

Researcher

Robert Douglas Ferguson
Doctoral Candidate
School of Information Studies
McGill University
Montreal, Quebec
robert.douglas.ferguson@mail.mcgill.ca

Background

Robert Douglas Ferguson is a doctoral candidate at McGill's School of Information Studies. His doctoral research explores personal health information management (PHIM) by patients and caregivers. He seeks new ways to leverage information technologies, and information behaviours more generally, to support patient-care provider interactions and ultimately improve the overall wellbeing of patients and caregivers. Technologies of interest include personal health records (PHRs) and social media (including social networking sites and blogs) as matrixes for patient-provider interactions, PHIM, and self-care behaviours.

Robert holds a master of art degree in Social Anthropology. His MA research investigated the adoption of PHRs by persons with mood disorders on the social networking site PatientsLikeMe.com. After 8 months of participant observation on the site, Robert produced an account of how site members adopted social networking, self-monitoring, and research participation into the care they receive from medical experts off-site, with particular attention to how individuals negotiate issues of identity, openness, and privacy of having their personal health information stored publically by a for-profit data-mining site.

As an applied anthropologist, Robert is also a collaborator on a GRAND NCE-funded project exploring the use of information communication technologies (ICTs) to support hospice patients and families at the end-of-life. His interest in the project is how ICTs support intergenerational interactions and the affirmation of life among terminal cancer patients. Robert is also a research assistant on a CIHR-funded project aimed at mapping the publication and collaboration relationships between experts in Aging and Chronic Health Conditions in the Quebec Region. The aim of this project is to create a new Networked Centre of Excellence (NCE) that supports new scientific discovery and collaboration by medical experts on Aging.

Goals for Participation

My goals for the PIM workshop is to work collaboratively towards cultivating a set of methodological best practices that support the further development of PIM as a field, with a particular concern for PHIM. Feedback received and best practices

developed collaboratively within the workshop with be directly incorporated into my doctoral research proposal and inform my upcoming investigation.

I am particularly interested in discussing the assumption that shortcomings in PIM require technological solutions rather than behavioural interventions at the level of the individual or more close investigations of the social and organizational contexts in which PIM occurs and is meant to support. That is, I am interested in further discussing the relationship between in PIM by the self versus collective PIM as a part of group work that may or may not include technology as a mediating actor (Latour, 2005). This bridges multiple senses of PIM, such as the information we own/produce, information directed towards us, and information we share with others, in a holistic fashion.

Proposed Exercise

Within the field of anthropology, self-reflexivity by the researcher on their own assumptions, motivations, and practices is part of working towards a situated or soft objectivity (Haraway, 1991). Rather than using highly controlled research designs to eliminate the potential influences or effects of the investigator on the knowledge they produce, an alternative strategy is to account for these influences and effects by granting them an equal opportunity for exploration. Thus, if I could propose an exercise for the workshop that could lead to a best practice for investigations of PIM overall, I would propose a self-reflexive task of exploring our own PIM strategies and preferences using the PIM tools we bring to the workshop. By exploring and sharing as a group, it is my hope that we can observe the diversity and overlap in PIM strategies among the participants and help each other identify potential biases and strengths from our own PIM behaviours that can better inform future research. The goal of this exercise would be to highlight how a set of best practices does not necessarily entail a single dogmatic approach to PIM research.

Steps in Workshop

The proposed exercise could take place as part of the personal introductions portion of the workshop, where individuals introduce not only their research interests but also their PIM. It could also used as a take-home message activity in which to encourage reflection upon what was discussed in the workshop and how these best practices can be applied to our own practices as well as research.

Potential Impact of the Work

The potential impact of this exercise is a better understanding of PIM in our own lives as well as in our research. It will allow us, as researchers, to explore other modes of objectivity and engage in knowledge-translation across disciplines. There is the potential for serendipitous discovery that can lead to unanticipated novel

approaches to research as well as an affirmation of the skills and experiences each of us brings to the workshop in support of our colleagues.

Resources Required

No additional resources would be needed. Part of the exercise will be “real life... making due with what you have” that is a core of PIM itself. Potential materials that participants can be used to reflect on one’s own PIM could be their notebooks, laptop hard drive, cellphones, inboxes, purse contents, etc.

Attending Authors

As an individual and junior participant, I am highly in support of being assigned to an existing group at the workshop. As a resident of Montreal, I can confirm my presence should I be accepted. Thank you for considering my proposal.

Works Cited

Haraway, D. J. (1991). *Simians, cyborgs, and women: The reinvention of nature*. New York: Routledge.

Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.