Small World Lives: Implications for the Public Library

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ABSTRACT
THIS ARTICLE ADDRESSES WAYS IN WHICH information professionals might re-examine the world of information from small world perspectives. Information behavior in small world lives has been little touched on in the literature. However, issues raised in this discussion should lead to further considerations regarding this phenomenon. The approach to this subject is not intended to provide practical hints for information system design or the delivery of information into these environments. It is anticipated that others who are more gifted in these matters will make use of this research in more practical dimensions. Four concepts are used to develop a conceptual scheme in which to examine small world lives—i.e., social norms, world view, social types, and information behavior. The authors make extensive use of ethnographic inquiries to illustrate how qualitative methodology can be used to examine the information worlds of ordinary people. Findings suggest that qualitative methodology is a rich and fruitful approach to the investigation of social worlds that fall outside the traditional environment of public library use. The contribution that this article adds to the field is to revisit the role of the public library in responding to factors that constitute information behaviors.

INTRODUCTION

Every research project begins with the most basic question that can be asked about how people look at their world. The social meanings that define the contextual basis for public behavior, including information

behavior, were chosen to be examined. It seemed reasonable to start with an examination of how a cultural world establishes standards for information-seeking behaviors. There is minimal research regarding the social milieu of ordinary people. It is also difficult, if not impossible, to respond to information needs if we do not have a clear understanding of the situations that generated those needs.

What is proposed is a conceptual scheme as one way to approach an examination of small world lives. The development of this scheme will be shown through analysis of qualitative research. Finally, it is reiterated that this discussion is not a practical guide that could lead to solutions to the issues that are raised. The importance of colleagues who can make something real in response to the needs of individuals is minimized. This discussion tends to fall into that category in which conceptualization leading to interesting questions also has a viable place in the literature. The argument is that both types of scholarship can add immeasurably to understanding information need, use, and seeking behavior.

CONCEPTUAL SCHEME FOR SMALL WORLD LIVES

It should be stated at the outset that these authors do not think that lives lived in a small world are unimportant lives. In fact, there is a strong belief that, by examining people who share a similar social and cultural space, some generalized statements about the larger society can be made. What is meant by the term "small world lives" is lives that are played out on a small stage. The everyday reality of such lives is characterized by commonness or routineness. The small world lacks sweeping surprises or catastrophic problems, at least as these are commonly defined. One conducts the business of living in such an uneventful way that few aspects are worth important discussion.

Most of the occurrences in these "small worlds" 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—i.e., one looks at the world at large with some degree of interest. However, most of the information produced outside the small 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 be to simply measure the overall soundness of the world "out there." On the other hand, the information might simply be used as a source of entertainment. Patrick Wilson (1983) notes that:

> the attitude is different in light and uninvolved world watching. It is not that truth and falsity are irrelevant but that the question of truth and falsity is not worth pressing....It does not really matter.
> One engages in light world watching for entertainment. News is often entertaining, and we do not even demand verisimilitude as we would if we were reading fiction. (pp. 142-43)

One can look at the "small worldness" in light of its context. *A Place on the Corner* by Anderson (1978) is a monograph that is rich in the contextual stuff of life. The author sought to discover how people in the small world of a corner bar use everyday social exchanges to define themselves and others. He found that social control is a factor in shaping one's view of oneself. What is important to us is the author's observation of information. Anderson found that information was an active agent in this control process as well as in the establishment of values—i.e., those who understood the value system of Jelly's Bar were viewed as "insiders" or "regulars," and those who exhibited different expressions were seen as "outsiders."

Because it is difficult to discuss small world lives outside of their context, the following concepts must be viewed in light of their contextual meaning. To this end, we introduce the following terms: "social norms," "world view," "social types," and "information behavior."

Social Norms

There is a long history of qualitative research to support the position that social norms play a role in the acceptance or avoidance of information. Although the earlier researchers did not specifically address the role of information in shaping collective behavior, they implied it. For example, the manner as well as the degree of compliance to the group was conveyed through the communication of information. Tönnies (1957) refers to this process as the formulation of "group life." He states that "without regularity in the behavior of individuals there could be no group life" (p. 8).

