned more than 50,000 euro per annum.

The profile of participants in this study bears similarity to that of amateur genealogists in general. Participants were most often of an age when childcare responsibilities were no longer a pressing concern and when they might be retired or in the later stages of a career. In addition to having the necessary time to devote to a hobby, the participants were often well-educated. While income facilitated participation in areas of the hobby requiring financial investment in obtaining information, participants also generally reported valuing acquisition of information for which there was no charge.

FINDINGS

Analysis of interview and discussion list data revealed a picture of information sharing that strengthened bonds between individuals and within familial and genealogical groups. Sharing, particularly reciprocal sharing, reinforced learning and shared learning. The importance of sharing

information underlies community building within the hobby, with *super sharers* initiating information dissemination to a range of related and unrelated genealogists searching for their ancestors.

INFORMATION ACQUIRING

Amateur genealogists in this study were strategic in their approach to locating information, quickly identifying and pursuing potential sources of information. To this end, they were well-versed in using libraries, as well as government institutions, family records centers, historical societies, and genealogical associations. In addition, using multiple and varied sources of information increased chances of finding information.

As a result, amateur genealogists were avid learners who treated learning as part of the genealogical process, particularly with regard to advancing their understanding of records and information systems supporting access to information.

As is common in the hobby, participants placed special value on the Internet as a source of information. As one participant reported, the Internet was a favorite source for its convenience:

Well I have to say, I'm, I'm falling in love with the Internet. [Laughter] There's more and more available, and it's just so easy to sit at home and do it from here. I guess that's my favourite now . . . It's certainly convenient. If you go downtown [town name] to the library, that's probably my second favourite. You have to park and pay for parking, and it's open only certain hours.

In this study, 92 percent of participants reported that they used the Internet regularly in their genealogical research.

The Internet satisfied several aspects of participants' information searching, in spite of questions of reliability of information found there:

Well, [the Internet is] not [laughter] reliable, but it is—hints, ideas and places to look. Probably the biggest value is being on a mail list. Survey mail list, or a location's mail list, and you find other people who are also interested in researching their family. I know not to accept the information on the Internet as Gospel.

Scanning and posting information to mailing and discussion lists enabled amateur genealogists to cast a wide net for information, and they frequently invested a great deal of their research time in this type of activity. Participants typically reported that this approach was effective in finding other genealogists who might be related and searching for the same information. As one participant summed up, the Internet facilitated communication:

I think it's very interesting, because it's relatively new, the use of the Internet. I mean, that is amazing . . . how that has grown. And just how the mailing lists, you know, everyone is chatting. And, you know, out of

that, things like chat rooms which are for genealogy only, and the rest of it. And, of course, that then, is not, hard research; that is just mostly social, frankly. And that is just an extraordinary development.

The Internet, then, offered communication, but also a social atmosphere.

In fostering social ties, the Internet served not only as a source of information for participants, but also as a medium for sharing information. When asked about information sharing generally, one participant cited the Internet as her first choice among methods of disseminating information, noting that she spent a great deal of time online communicating with other amateur genealogists: "I spend a lot of time on the Internet as part of the—you know, it's not actual research. It's just fun just contacting other people and helping them. . . . I'm continually communicating all sorts of information to them." In this case, the Internet functioned not only as a means of accessing people and information in support of the hobby, but also as a social support. Learning how to use this tool supported information seeking and building social connections. In this sense, Internet research was not work; rather it was, again, more of a social time:

I know how to find people. And, I knew how to find people before we got the Internet [laughter], but research has always been the fun part. So, since the Internet has come along, it's been the people, sometimes people [who have] been fabulous at telling you and helping you find records at various places, because I might not know [town name] or I might not know in [city name] where some of these records are—but people who are—I belong to several mailing lists, email lists, etc.

The potential for encountering unexpected information or relations increased the desirability of Internet searching. And encountering information and people encouraged sharing. For instance, one participant explained that he valued participating in a weekly discussion group, which facilitated information sharing among related individuals located in different parts of the world.

The Internet, then, offered a means of connecting with others that extended beyond one's immediate circle of contacts. Working strategically, some participants further used the Internet to draw people to them by setting up websites dedicated to their genealogical research, with the hope that other genealogists working on similar problems would find them and share information. Reaching out to this wider genealogical community was an important route to information and people for genealogists. Although family members figured prominently as an information source for the majority of amateur genealogists in this study, finding living relatives could be a challenge in a search. In addition, family might function as an important information source at the beginning of a genealogical inquiry, and then the amateur genealogist, considering the task of consulting a family source completed, might turn to other sources.

