

iConference 2019 – Proposal for Session for Interaction & Engagement

Title: Family Matters: Studying Information Phenomena Within the Context of the Family

Organizers:

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Key Participants:

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Abstract: In this session for interaction and engagement, participants will engage in small- and large-group discussions focused on the unique opportunities and challenges that arise in family-focused information science research. Situating research within the context of the family can impact the ways in which information phenomena are understood theoretically, the methods that are used to investigate said phenomena, and the findings of such research. Approaching the study of information phenomena in this way can also present a unique set of challenges. These and other topics will be part of small-group discussions led by the key participants, all who have experience conducting research that engages with the concept of the family in some way. This session will conclude with a large-group discussion that will center on the ways in which information science can both enrich and be enriched by family-focused research.

Description:

Purpose and Intended Audience: This SIE centers on family-focused information science research, drawing attention to the ways in which conducting research in this context is useful in extending our understanding of theoretical concepts and methodological approaches within the field. Family-focused research can take many forms, including collecting data with multiple members of the same family, examining individuals' perspectives of the actions and influences of their family members, and/or conceptualizing a phenomenon of interest as being rooted within the family unit. Families in this context are broadly defined, and can be made up of both biological relationships (e.g., siblings) and non-biological relationships (e.g., spouses).

iConference 2019 – Proposal for Session for Interaction & Engagement

The goals for this SIE are:

- To generate discussions on the ways in which information science research can both enrich and be enriched by family-focused research;
- To begin to map out how familial relationships can impact and shape information phenomena;
- And to provide an opportunity for researchers interested in family-based research to meet, learn from each other, and facilitate opportunities for future collaboration.

The intended audience for this session include scholars and researchers who are currently engaged in or are interested in research with families, however defined, within the broad field of information science.

Proposed Activities:

Introduction (5 minutes)

This session will begin with a brief introduction of the key participants and the session's agenda.

Small-Group Introductions & Discussions (50 minutes)

Next, attendees will be invited to engage in small-group discussions focused on the unique considerations that conducting research within the context of the family may entail. Attendees will be divided into small groups and seated at tables with flip chart paper, post-it notes, and markers. Dependent on the number of attendees, each small group will be led by one or two key participants.

Attendees will be invited to briefly introduce themselves and describe their interest in attending the SIE (i.e. what type of family-focused research they are currently conducting or are interested in pursuing in the future).

Next, each small group will be asked to select one or two questions (below) to discuss in their groups, or to propose and discuss their own questions related to the topic at hand. In order to ensure participation by all attendees, attendees will be encouraged to write their answers to chosen discussion questions on post-it notes and affix them to the poster paper. This will allow for all ideas to be seen and made available for further discussion within the group.

Questions that will be used to guide small-group discussions include:

- How might the concept of “family” be defined in information science research?
- How can situating research within the context of the family influence a study's theoretical

iConference 2019 – Proposal for Session for Interaction & Engagement

framing?

- How can situating research within the context of the family influence the methodology used to investigate the research question(s)?
- How can situating research within the context of the family influence a study's findings?
- What unique challenges might arise specifically related to situating research within the context of the family?
- How is studying "the family" different from studying other groups of individuals, such as members of political organizations, clubs, employees, etc.? What similarities might be helpful across these types of groups?

Large-Group Discussion and Conclusion (35 minutes)

The SIE will then move into an interactive, collective development of priorities for information science research engaged with families. Through the development of these priorities, attendees will be encouraged to take up and engage with family-focused research within their own disciplinary domains. The priorities articulated during this discussion will later be published in an online forum, extending the conversation beyond the confines of the SIE to a broader audience. During this time, attendees will also have the opportunity to ask questions of the key participants.

Relevance to the Conference/Significance to the Field: Scholars taking up family-focused research have the ability to investigate a myriad of intersecting topics that inform information science research, practice, and phenomena, including the role of technologies, the impact of relationships and emotional ties on information practices, information mediaries (Abrahamson & Fisher, 2007), the role of information in maintaining health and wellbeing, all while having the ability to investigate these topics from an intersectional lens (Few-Demo, 2014), taking into account, for example, the impact of culture, geography, gender, race, and class on families' (or a specific family member's) information practices. With this diversity, this SIE enables participation from a broad spectrum of iSchool community members.

Previous research in related areas of study have demonstrated the power of examining phenomena of interest within the context of the family, including research concerned with digital media use (Gee, Takeuchi, & Wartella, 2018), computer programming (Banerjee et al., 2018), the impact of geography on information sharing in family networks (Mulder & Kalmijn, 2005), as well as families' information needs following a family member's chronic illness diagnosis (Rees & Bath, 2000; Hummelinck & Pollock, 2006). This SIE aims to draw information science research in from the periphery of family-focused research.

Studying information phenomena within the context of the family acknowledges that individuals do not live nor act within a vacuum, but that their actions, thoughts, and activities are influenced

iConference 2019 – Proposal for Session for Interaction & Engagement

by the complex (and sometimes complicated) relationships with the family members with whom they share much time and daily life experiences. A family-focused approach to understanding information practices, for example, allows for the relationship between information and care to be more holistically examined and understood (Barnes & Henwood, 2015; Barnes, Henwood, & Smith, 2016). Furthermore, examining the site of families' information practices is an important area for study as Harris (2009), for example, notes that information practices within the home “remain largely invisible and unarticulated” (p. 80). Lastly, the family also serves as an interesting site for studying information phenomena given that its shifting realities reflect changes in the social structure of family, attributed to detraditionalization and individualization (Duncan & Smith, 2006; Smart & Shipman, 2004) as well as changes in demographics and familial geographic displacement. As such, this SIE is of timely relevance for the iSchool community.

Duration: One 90-minute session

Special Requirements: Flip chart paper, post-it notes, markers; room set up with tables & chairs allowing for both small and large group discussions

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