In the first paper Chatman elegantly addresses concepts such as dissemination theory, opinion leaders, motivation, alienation, gratification theory, social norms and (social) location and applies these as a theoretical framework to a specific case. However, she also show the limits of these concepts for certain types of information, and suggests a framework explaining why this is the case. The following papers in this section address further aspects of the use of theory: philosophical and theoretical choices to be made (Hjørland); the metaphors used in major theories (Savolainen); the different insights phenomenography provides as opposed to a cognitive view (Limberg); and the need for the empirical testing of available theories and models (Wilson).

Emphasis on context is another important aspect of this field. We find that a majority of the research papers tend to fall into a few major areas for empirical research: working life, education, and the private sphere. In this volume several papers address information seeking in working life with different approaches (Byström, Cole, Fulton, Hertzum, Mutch, Preston and Tibar). The role of differences in work task and experience, as well as topical domain and context, are shown by different methods to interact in these studies. Implications for system design as well as for future research add further value to these studies.

In arranging the contributions we have made a distinction between information seeking and information searching, indicating the difference between the more general studies of information (seeking) behaviour and the more specific studies of the actual search (or search outcome) in interactive information systems. The three papers in this category use different methods and research approaches, revealing clear links between context, search and the evaluation of search results (Anderson, Erdelez, and Fidel).

Together these studies provide a rich source of information illustrating the growing variety of approaches to the field, while at the same time keeping the interaction between people, information systems and contexts in focus. New groups are being added to the field which challenge existing theories and stimulate theoretical development, and of which the second volume of *The New Review of Information Behaviour Research* will also provide enlightening examples.

Lars Höglund and Tom Wilson

Framing social life in theory and research

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Ordinary people experience information in response to everyday needs and concerns. Ways in which this type of information is viewed depend upon the context in which it is found. Using a variety of theoretical approaches, Chatman explores information behaviour from a number of small world perspectives. Findings indicate the rich potential that theory brings to empirical inquiries. Her conclusion is that the interplay between theory and methodological issues provides a robust area for studies of information behavior.

FRAMING SOCIAL LIFE IN THEORY AND RESEARCH

should like to begin this keynote address by placing my topic, Framing Social Life in Theory and Research, within the context of our conference theme. More specifically, that part of our theme that addresses the "theoretical and methodological issues." In this light, I want to share with you a series of studies that I have conducted that speak to theory and empirical research.

First let me explain my use of the concept small world. As many of you know, I have used this term to describe a world in which everyday happenings occur with some degree of predictability. Even more importantly, the small world concept allows for the presence of the 'legitimized others.' By this I mean people who share physical and/or conceptual space within a common landscape of cultural meaning. Within the contextual understanding of information behaviours, the legitimized others place narrow boundaries around the possibilities of these behaviours. In other words, legitimized others shape, change, or modify the information that enters a small world in light of a world-view. In this instance a world-view is that collective sense that one has a reasonable hold on everyday reality.

Before moving into the heart of my presentation, namely my use of theory to explore information in everyday use, I should mention that 'small world' as concept was not my original idea. As many of you know, it has a long history and many theorists such as Schutz and Luckmann (1), Kochen (2), and Wilson (3) have addressed it. Having said that, small world has become a central theme in my own research.



THEORY, RESEARCH AND EVERYDAY INFORMATION

I began my inquiries several years ago by wanting to discover: what constitutes a poverty life style? On the surface this is a simple, almost elementary question. However, its answer has driven me to several conceptual frameworks and even the creation of several of my own.

During the course of my research, four critical concepts appear to linger. They are deception, the element of risk-taking, secrecy, and situational relevance. Let me share with you how these concepts have led to the necessity of employing a number of conceptual frameworks in order to provide reference to everyday information. The CETA study was primarily guided by propositions developed in diffusion theory. This was a theory that many of you know came from anthropology and rural sociology. It was intended to look at the diffusion of a physical item, such as corn. I wanted to apply it to information, serving as the basis for my dissertation research, 'The Diffusion of Information Among the Working Poor' (4). I discovered that, with modification, I could make a case that diffusion theory almost works within a study of information. However, I found a number of instances in which diffusion theory could not be applied. For example, the theory allows for the presence of opinion leaders - those members of one's social milieu who gathered and shared the new 'innovation.' Although I discovered them in my study of women who were single heads of households, they were not sharing much information. Moreover, they were not sharing any information pertaining to a possible job lead. This was a major anomaly which actually led to a better understanding of ordinary information. This was the type of information that I was examining. That is, some information is not meant, rather cannot sustain a long chain of information sharing. This type of information loses relevance and value the longer it is diffused. Job information fits this model. The longer news about a job remains on the social network the less attractive it becomes. This finding provided better insight about the role that theory plays in empirical research, and a clearer sense of everyday information.