Finding like-minded family members strengthened information sharing and fostered ongoing sharing. For instance, one participant noted:

We enjoyed meeting him [cousin]; he's very nice, and we are still in contact every once in awhile. . . . He moved from one city to another and changed job, so he's not been very much involved lately. I have found one of those four brothers that came from Ireland . . . [so] I found him and wrote [to] him [about] what I found out about brother [X] eight or nine months ago. So we stay in contact when we find out.

Maintaining connections was an important feature of information sharing, even if the connection was a very distant relative or acquaintance. Participants believed in keeping up connections with others, just in case new information emerged in the future that might then be shared:

You have a nice little conversation with someone online and who knows! . . . And, and you find out, well, I won't search this line anymore, because I know it's a dead-end. But [I] still keep in contact with this person, because eventually they may have somebody else contacting them who is from your line, and they'll put them in touch with you.

This process further involved remembering the information searches of others. Telling others about particular information sought could result in a chaining of contacts leading to information sharing. While results might be immediate or take years, the promise of possible information encouraged participation.

SOCIAL NORMS IN INFORMATION SHARING

Amateur genealogists identified specific expectations of the genealogical community that shaped their information sharing. They valued the nature of the information shared, as well as the means of sharing that information. For example, amateur genealogists generally valued documented research, as opposed to an individual's weaving of a family history. Leads must be checked to see how or whether a claim could be substantiated, such as information provided through family stories or found via the Internet. Similarly, documented research was valued in information sharing. Receiving documented research from another genealogist increased reliability of and confidence in information shared. In addition, the sharer of the information was acknowledged as a credible source.

Sharing information was not only considered a positive social outcome to communication with another genealogist, but reciprocal information sharing was expected. As a result, one genealogist giving information to another genealogist hoped that person would return the favor then or at a future time. In addition, receiving information from a genealogist carried the anticipation that one would reciprocate to acknowledge and thank the information sharer for their assistance. Repeated acts of sharing depended upon reciprocity.

When amateur genealogy crossed over to a money generating activity, the degree of openness among participants had the potential to decrease. The participants in this study were all amateur genealogists engaged in leisure; however, they also differentiated between those who were paid for their research and those who freely shared information. As one genealogist explained, helpfulness was linked to freely shared information:

Generally, people are extremely open to help and there are—occasionally, you meet people who are also trying to make a living or make some pocket money out of it [genealogical research], and they become a little bit reluctant to pass on information or whatever, but that's exceptional. I mean, the majority of people are terribly open and I, myself, am trying to make some pocket money out of it but I don't believe that it's any help not being helpful.

Moving beyond serious leisure to paid work could change the nature of information sharing. However, amateur genealogists valued the free exchange of information in the hobby.

The strong association of sharing with helpfulness was common among participants. Sharing was perceived as a helping activity. Conversely, withholding information was viewed as unhelpful. The emphasis on sharing as a helping behavior was connected to the genealogists' sense of community. One participant summed up the situation:

[My favourite source] would have to be the [X] folk group, because that is exactly where my parents' family is from. So I get huge amounts of information from them; they are tremendously helpful. We're all in the same boat. You know, we all have our ancestors in this tiny little village, and so we kind of get all our information together, and they are tremendously helpful.

Helping one another was considered community participation, both within families and in the wider genealogical community. As a result, lack of reciprocity was problematic, leading to a disconnect between individuals and community values. Sharing was, therefore, expected, as a commonly considered act of "politeness" and familial togetherness, as well as part of appropriate hobby participation.

SUPER INFORMATION SHARERS

Sharing information encouraged deeper linking of individuals and networking of groups in genealogical endeavors and personal friendships. Information champions functioned as gatekeepers, taking leadership roles in responding to the queries of other genealogists and in initiating sharing among genealogists. In addition, super sharing existed in different forms and to differing degrees.

For instance, super sharing at a local level might involve a relative with shared interests, where the two individuals functioned as *the* genealogists in their immediate family circles. As one participant explained: "I think,

in every generation, there's just one or two people who will really pursue it and I happen to be the one in my generation. And so I'm always sending out the information to keep it distributed." The connecting of these key individuals with shared interests facilitated information sharing about particular families.