To understand the effect of social norms on behavior is to understand a social world in which social action is seen as normative, routinized, and easily recognized as fitting within a system of shared meanings. We should mention that behaviors of social world insiders often seem meaningless to outsiders because they do not readily understand this very personalized codified system. Jack Douglas (1970), author of *Understanding Everyday Life*, refers to this process as a way in which insiders examine the relevance of social meaning. It is, he adds, a necessary process for researchers to understand if they hope to grasp a life-world different from their own.

Angulo (1990) illustrated social norms in an insightful ethnographic study titled *Indians in Overalls*. In it he examined the Pit River Indians in Maca, California. He chose to study this particular tribe because he believed that they were the most primitive of the tribes still existing in California. He observed that they were "just about at the level of the Stone Age in culture" (p. 8). Angulo wondered why the Pit River Indians chose to continue living in such primitive conditions.

On the other hand, the Pit River Indians wondered why the white men all seemed to be homeless, wandering from place to place. They were trying to understand the notion of white men in light of their understanding of what "a people" means. That is, for the Pit River Indians, the critical question was, How do white people define themselves as a people?

Angulo (1990) had a key informant whom he called "Wild Bill." Actually, he called all the Indians "wild." For example, there was Wild Tom, Wild Joe, and so on. When the author asked Wild Bill the name of his tribe, Wild Bill responded that the word is "people" and people "is" (p. 71). This, he strongly emphasized, was a word that applied only to Pit River Indians, not to whites. Below is an exchange between Angulo and Wild Bill:

> *Angulo:* ["Listen , Bill. How do you say 'people'?"]
> *Wild Bill:* ["I don't know. . .just is, I guess."]
> *Angulo:* ["I thought that meant 'Indian.'"]
> *Wild Bill:* ["Say. . . .Ain't we *people*?!"]
> *Angulo:* ["So are the whites!"]
> *Wild Bill:* ["Like hell they are! We call inillaaduw: 'tramps,' nothing but tramps. They don't believe anything is alive. They are dead themselves. I don't call that 'people.'"] (pp. 71-72)

What we have in this exchange is a small world in which the term "people" is defined by social norms. Both groups view themselves as being people but from totally different world views. As this example illustrates, it is difficult to understand another's world without an appreciation for the norms that govern that world. The conclusion that Angulo drew from his experiences is that he was never able to enter the Indians' world. It is suspected that a reason why he could not enter their world is that he never grasped their sense of the meaning of things. What mattered was how the Pit River Indians defined their lives. It really did not matter how others defined them.

This examination thus far suggests the following relationship between social norms and information behavior. Information, like public behavior, is shaped by the contextual others who define what is acceptable within a social world. The act of seeking information occurs because an individual's concerns reflect problematic situations that are shared by members of a homogeneous social milieu. Within this context, information enters through channels deemed appropriate thereby adding to the relevance of the information. Social norms, then, are the sine qua non by which sources are either sought or ignored.

An understanding of social norms in information behavior research is essential for an appreciation of the information need, seeking, and sharing. In support of this argument, Schultz and Luckmann (1973) observe the following interrelation between social norms and a person's decision to search for information: "[M]y life-world is not my private world, but

rather, is intersubjective; the fundamental structure of its reality is that it is shared by others" (p. 4). The sharing of this reality is what constitutes a social norm.

World View

Simply stated, a world view is a comprehensive philosophy that shapes a body of beliefs about human life. It is a system of shared experiences that provides an outlook or point of view. It serves as a measure to gauge one's role, position, status, etc., within a network of similar others and to assess the relevance of events, people, happenings, and so on, in the larger social world.

The importance of things (including information) is an essential concept in understanding a world view. For example, Wilson (1983) notes that:

> the basic facts about ...perspective are these: what you can see, what will appear in your field of vision, depends on where you are and in what direction you are looking. . . .The closer we are to some features of social life, the bigger it seems to us—bigger in the sense of importance, salience, significance, bigger in the sense that it occupies a larger share of attention, effort, interest, reflection. (p. 4)

What the above quote suggests is *Weltanschauung*, or a particular way of looking at the world. In other words, world view is an outlook on life in which mores, norms, and values dominate social action. It is the "conceptual field of vision" that drives the standards by which appropriate behavior is judged. For most, if not all, populations, Weltanschauung is sustained by a collective vision that "outsiders" are to be treated with suspicion. The ultimate value of world view, then, is to aid in the production of common customs, language, and lived experiences. One facet of lived experience is how information is sought and used, or even how information is allowed to be expressed.