I began my study of the janitors because they were convenient and because they appeared to be a stable population. In other words, they had been at the university where I was employed for a number of years. Thus, I figured that the fierce competition for jobs would not be a deterrent in information sharing. My assumption was that I could have a better sense of how commonplace information comes into a small world and is shared among its members. Since I had identified competition as a factor in the lack of information-sharing in my first project, I needed a conceptual framework that would shed light on what influences were hindering that information sharing.

This search led me to alienation theory with its emphasis on secrecy and self-protection. My findings revealed that janitors were not assisting each other to cope with problematic situations because they perceived themselves to be isolated from each other and disconnected with their world around them. They believed that, if their supervisors or even neighbours or friends knew some problems that they were having, they would take advantage of them by using this information against them. As I began to observe and take notes, I noticed that the janitors spent little time communicating with each other. Over time, I also discovered that they were suspicious of each other and felt that no one but one's closest friend or relative could be trusted.

Perhaps the clearest use of this conceptual framework was Seeman's work on alienation (5). Once I had some causal understanding of why janitors who worked together for a number of years were suspicious, isolated, and estranged from each other, their small world made sense. What this provided was a rationale to explain what influences information behavior in this case, factors that acted as barriers to information.

So, if they lived in a world in which they perceived that it was not possible for them to solve their problems by themselves, what sorts of things motivated them to seek ways in which they could cope with their everyday reality? By now, it became obvious that alienation theory had limitations. The problem with alienation theory was again, no provision for information as a critical element in one's sense of isolation.

A research question that led me to gratification theory was simply: what effect, if any, does the institution in which one works serve as a source of information? In the case of the janitors I found that this institution, the university, had none to a minimal effect. When talking to the respondents, I discovered several reasons for this phenomenon. They felt the university was something that they could not afford to invest in. The type and kind of information conveyed by the professors and students were irrelevant to them. And, they had an enormous sense that life events were controlled more by luck than anything else.

For example, because the janitors believed so strongly in luck, they believed 'what happens, happens.' Or, to put it another way, what is the purpose of trying to improve my situation, if in the end it's all been solved by fate? It was not to their advantage to engage in expending needed resources such as personal energy, financial resources, or even optimistic dreams, if in the end, their lives were sealed by fate. In this case, even potentially helpful sources were *irrelevant* to them because these sources

really had no meaning. In sum, the results from the janitorial inquiry were that information behaviour encompasses not only information seeking but also information avoidance, and disinterest.

The third study was an examination of ageing women using social network theory. I knew about social network theory from my search in the literature for previous studies dealing with issues similar to those I was exploring. Social network theory seemed particularly attractive because of its emphasis on sharing within a support system of similar others. I also figured that I could not go wrong with a homogeneous population of southern white women who had many life events in common. For instance, they were widows, lived in what I initially perceived was a voluntary age-segregated environment, had a middle-class income, and shared a similar religious faith, namely, Baptist.

There were many reasons why social network theory failed to shed light on the information world of my respondents. I discuss them quite extensively in my book, *The Information World of Aging Women* (6), and will not take time to examine them here.

The important point, though, is that it was this study that put closure to my initial question regarding information poverty. It was this theory that produced my first critical anomaly regarding information and public behaviours. Simply put, the anomaly challenged a central proposition of the theory: that networks exist to facilitate resource exchange. This was also the beginning of my own attempts at theory construction. To date, I have created three theories to explain information behaviours in their everyday contexts. Two have been published, the third is in press. Let me finish with a brief explanation of each.