The recipient of information from a super sharer might also be an unconnected or unrelated individual. In this case, the super sharer might assist this person with such tasks as finding information or sources and learning to navigate information systems. The super sharer might act alone; for example, a participant in the discussion list for this study adopted the role of advice giver for all amateur genealogists taking part in the discussion. She reported that she spent 40 percent of her research time posting replies to others on the Internet. This participant noted that she had benefitted from the sharing behavior of another genealogist; in turn, she was continuing the sharing behavior, extending a helping hand to others: "Anybody I've been in contact with over, what, these three years—I always pass on all the information. You know, 'Have you tried this web site?'"

On the other hand, super sharers can also exist as and within groups of organized genealogists who help other genealogists with their research, from small, localized groups who invest themselves in a particular community (e.g., genealogy societies, heritage groups, local history groups), to groups who take on large projects and function as a group in the wider genealogical community (e.g., UK Free Births, Deaths, and Marriages project). Whether individual or group super sharers, they are motivated to take a lead in information dissemination because of their intense interest in the hobby and research activities. For some, the sharing function provides fulfillment beyond examining one's own family tree. For others, super sharing is an act of reciprocity that enables them to give back to the genealogical community that helped them.

Amateur genealogists valued the assistance provided by super sharers. As explained by one amateur genealogist, an information champion herself, super information sharers were important, and fulfilled an information provision function that extended beyond the information one's family might have to give or be able to access:

[Particularly helpful people sources include] I would say the moderators in these groups, the associations, the genealogical associations. I don't know the names but [X] who is particularly helpful. These are very clever people. They're also retired people. They're all retired. They were able to scan a lot of information and they really did send it to everybody. They do share all their information with anybody who's interested. They're very generous. Very generous. Family will give you, tell you all they know but they're not ready to go very much further.

Because they view genealogical research as an exciting and enjoyable challenge, super sharers are eager to find information and even extend a

search beyond the original question. Their enthusiastic sharing supported community and practice for their fellow amateur genealogists.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The majority of participants in this study were focused on information retrieval. That is, they directed their efforts at acquiring information in support of their Irish family research. To this end, they shared information to learn more about their ancestors and information tools supporting information retrieval. By learning how to use particular information systems, whether online or not, participants gained knowledge and expertise in the hobby, which they could then share with others. Participants were strong users of the Internet. High usage of the Internet in this study echoes the findings of such projects as the Pew study, *Older Americans and the Internet* (Fox, 2004), which found that older American adults dominate in using the Internet for genealogy with 36 percent of wired adults over age sixty-five researching their genealogy compared to 24 percent of all users of the Internet. In the current study, amateur genealogists emphasized instant access to information and people as the main advantage of the Internet, enabling sharing across large distances without necessarily meeting people in person.

The sharing among amateur genealogists in this study was focussed on locating information or advancing one's genealogical research. Shared information was both sought and encountered. In keeping with the analytical framework developed by Hersberger, Rioux and Cruitt (2005), amateur genealogists fulfilled all levels of community building, valuing their social networking, as also found in other studies of genealogists (e.g., Duff and Johnson, 2003, Yakel, 2004). In addition to social sharing to strengthen communal bonds, amateur genealogists, similar to Talja's (2002) academic information sharers, were strategic in their sharing as they targeted particular sources, such as online discussion lists, to make connections and provide information. Their shared belief in helping each other also relates to Talja's (2002) classification of directive sharing, with genealogists taking on teaching or guiding roles for other genealogists.

Individuals who assumed a position of information leader or champion illustrate the importance of particular roles within the wider genealogical community. As super sharers of information, they offered leadership in information sharing practices, recommending sources of information to others and providing research strategy advice. These super sharers found excitement in the thrill of the hunt for information, as opposed to the location of their ancestors alone. Their enthusiasm and their understanding of sources and the genealogical community have much to offer libraries and other institutions serving this group.

The social norms surrounding sharing information among amateur genealogists shaped their engagement with one another. Amateur gene-

alogists were adept at using information not only to satisfy their own research needs, but also to develop relationships with other genealogists. As well as remembering the needs of other genealogists and sharing encountered and acquired information with them, they anticipated that others would return the favor. The reciprocal means of communication among amateur genealogists offers insights into the ways adults, and particularly adults as they age, view information sharing in a leisure context. If gender and age can positively influence reciprocal behavior, as suggested by Dohmen, Huffman, and Sunde (2006), then it is possible that encouraging information sharing and exchange through leisure participation may assist positive aging. Understanding the importance of shared information and meaning has potential for increasing our understanding of personal and community development.

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