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Project proposal

In order to come up with a metric for engagement, I am going to start with the hypothesis: Engagement begets engagement. While this statement can be defined many ways, the definition that I am considering is that upon completion of involvement with a deeply engaging experience, the resultant thoughts, ideas, continuations, and further experiences will also be deeply engaging onto themselves. These new thoughts and experiences can potentially, in turn, generate further engaging experiences and start a chain of engagement that could continue until acted upon by an external force such as running out of time, hitting the bounds of physical ability, or running out of resources. The chain of engaging experiences could also end due to subsequent experiences being slightly less engaging than the prior ones due to decreasing novelty or some other unknown reason.

The experiment proposed below may prove to invalidate the hypothesis, but by assuming that it is valid, we may be able to identify deeply engaging experiences by examining the resultant chain of events. Without another metric for measuring engagement (although perhaps a collaboration with another student in the class creating such a metric) it might be as difficult to examine the chain of events in a relevant way as it is to examine the original experience, however, by comparing multiple chains generated from different original experiences, it may be possible to get a relative sense for their engagement based on attributes of the chains such as duration and the breadth of experiences spanned by the entire process.

The experiment is based on the idea of communal campfire stories. These are the stories that are started by one person and passed around from person to person, each contributing to the narrative. The above hypothesis suggests that it will be easy to tell which of the stories were the most engaging by the willingness of the people to participate and the duration and quality of the resultant story. As the story gets more and more engaging, people want to contribute more and don't want it to end; in fact, if someone were to end it, it is often the case that another person negates the ending (boogeyman rises from the grave) and the story continues, refueled from this anti-climax.

For this experiment, I will create the beginnings of at least 6 stories each containing (or at least suggesting) some subset (or none) of the attributes of engagement that we have identified throughout the course. The stories will then be presented in a public forum (wiki, perhaps) with an invitation to contribute to the story. Participants will be required to read all of the stories before they can contribute to any of them to allow the comparisons to be valid. The end results will then be examined and compared, with respect to the percentage of viewers who chose each story, how much was contributed, the apparent quality of the contributions, how many attempts to end the story were made, and by possibly subjecting the entire story to any other metrics that the class may come up with. Time-stamping each contribution is also very important as it will illustrate if people tend to choose a particular story simply because it has had less contributions up until that point.

Through these observations, we can potentially prove or disprove the hypothesis that engagement begets engagement, confirm or deny certain attributes of deeply engaging experiences, and come up with a metric for comparing the depth of engagement of multiple experiences.