A THEORY OF INFORMATION POVERTY

As I indicated earlier, the ageing study, with its seemingly homogeneous, insulated environment, revealed the strongest argument for deceptions' influence on information-seeking. In other words, respondents were not engaging in information-seeking or sharing behaviors because they wanted to give an appearance of normalcy. That is, they did not want to be viewed as somehow less capable than their neighbours in coping with life-stresses. Moreover, in some instances, their deception of well-being meant their ability to maintain some degree of independent lifestyle or face the real possibility of expulsion from their retirement community. The end result was that many of the residents were desperately in need of information or advice, but pretended that they were successfully coping without having it.

In the study of those women, I introduced the argument that the lack of relevant information which could have responded to their situation was not perceived to be available. In other instances, the data suggested that it might not have been due to sources being unavailable, but rather that the residents perceived a search for information to be too costly. Thus, they engaged in secrecy, in which they chose not to tell others who might be in a position to help them, and in self-protective behaviours in order to give an appearance of normalcy. What resulted was a social network devoid of the most critical kind of information.

A theory of information poverty explains ways in which people define their life experiences in order to survive in a world of extreme distrust. When concerns and problems present themselves and when information is recognized as potentially helpful but is ignored, individuals live in an impoverished information world. Determined to hold the seams of their life-world together, they engage in self-protective behaviours, which define the finite boundaries of a world of poverty.

Needless to say this theory indicates a situation in which people know that there is valuable, relevant and potentially useful information. However, either the information is seen as too costly to pursue, or the information seeker is motivated by a sense that in the end, why bother?

A THEORY OF LIFE IN THE ROUND

In leaving the ageing study, I became aware of two central concepts that needed further exploration. These were *social norms* and *self-protective behaviours*. What the women taught me was that many of their public behaviours were driven by social norms. That is, by what were considered 'proper' and appropriate social expressions.

The study also revealed the intensity of one's desire to appear normal or not to exhibit behaviours that would call undue attention to oneself. The end result was the careful shielding of one's true state from others. This phenomenon I have called self-protective behaviours.

Still curious as to how these concepts played out in social life, I decided to study women at a maximum-security prison. I chose this site for several reasons. I wanted a 'stable' environment and this prison was designed for 'lifers' and persons serving long-term sentences for major crimes. I also wanted to examine how the inmates recreated social norms that would help them survive in prison. In other words, what strategies did the women employ in order to recreate a new social world to replace the one they had left and, in fact, could not return to. For example, I remember a prisoner

who told me that when she came in here, her babies were three and seven. Now they are grown men. The value of the prison research was to allow for an examination of how such a world is created by exploring information sources that identify and sustain that which constitutes a 'normative' life in prison or what I called a 'Life in the Round.'

This view of the information world of prisoners brought me back to using a small world *conceptualization*. The reason for this is quite simple. The women had a number of life events in common, were experiencing common phenomena, and were playing out public lives within a social landscape of limited possibilities. To them, life in a small world is one in which activities are routine, predicable, and part of everyday occurrences. An element that binds this world together is social control. (For an interesting discussion regarding the role of social control in everyday life, see Berger's discussion pp.68-74 in *Invitation to Sociology*). The horizons of their world are being determined by *social norms*. The source of these norms is social control *par excellence*. For example, Berger (7) notes that a primary function of social norms is to tell 'an individual just what he/she may do and what he/she can expect of life.'

In this light, an important contribution that the concept of norms brings to the fabric of social life in prison is that the norms set initial (and in some cases, lasting) boundaries in which to play out one's life-world. I suspect social norms also finely shape experiences in which the women prisoners can be defined by these very limited horizons.

Another concept is social types. In prison they may be 'the brides,' the 'gaybirds,' 'the hood,' lifers. How you are classified determines both your access to information and your ability to use it. In the roundness of prison life, the type articulates the norms that govern for one's public behavior.

A third concept that is emerging in this study is world-view. I discovered world-view within a social setting in Cressey's 1932 study of the Taxi-Dance Hall in Chicago (8). Cressey introduced the notion of a world-view as a lived experience in which one played out one's experience in its 'total round.' The author used the taxi-dance hall as the context in which to examine a world that began as one entered the hall and ended at the conclusion of the evening. (A taxi-dance hall was a place where men bought tokens in order to dance with single, attractive women). Another concept linked with a world-view is *location*. In short, *location* alerts its members to items of concern in which everyday things require significant concentration or not. What is most significant, of course, are those things

deemed by 'central insiders' as worthy of note. Of course, every member holds a private world-view, however, from a social researcher's perspective, it is simply not enough. It is the collective view that leads to understanding the workings of a small world.