A fuller description of Jelly's Bar will illustrate this point. Anderson (1978) observes that the bar is a combination of liquor store and bar located in an urban area inhabited by the poor. He observes that Jelly's is surrounded by signs of urban decay, and that the residents of this area would be surprised if the city took an active interest in trying to better their condition. Quoting Anderson, the author comments:

> But once inside Jelly's people don't have to be concerned with the conditions outside. They become involved as soon as they meet others on the corner, or as soon as they walk through Jelly's door. Somebody is waiting at least to acknowledge their presence, if not to greet them warmly. They come here "to see what's happenin"—to keep up on the *important* news. They meet their "runnin' buddies" here, and sometimes they commune with others. Inside...they joke, argue, fight, and laugh, as *issues* quickly rise and fall. . . .It is time-in for sharing one's joys, hopes, dreams, troubles, fears, and past triumphs,

> which are all here and now to be taken up repeatedly with peers
> whose *thoughts* about them really matter [emphasis not in original].
> (p. 3)

What this example shows is that Jelly's is a small world with its own
social system of rewards, friendships, and points of view. The idea that
persons who frequent the bar also use it as a source of relevant informa-
tion is not surprising. Anderson also reports that the men accepted infor-
mation from each other because they trusted one another to be truthful.
That is, the men held a common view that Jelly's offered a haven in which
one could express oneself among equals and, for the most part, be given
a reliable response. On the other hand, the world outside of Jelly's per-
ceived them simply as drunks. The sense that the world at large had no
serious regard for them influenced their approach to this world and the
information generated in it. It was simply not important to them.

The merit that we find in the concept "world view" is that it allows for
an interrelated system of ideas. In Jelly's bar, such a system influenced
members' acceptance of certain information (mainly that which came from
other "insiders") and rejection of others (information that was produced
outside the bar).

This example confirms the world view concept. The small worldness
of the setting caused people to look at the world in a certain way and to
exhibit public behavior that conformed to this view. Goffman (1959) re-
fers to this phenomenon as backstage language of behavior:

> throughout Western society there tends to be one informal or back-
> stage language of behavior, and another language of behavior for
> occasions when a performance is being presented. The backstage
> language consists of reciprocal first-naming, cooperative decision-
> making, profanity, open sexual remarks, elaborate griping, smoking,
> rough informal dress, "sloppy" sitting and standing posture, use of
> dialect or substandard speech . . . . (p. 128)

What Goffman's observation contributes to this discussion is the rela-
tionship between world view and the sense of belonging. It helps to ex-
plain how a world view conditions the parameters by which a life-world is
defined.

Social Types

The concept of social types is not new to studies of human behavior.
It was eloquently introduced in the social science literature with Weber's
(Mommsen, 1986) description of *ideal types*. In essence, an ideal type is a
social construct that serves as a measuring device to compare public be-
havior. An ideal type indicates broad but typical social actions. Like all
concepts, social types are not intended to convey an actual person but the
culmination of exhibited behavior that forms a specific perspective. For
example, we can say that "nurse," "teacher," "drunk," "saint," or even "li-

brarian" are all social types. We would be hard pressed if asked to produce the "nurse." What social types allow us to do, however, is create assumptions about public conduct and social conditions. When linked together, these are used to classify people along a continuum from accepted members of one's world, to persons viewed as having no or minimal merit in that world, to persons viewed even as irrelevant to one's world.

Social types provide a commonsense system in which to create a typology of persons. In the process of creating typological distinctions, members of a small world have a sensible clue to the ways in which to behave, converse, and share information. This phenomenon is supported by Raymond Aron's (1988) observation that "social reality is made up of experiences undergone by the consciousness of all" (p. 17).

