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Recent Posts

- Blog #8: Final Reflection
- Blog Post #7: Websleuths & Emerging Technologies
- Blog post #6: The human flesh search engine: NOT a search engine for cannibals
- Blog post #5: Learning and programming opportunities for websleuths are scant, but there is room for growth
- Blog post #4: A summary of What's the deal with websleuthing

Recent Comments

- Sarah Rainey on Blog #8: Final Reflection
- Sarah Rainey on Blog Post #7: Websleuths & Emerging Technologies
- Corrina on Blog #8: Final Reflection
- Mirtha Lopez on Blog #8: Final Reflection
- Corrina on Blog Post #2: Sleuthing Citizen Detectives, an Information Community

Blog post #5: Learning and programming opportunities for websleuths are scant, but there is room for growth

Edit

Posted on November 15, 2020 by Corrina

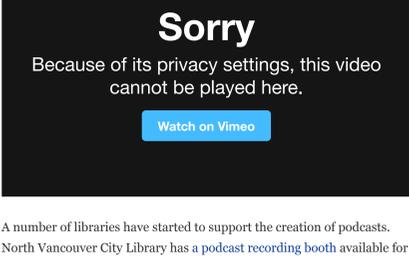
As I have come to find, research on websleuths' information behavior is fairly non-existent. The same is true of the learning and programming opportunities provided by libraries and information centers for this community. However, there are such services provided by libraries for other communities that could benefit websleuths. These services can also provide the programmatic groundwork for libraries to develop learning opportunities specific to websleuths and other serious leisure information communities. Moreover, if libraries approach their programming for such communities using the Serious Leisure Perspective (SLP) theoretical framework and use systematic, evidence-based resources (VanScoy et al., 2020), libraries can create more robust, relevant learning and programming opportunities for these communities.

The roles and services provided by librarians and libraries have undoubtedly changed from what they once were. Instead of approaching the reference librarian with your query, the reference librarian comes to you, works with you, and helps you by connecting you with a variety of resources (Kenney, 2015); and academic librarians no longer simply connect students with appropriate research sources to complete their assignments—rather they are integral in the development of course curriculum at the universities they serve and their students' academic career (Lippincott, 2015). Such changes highlight Stephens' assertion that "libraries of all kinds also serve as creative classrooms" that empower learners by employing "innovation management; learning by play/exploration/creation; emotional intelligence; meaningful activities; and networking with the real world" (2014). This shift means that libraries, especially public libraries, have become more focused on expanding their programming to meet their communities' needs. Public library programming has become "a cornerstone of contemporary library offerings, addressing a range of topics and themes, from local activism to small business strategies to personal health and growth" (VanScoy et al., 2020).

To this end, libraries have created a number of exciting programs and spaces that would be of interest to websleuths. Libraries are already a hub for genealogists (Kenney, 2015), but libraries have capitalized on this by offering workshops specifically for these communities. Fort Bend County Libraries in Richmond, Texas joined with the Genealogy Network of Texas in October 2019 to host a day-long Genealogy Lock-In to address contemporary topics of interest to genealogy buffs (n.d.). Looking over the program, all six of the days' offerings looked promising for websleuths, but of particular interest was their "Introduction to GEDmatch" program. GEDmatch is a third-party website that collects and compares autosomal DNA from different testing companies (e.g., 23andMe) and has been instrumental in solving some of the coldest cases, including identifying the Golden State Killer ("GEDmatch," 2020). In fact, some libraries, such as the Fresno County Public Library, host a monthly meeting for their local genealogical society focused on how to use GEDmatch for both genealogical and law enforcement purposes (n.d.).

Continuing in the forensic science vein, the Free Library of Philadelphia hosted a series of forensic workshops on fingerprints and fingerprinting. The workshop series, led by an associate professor of forensics at Rutgers-Camden University, covered the various types of fingerprints, how identifications are made, and how to dust and lift fingerprints (McLaughlin, n.d.). Forensic workshops like this, as well as others that center on DNA, are very beneficial for websleuthing activities, especially if they acknowledge the increasing fallibility of such forensic science techniques and how forensic scientists' preconceptions can affect results (Geddes, 2015).

Austin Public Library (n.d.) hosts a monthly true crime book club, and on their Vimeo channel's "True Crime Corner", three librarians discuss an article pertaining to the month's selection. While geared more towards the true crime enthusiast, this is a great format for websleuths as it connects them to the research behind the case as presented in the book. Moreover, such videos bridge the ever-important connection between community member and librarian in a digital medium and support the environmental factor of learning and the constructivist theoretical approach to learning (Booth, 2010).