LIVING LIFE IN THE ROUND

What do I mean by living life in the round? For my purposes, life in the round is one with an enormous degree of imprecision but surprisingly, accepted levels of uncertainty. It is a world of approximation. It is a life lived with a tolerable level of inexactitude. This life - for most of the prisoners - is not exact, but it is close enough in order to survive. The very routine of their lives help to solidify a roundness of life and fits one of the reasons for this phenomenon: the provision of some measure of security. Most prisoners do not question this dimension as long as they sense that most events occurring can be taken for granted, and that they can approach their daily activities, moving along a life in a routine, predictable way. In a sense, a life in the round is also a way to ensure self-protective behaviours.

Having provided this brief background, I should like to examine the six propositional statements that constitute the theory.

PROPOSITIONAL STATEMENTS

Proposition 1

A small world conceptualization is essential to a life in the round because it establishes legitimized others (primarily 'insiders') within that world who set boundaries on behaviour.

Proposition 2

Social norms force private behaviour to undergo public scrutiny. It is this public arena that deems behaviour - including information-seeking behaviour - appropriate or not.

Proposition 3

The result of establishing appropriate behaviour is the creation of a world-view. This world-view includes language, values, meaning, symbols, and a context that holds the world-view within temporal boundaries.

Proposition 4

For most of us, a world-view is played out as life in the round. Fundamentally, this is a life taken for granted. It works most of the time with enough predictability that, unless a critical problem arises, there is no point in seeking information.

Proposition 5

Members who live in the round will not cross the boundaries of their world to seek information.

Proposition 6

Individuals will cross information boundaries only to the extent that the following conditions are met: (1) the information is perceived as critical, (2) there is a collective expectation that the information is relevant, and (3) a perception exists that the life lived in the round is no longer functioning.

Before leaving my Theory of Life in the Round, I think it is appropriate to look a bit closer at the claims I have made regarding information behaviour. My argument is that life in the round will, for everyday purposes, have a negative effect on information seeking. As I have indicated throughout this paper, there is a simple reason for this. People will not search for information if there is no need to do so. If members of a social world choose to ignore information, it is because their world is working without it. I should also say, however, that I am speaking of a particular type of information, one that is intended to respond to the needs of individuals within a specific social context. That is, the information sought to respond to problematic needs is a different type of information from that which is intended for everyday casual use.

THEORY OF NORMATIVE BEHAVIOUR

I created a Theory of Normative Behaviour to explain the common or routine events that characterize the everyday reality of people who share a similar cultural space. The small world of their lives lacks sweeping surprises. One conducts the business of living in such an uneventful way that few aspects are worth important discussion. Most occurrences in this world are predictable. Much of the information that holds this world together is appropriate, legitimate, and has a rightful place in the general scheme of things. Even the activity of information seeking can be viewed as normative. That is, one looks at the world with some degree of interest.

Most of the information produced from the large world has little lasting value. One might, for instance, make use of some tidbit for casual conversation with a neighbor or friend. The purpose might simply be to measure the overall soundness of the world 'out there.' If this is the case, how, then, do we examine those things most absorbing to members of a small world? One way to approach this question is to look at information within its contextual meaning, then to shape that meaning into that which constitutes public expressions of the information. For example, if others

view these expressions as normal or reasonable they can be said to be appropriate behaviours in that particular context (9).

There are four concepts, which constitute the *Theory of Normative Behaviour*. These are *social norms*, *worldview*, *social types*, *and information behaviour*. Essentially, *social norms* allow for standards to dictate 'rightness' and 'wrongness' in social appearances. For example, Schutz and Luckmann (1) observe the following interrelation between social norms and a person's decision to search for information: '[My] Lifeworld is not my private world, but rather, is intersubjective; the fundamental structure of its reality is that others share it.' The purpose of *social norms* is to give persons a sense of balance—a way to gauge what is 'normal' in this context at this time. Social norms point the way to acceptable standards and codes of behaviour.

