

**New Directions in Human Information Behavior** by Amanda Spink and Charles Cole (eds.). Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer, 2006. 254 pp. ISBN 978-1-4020-3667-5.

Information Behavior is expanding its boundaries beyond library doors, past the bits and bytes of computer databases, to include “information foraging,” “everyday life information seeking,” “information use,” “information seeking,” “information searching,” as well as the myriad of other ways people acquire and interact with information in their lives. This is the focus of *New Directions in Information Behavior*, which offers a variety of intriguing new approaches to the area of study currently labeled “Human Information Behavior” (HIB).

The monograph is a collection of unrelated papers, but editors Amanda Spink and Charles Cole have provided a cohesive organization plus introductory and closing chapters that allow for easy transitions from one subject to another and provide a clear overall picture. The contributing authors hail from around the world, and while most are from the field of Library and Information Science, many are specialists in other disciplines. They are predominantly established scholars with impressive credentials, and the few who are beginning their careers provide innovative and challenging viewpoints.

The papers rely heavily on previous Library and Information Science (LIS) studies, but the authors are uniform in describing HIB as a significant new direction. Their consensus is that, at present, HIB includes all forms of information seeking and use, including social networks, group dynamics, and non-linear activities that more accurately describe how people relate to information and vice-versa. It proposes an emphasis away from how end-users interact with information systems to an examination of how people actually acquire information, and how they use it. Traditionally, information seeking and information searching have been the main focus of LIS researchers, who have primarily concentrated on individual static processes in the library or database setting; HIB has definitely headed in a new direction.

After the Introduction, the first section of papers deals with the social aspects of HIB. In the first of these, “Emerging Evolutionary Approach to Human Information Behavior,” Spink and Currier offer a broad, historical perspective of information behavior utilizing human evolution as a framework. Next is “Information Behavior in Pre-literate Societies” in which Madden, Bryson, and Palimi examine non-textual information environments and show that the inherent tendencies of how people deal with knowledge acquisition, especially their reverence for written materials, have important implications for the digital age.

The importance of social groups in the acquisition and use of information is analyzed in several chapters. The authors propose that most information

processes are best explained and studied from a group context as opposed to examinations of the storage of information and its retrieval by individuals. In this vein, the exchange of information, and such cooperative processes as collaborative information behavior, and collaborative information seeking and retrieval, are explored in "Information Sharing," by Talja and Hansen. Similarly, in "Toward a Social Framework for Information Seeking," Hargittai and Hinnant propose research methodologies that incorporate social factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, income, and social support networks.

New ways of studying individualistic information seeking and processing are also discussed. In the chapter entitled "Multitasking and Co-ordinating Framework for Human Information Behavior," the authors describe information seeking as a complex, holistic process in which searchers have to coordinate a diverse set of techniques to locate and process information. Along the same line, Allen Foster challenges the conventional model of database searching, proposing an alternative that describes a dynamic, complex interweaving of information-related processes in "A Non-linear Perspective on Information Seeking." This new model helps explain the often shifting measures of relevance that searchers describe as they examine retrieved documents.

In looking at HIB and its immediate applicability to libraries and information professionals, "Information Grounds: Theoretical Basis and Empirical Findings on Information Flow in Social Settings" demonstrates the importance of the setting or location in promoting information acquisition and exchange. Here Fisher and Naumer present data from previous studies (some by the authors themselves) that indicate a variety of environmental factors that invite information activities. In the present changeover from print to digital information sources, libraries must position themselves as facilitators of information access as opposed to storehouses of books. Their ideas will be of great benefit in this transition.

In "A Cognitive Framework for Human Information Behavior: The Place of Metaphor in Human Information Organizing Behavior," Charles Cole and John Leide present the model of human learning as the formation of metaphors or analogies, matching new information with that already known. The authors contend that when faced with entirely new information, humans create a prototype structure to serve as a temporary metaphor. This process is described as "metaphor instantiation."

The case studies produced ambiguous results, but there were only three subjects and the authors clearly state that the tests are only in the exploratory stage. The subjects were asked to describe intended search strategies in terms of a metaphor. A more productive methodology might have been to also interview the subjects after a successful information retrieval process and ask them to describe metaphorically the information they found in terms of what they previously knew.

Regardless, this paper indicates that future research in information science may, out of necessity, converge with the field of education.

Another piece that looks at information from the user perspective is “The Digital Information Consumer,” where Huntington, Williams, and Dobrowolski present data from several studies indicating a drastic change in information seeking behavior on the Internet as opposed to traditional print resources. The authors identify the following four changes that have been strongly validated by their studies: a shallow depth of searching (meaning Internet searchers tend to examine only one webpage at a given website), a lack of repeat visits to any given website, a wide range of visited websites, and a volatility of user interests. They find these behaviors to be consistent with documented studies of television viewers and propose that the nature of these two media allows, and even encourages, these behaviors. The research also indicates a general distrust of Internet materials and that the most important factor in achieving a high number of hits is the visibility of a website, not the accuracy of its information or the way it is presented. However, the data for these last two findings is not as strong.

The book is not without weaknesses. It does propose a broader scope for information studies, but at times it expands the scope without limits, as in “HIB includes all facets of the human information condition...” (p. 171). This may be overreaching. It’s important to delineate areas appropriate for study. Including “all facets” doesn’t define anything. The book presents thought provoking proposals and useful models, but there is limited hard data. However, given the newness of this area of research this is understandable. As the title suggests these are proposed avenues for future study, not final results.

But these are minor quibbles. This book represents a significant shift in emphasis from information systems to the information user. The editors and authors have produced an important work that extends the borders of information behavior research into living rooms, coffee shops, the workplace, and beyond.

### **Reviewer**

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