Before demonstrating the effect of social types on information behavior, we need to introduce another factor, namely the role that social condition plays in establishing social types. To this end, we turn to the famous theory developed by Thomas and Thomas (1928) called the "definition of the situation." In a thoughtful analysis of this theory, Volkart (1968) stated:

> at the group level, the definitions of situations are contained in norms, codes, and laws. That is, all groups have standards of how individuals should or should not behave in life situations, and, at this level, much misunderstanding, confusion, and conflict result from the fact that different groups and subgroups. . . have different definitions of the situation. (p. 3)

Another way to look at the definition of the situation is supplied by Volkart (1968) who observes that "human actions can make sense to us only if we become aware that all meanings come to be constructed by definitions through which the prism of the mind orders perceptual experience" (p. 3). Moreover, "apart from sheer reflex, human action is preceded by this process of defining the situation, and even though the basis of the action is subjective, the results are not" (p. 3). In Thomas and Thomas's (1928) words, "if men define situations as real they are real in their consequences" (p. 572).

The relationship then between the definition of the situation and social types is the ability of character attributes to cluster into a categorical scheme. This scheme is generated by the situation which members of a small world have defined as most immediate, real, and necessary for their well-being. And once a "Vietnamese becomes a 'gook' or a Black a 'nigger' or a Jew a 'kike'"(Coser, 1977, p. 521), that person becomes the ultimate outsider and the consequences to the well-being of the person are predictable. On a related note, in the library profession, we identify members of our public as "users" and "nonusers." By using these terms, some individuals are treated as insiders and others as outsiders. Once it is

recognized that categories are used in small world lives to distinguish persons, we can begin to understand how information is transmitted within that world. It stands to reason, of course, that information is most shared among persons who view themselves within a certain typology. Consequently, it can also be predicted that the further removed one is from that category, the greater the division in sharing of information.

For example, in a study of women at a maximum-security prison, Chatman (1997) discovered that certain inmates were being typecast by other inmates. Moreover, the manner in which they were viewed influenced their information behaviors. In this facility, there were several social types assigned to the prisoners. As can be imagined, within the narrow space of a prison, it is relatively easy to observe the phenomenon of typecasting. The two social types that will be examined for our discussion here are the *bitch guard* and the *brides*.

Bitch Guards. The officers or guards are always close by to watch the inmates and enforce the rules. They often become a source of information for the prisoners, especially those who are first timers and or recently incarcerated. Some guards are looked upon as helpful and others, the bitch guards, are avoided. Not surprising, there is an enormous degree of hostility between the inmates and the bitch guards. Since the guards have the power to discipline the inmates, most are viewed as potentially dangerous. However, the bitch guards are especially disliked for their demoralizing attitude toward prisoners and their ability to provide favors to selected inmates at the expense of others. For example, prisoners perceive these guards as showing extreme unwillingness to share information that could help them understand various rules. This information is important because understanding the rules can mean avoiding punishment, earning earlier release time, getting desirable work assignments, and even wearing a certain color of uniform. There are five colors of uniforms at this prison: blue for long-termers; brown for the newest inmates; green for minimal security prisoners; and white for cafeteria, hospital, dental jobs, and cosmetology. Yellow is for prisoners on death row (there are currently four women on death row, but they are not allowed to mix with the general population and the author never met them).

The inmates believe the bitch guards create rules to exhibit their power over prisoners. The following example will illustrate this point:

> Sometimes the rules don't make sense. Ninety percent of what the bitch tells us is outside the real rules. You can get three warnings on three different things, but it ain't the same as breaking the rules. Like the bitch could basically send you to lock-up, whenever: 'cause they say your "name is in the *blue book*" when it really ain't. So they bend the official rules to send you to lock-up.

The prisoners fear lockup. It takes away parole time, is isolating and, according to this respondent, is not very clean. She shared an incident that appears too trivial to have merited such severe punishment. In her case, it was exchanging a few angry words with another prisoner.

Another example to support the perception that bitch guards create situations for punishment even when some incidents are not punishable by the rules:

> Guards have no compassion. But there is one or two I really dislike. But most have real bad dispositions. You are treated like a dog sometimes. This one bitch gave me the top of an ink pen and said to go clean the shower. I gave it back to her and said you do it yourself. She gave me 10 days lockup for that. Roaches is really horrible in lockup.

Because the bitch guards are typified as extremely brutal and horrific, prisoners avoid encounters with them at every chance and opportunity. Even if they had information that could be potentially helpful to the inmates, the information itself would be suspected.