An additional support for this concept, Douglas (10) views this codified system as the means by which to examine the relevance of social meaning. In his book, *Understanding Everyday Life*, he suggests that social norms are the 'stuff of everyday life.' In my theory, *Life in the Round*, I also indicate that social norms play a prominent role in holding a small world together. Although done through an element of control, it allows members of a small world to have a sense of order and balance. Even though the boundaries of that world are set by social norms, most members feel disinclined to cross them.

Worldview is a collective perception members of a social world hold in common regarding those things which are important and things deemed trivial or unimportant. The value of having a worldview is that it gives a collective approach to the importance of things. That is, not all things have the same value as they enter a person's awareness. It is the learning of perception in concert with others that alerts members to be conscious of those things that they ought to know.

In a significant yet highly readable monograph regarding the world of winos, Anderson's (11) observations reveal how the contextual use of information allows for the creating of a world-view. The setting for his research was Jelly's bar, a place where urban, poor, black men went to drink and socialize. What is important about this study is the finding that the men had a *collective sense* that the world outside of Jelly's had little regard for them. As a result, they approached the world outside as not very critical to their life world.

In an engaging and vivid look at everyday life, Goffman (12) suggests that a world-view allows members to have a sense of belonging, thereby giving

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them a communal approach to events and activities that occur in their social milieu. Related to this notion, Bould's (13) research with female domestic workers also found that, although the women worked in a variety of environments, their view of the world was very similar. Her respondents disclosed that they had a minimal expectation that the larger world contained resources that could benefit them. Having said this, I would simply add that what seems indicative of world-view is that it shapes, changes, and modifies an individual's perception about the world, to correspond to what other members perceive about that world.

Social types are the absolute definition given to members of a social world. It pertains to a classification of a person or persons. In the process of creating typological distinctions, members of a small world have sensible clues to the ways in which to behave, converse, and share information.

I first came across the concept of social types from reading Weber's 'Ideal Types' (14). As argued, Weber states that: 'we have already taken it for granted that once the sociologist constructs type-concepts, and seeks to formulate a general statement about what happens....The sociologist in forming his concepts, for the most part (though not by any means exclusively) finds the material which serves him as a paradigm in those same real human actions...'

Finally, Pendleton and Chatman (9) extended the concept of social type to include a commonsense system in which to create a typology of persons based on predictable behaviours. In turn, these behaviours give that person a certain signature, which defines what role that person plays in his social world. For example, one can be a social type called 'student,' 'parent,' 'liar,' and so forth.

Information behaviour can be perceived as a state in which one may or may not act on the information received. It is impossible to understand the seeking process without first acknowledging one's behaviour with respect to information. Information behaviour as a concept has many flaws. However, it is the best way I know to explain why some members of a world will choose not to search for information. Moreover, this decision to avoid information may come at a time in which it is greatly needed by the person.

In a seminal article, Dervin (15) raised the issue of 'how can you predict information behaviours?' In her observation, she implies that to understand information behaviours, it is necessary to understand the situation that generated the need for information. Although I suspect she was not addressing information in the sense that is more currently used, her

introduction of the term in light of its contextual meaning is a significant contribution.

Another important theorist dealing with the concept of information behaviour is Wilson (3). In his thoughtful essay, 'Exploring models of information behavior: The 'Uncertainty' Project,' he creates a model that depicts the various ways to examine information behaviors in light of the information seeking paradigm. His conclusion, like my own, is that one needs to step back from an examination of the seeking process.

Having said that, what are the cases to support my observation? A person might perceive the information search process to be too costly. The information might be viewed as important, but one can get along without it. The information came from a social type that is unacceptable, thus the information is unacceptable.

The point of this discussion is to explore and examine why intelligent, reasonable persons do not start the search process or if they do start it, sometimes are willing to give it up.

THESIS STATEMENT

Normative behaviour is that behaviour which is viewed by inhabitants of a social world as most appropriate for that particular context. Essentially driven by mores and norms, normative behaviour provides a predictable, routine, and manageable approach to everyday reality. Aspects of interest are those things which serve to legitimize and justify values, which embody social existence.