A number of libraries have started to support the creation of podcasts. North Vancouver City Library has a podcast recording booth available for its patrons and provides a great LibGuide on how to start a podcast (n.d.); Charlotte Mecklenburg Library has podcasting kits available for their patrons to check out (2018). Podcasting is an emerging medium used by websleuths as evidenced by such podcasts as *Jensen and Holes: The Murder Squad*, *Missing Maura Murray*, *Up and Vanished*, and the Websleuths.com podcast. Supporting the production of podcasts is a valuable service for communities such as websleuths for whom podcasting is becoming a popular mode for sharing and publishing information.

Prior to 2020, library services were already changing. Now, libraries must not only explore new programming options, they have to pivot in how they deliver those experiences. As libraries and other agencies stop triaging from the pandemic-induced turmoil, they will find that they have developed some innovative ways in providing their services digitally. This mode of delivery is important for global virtual information communities like websleuths. If you couple this shift with the call for defunding the police and re-allocating some of their funding, a space opens up for a unique opportunity to serve law enforcement and the community by training and empowering websleuths to undertake some of the more time-consuming tasks faced by law enforcement.

To do this, libraries can audit their current programming utilizing the SLP lens, which will allow for strategic decision-making in adapting and growing their program offerings to ensure serious leisure communities are being equally served (VanScoy et al., 2020, p. 7). Moreover, they can see if their programming addresses the information activities of serious leisure communities: search and retrieve; browse; monitor; unfold; exchange; dress; instruct; and publish (Hektor, 2001). The programs and services outlined above do a good job of addressing most of these activities, but the addition of a well-curated LibGuide would be immensely helpful, especially in directing websleuths to reliable information sources. Additionally, librarians could work with law enforcement to create a set of guidelines for websleuths to follow. This would ensure that websleuths are obtaining information in a legitimate manner from legitimate sources and sharing that information with law enforcement through preferred channels. Hosts Jensen and Holes outline rules for their websleuths on each episode of their podcast: do not name names in public, do not dox each other, and be nice (2019-present). They also ask websleuths to either share information directly with them or with the law enforcement agency responsible for the case (Jensen & Holes, 2019-present). Their rules would be a good beginning framework for such guidelines.

As VanScoy et al. (2020) assert from their study of serious leisure programming in libraries, "public library programs unevenly represent across the serious leisure sub-type of hobbies" (p. 7). By developing programming for websleuths, libraries could not only address a gap in their offerings, but they could also create a framework for developing opportunities for other serious leisure information communities. This would, in turn, attract a more diverse set of serious leisure participants to their libraries (VanScoy et al. 2020, p. 7).

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This entry was posted in INFO 200, Information community, Uncategorized, websleuths and tagged library programming, serious leisure programming. Bookmark the permalink.

← Blog post #4: A summary of What's the deal with websleuthing | Blog post #6: The human flesh search engine: NOT a search engine for cannibals →

4 thoughts on "Blog post #5: Learning and programming opportunities for websleuths are scant, but there is room for growth"

 Monica Manning says:
November 18, 2020 at 4:24 pm (Edit)

Wow! There is so much potential for great programming for this community. There can be some big, real world impact there too when you consider, as you said, the call for defunding the police and re-allocating some of their funding. Very interesting post and commu-ally!

Reply

 Corrina says:
November 28, 2020 at 1:24 am (Edit)

Thank you, Monica! As I was thinking more about it, I think it would be good to involve people like the hosts of The Murder Squad—one is a retired detective and the other is a journalist. They could help navigate and develop such program as they already have experiencing interacting with websleuths AND law enforcements. But, yes, there is potential here for libraries!

Reply

 Sarah Rainey says:
November 23, 2020 at 5:42 pm (Edit)

Once again, the APL and the Free Library impress me with their innovative programming. Very informative blog post!

Reply

 Corrina says:
November 28, 2020 at 1:25 am (Edit)

I hope to one day visit the Philadelphia Free Library—it is such a cool place! And thank you for the tip about APL's True Crime Corner!

Reply

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- November 2020
- October 2020
- September 2020
- August 2020

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- INFO 200
- INFO 203
- Information community
- Introduction
- Uncategorized
- websleuths

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- Site Admin
- Log out
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- Comments feed
- WordPress.org