Brides. The final example is the social type brides. Brides are inmates who are new to prison life. These are young women who need closure on sentencing, orientation to standard procedures, introduction to personnel, and so on, before being allowed to mingle with the prison population. This process is called the *reception*. It is also a time when inmates who are assisting in this activity or who hang out near the reception area can evaluate the women as potential brides.

While these women are in reception, which can be anywhere from a week to a month, new inmates stay together as a group. They live together in the same dorm. They are not allowed any privileges, such as calls or going to the snack machine on the grounds. They are unassigned to any permanent residence, and they have no job to perform until their processing is done. They wear brown dresses, which informs everyone that these are new people.

So the *studs* (another social type) keep an eye on the women. They notice potential brides who come into reception wearing nice shoes and jewelry. When these newcomers enter the general population, the more aggressive prisoners will approach them. As one respondent shared, they tell the young women, "I'll take care of you. I will do what is needed to help you. I will keep you protected. You become my woman and you will have nothing to worry about."

Many of the young women, who would usually lead heterosexual lives, will become brides. Once the relationship is established, they exhibit all the attributes of a young wife. They run errands for their "husbands," wear dresses, let their hair grow, and allow themselves to enter into a marriage arrangement.

The effect of assuming the role of bride on an inmate's behavior is obvious. Useful information enters her world at the discretion of her "husband." Other prisoners approach her and share tidbits with her because she is the bride of so-and-so. If she becomes the bride of a prisoner with some status, her information becomes that much richer. Other prisoners will approach the bride to request a meeting with her "husband," "boyfriend," or "old man," or they convey a message and tell the bride to make sure that her mate receives it. In other words, the bride becomes an additional channel of information. Her role is not to use or apply whatever information is presented for personal gain but to pass it along to the "important member" of this relationship. What results is the brutalization of the socialization processes that incarcerates the information world of a young inmate.

Information Behavior

In an earlier article titled, "Knowledge Gap, Information-Seeking and the Poor" (1995), these authors attempted an explanation of the concept of information behavior. At that time, it was argued that, to understand information-seeking behaviors, it was necessary to take a step back in order to address "knowledge-gap" research. It was felt that this conceptual discussion held some important clues to understanding information in a small world. Although the discussion was based on observations of poor people, it is believed that the conclusions are generalizable to any "small world" situation.

At that time, we wrote that most knowledge gap research has several models to explain how people acquire and use information. It was found useful to approach information in terms of first- and second-level knowledge. It is contended that second-level knowledge is that which informs us about the world at large. Not only do the sources of information originate outside the small world of group members, but the information itself is unfamiliar and foreign. For the sake of this article, therefore, there is no critical interest in how information is created by outsiders. What is of greatest interest is how, if ever, that information enters into a small world. There is also interest in discovering when that information becomes a useful item in an information environment.

It is known that information of the first kind, or first-level knowledge, is most important to small world lives. A reason for this, it was concluded, is that "first-level knowledge is knowledge *of* things. . . .These things are readily accessible and sources have immediate verifiability. We simply check it out for ourselves or ask others until a collective assessment of the situation satisfies us" (Chatman & Pendleton, 1995, p. 143).

Some time later, a serious reassessment was begun of the use of information-seeking behaviors. It was thought that this concept did not quite

explain why some members of a small world refused to accept, and others simply ignored, information that was intended to meet their information needs. It is known that, for many members of a social milieu, information seeking is a very active routine part of their lives. However, we have had enough experience with the real world to know that a fair number of people choose not to be informed or to remain uninformed about the things that the larger social world deems important.

In searching for a word to explain this phenomenon, it was decided that "information behavior" served the purpose. It was believed that the choice of this term more adequately explains what really happens in the information lives of people. On the other hand, "information seeking" is a process that results from the recognition that a problem exists and that a search is necessary.

One of the greatest challenges is to better understand how information behavior works within a social system. There was also curiosity about how members of these systems solve problems. It does not matter how these problems are being defined. What was necessary to know is how members of a small world deal with them before they become expressed. It is known that, once the expression occurs, the seeking process is likely to follow. The missing component in this understanding of information and social lives is the impact of social types, norms, and world view on everyday information. It is known that social types are the frames by which normative behavior is measured; it can be extremely helpful to know who those persons are. Whether viewed as positive or as dysfunctional types, their opinions influence collective reality.