CONCEPTS

Social norms World-view Social types Human information behaviour

PROPOSITION STATEMENTS

Proposition 1

Social norms are standards with which members of a social world comply in order to exhibit desirable expressions of public behaviour.

Proposition 2

Members choose compliance because it allows for a way by which to affirm what is normative for this context at this time.

Proposition 3

World-view is shaped by the normative values that influence how members think about the ways of the world. It is a collective, taken-for-granted attitude that sensitizes members to be responsive to certain events and to ignore others.

Proposition 4

Everyday reality contains a belief that members of a social world do retain attention or interest sufficient enough to influence behaviour. The process of placing persons in ideal categories of lesser or greater quality can be thought of as social typification.

Proposition 5

Human information behaviour is a construct in which to approach everyday reality and its effect on actions to gain or avoid the possession of information. The choice to decide the appropriate course of action is driven by what members' beliefs are necessary to support a normative way of life.

GEOPHAGY

Geophagy is the deliberate consumption of earth (16). The subject of dirteaters or geophagists is a little known issue in the research area of public health, medicine, and medical anthropology, or in studies of central concern to social science research. Needless to say, geophagy is not acknowledged or addressed in the field of information studies. However, I am convinced that understanding this craving for dirt or clay provides essential clues to such vital issues as secrecy, deception, information need, and barriers to information. I have chosen to place these issues pertaining to geophagy under the broad umbrella of normative behaviours because, for these respondents, their approach to or avoidance of information might be within their context of 'normal.'

There are several themes associated with geophagy discovered in the small body of literature grounding the current project. These themes are: 1) dietary habits are intertwined with environmental factors, 2) geophagy is associated with social and cultural factors, 3) the custom of eating dirt in the United States is associated primarily with rural African-American women, 4) geophagists believe the clay or dirt has medical properties, and 5) geophagists perceive that their habit needs concealment.

SETTING FOR THE RESEARCH

I call this community Shade-Tobacco County. It is located in the northeast

THE 'POOR THINGS'

For the young mother, then, eating dirt is 'normal,' and among themselves they do not feel that they are engaging in harmful behavior to their fetus. As well, young children are given dirt for stomachaches, diarrhea, or simply to share in their mother's craving. On the other hand, they are aware of being labeled as ignorant, backward, and being called the 'poor things' for engaging in a habit that many view as dirty, 'rural southern,' and associated with poor education. Consequently, these women try to conceal their clay-eating habits in order to appear 'normal' to the wider social world. What are some reasons given for their consumption of dirt? Reasons provided include: 'earth is good for you,' 'it helps pregnant women,' 'it tastes good,' 'it is sour like a lemon,' and 'it tastes better if smoked in the chimney.'

There are several methods employed to avoid detection. For instance, a respondent said, 'I'd do it out there at night. I go out and pick the dirt. They think I be out there picking cotton or something. When nobody is home, I'll be watching TV and I can take my time and joy it.' Another said that she 'keeps it under the dashboard of her glove compartment.' A young woman who understood the stigma associated with the practice remarked that she keeps it 'in a coffee can, that way I can hide it. I keeps it where nobody can see it. I keeps the can in a bag. I don't want nobody to ask. I don't want nobody to know. Some people...most people thinks it gross. I don't want my husband and kids to see me.'

The end result, of course, is that they are in need of advice and information regarding fetal and child rearing care but have chosen not to share information about their behaviours. For them, the disclosure of such information would also reveal that they are geophagists.

CONCLUSION

In essence, the purpose of this paper was to address both theoretical and methodological issues in an area in which little is known. It was also intended to examine the relationship between a person's need for certain types of information and its effect on their information behaviors. Findings also indicate that cultural and social norms do affect ways in which the people choose to respond, be passive, or ignore information.

In many respects what these statements imply is the need for information researchers to better understand the need for balance. That is, how do we balance information as a positive force in the lives of people against their desires to ignore it? In the past, we have pigeon-holed people into the users and non-users without a real understanding of how these terms have type-cast people with little regard to their view of information.

How the emergence of information behaviors as *construct* will assist us in this process remains an open question. Whatever the outcome to us as scholars and students of everyday information, the average citizen will continue to settle his or her problems in ways that speak to their way of life. Our challenge is to discover what issues are most critical to this way of life and in what areas research needs to be done to help facilitate it.

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