The contribution that this discussion makes to studies of information is to introduce these concepts and to suggest that further theoretical discussions in light of public library use would make an attractive addition to the literature. Social norms are sacred standards driven by social types that verify and legitimize the appropriateness of public behavior and information-seeking strategies. It would be useful if there were empirical support, which would allow for better ways to classify information in light of social types. As indicated earlier, the conceptual scheme is potentially fruitful because it speaks more to information behavior concerns rather than information-seeking processes. This scheme makes it possible to examine any social reality that is played out on a small stage. Moreover, findings from this examination of small life worlds contain essential ramifications to ways in which people view themselves, are defined by others, and the effect that this process has on the use or avoidance of information. If it could be maximized regarding what information behavior tells us about the lives of ordinary people, then this would be something that is really significant. It is believed that a theoretical basis for examining information in everyday situations has been presented. The application of

our conceptual framework should provide essential clues to ways in which information is supported or denied by members of a cultural group.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND INFORMATION BEHAVIOR

The approach that was employed here is a qualitative methodology that is rooted in ethnography. Unfortunately, qualitative researchers have tended to be labeled as "soft" researchers who employ a method that is sadly in need of scholarly rigor. In these authors' opinion, this is not necessarily the case.

The main objective of qualitative research as, indeed, of quantitative methodology, is to make a considerable effort to address issues of reliability and validity. Although there are different ways in which the two methods address these issues, qualitative researchers do not or should not avoid them. For example, *reliability* is the degree to which observations are reported as consistent with some phenomena during the time the researcher is in the field. In *Wake Up Dead Man: Afro-American Worksongs*, Jackson (1972) wanted to discover the role that songs played in assisting work activities of black inmates in the Texas Department of Corrections. A more fundamental question driving his work, however, was to discover if these songs were created specifically for that particular context (prison) or if they existed outside prison and were transported there by the prisoners. He found that, "with a few exceptions, these songs do not exist in the outside world" (p. xvi). How did he know that he had a reliable finding? He listened to the nature of the songs and observed that "the subject, always has to do with making it in Hell . . . they are sung outdoors . . .in daylight only." But, he also records, that it is "darkness or absence or lostness or vacancy or deprivation that they are about" (p. xvi). A second strategy he employed was to make repeated visits to the work camps in order to establish sufficient rapport which would allow for the prisoners to explain more fully the nature of the songs. Jackson also interviewed men who had been released and asked if they ever sang those songs once free. He notes "the men who sing these songs in prison do not care to carry them outside when they are released" (p. xvi). Finally, he looked in several folklore collections to see if the songs appeared there. Not finding them, he concludes that the prison work songs existed in a specific place at a "specific time, sung by specific people for whom they have specific meanings and functions" (p. xvii).

The other major issue is *validity*. As the example above demonstrates, findings might be *reliable* (consistent with observations) but not *valid*. Validity is defined as the degree to which a researcher has a true or honest picture of the phenomenon being studied. There are several ways to test the validity of data. For the sake of this article, however, one strategy will be concentrated on, namely, *construct validity*. Briefly, construct validity

occurs at the analysis stage of research in which a phenomenon has meaning in light of the conceptual framework guiding the study. In the case at hand, a conceptual framework consisting of four concepts was devised. For example, social norms can be examined in light of social change. The task then is to discover whether social norms as a concept make sense in light of empirical support.

An illustration from such a study should prove this point. Susan Glenn (1990) wrote *Daughters of the Shtetl,* a monograph pertaining to the working life of Jewish immigrant daughters. In reading lives of immigrant daughters in the turn-of-the-century labor force, it was asked, Is there evidence that social norms influenced the behavior of those women and, if so, in what respects? It was discovered that the experiences the young women had as laborers were indeed profoundly influenced by their cultural and social heritage. For example, the cultural and social world of the small neighborhood shops reinforced the norms governing the women's approach to work.

> In those tiny, cramped, poorly ventilated quarters run by Jewish immigrant contractors, "the girl" ...knows whether her "boss" is making or losing money, and she realizes how her interests are regulated by his . . . . This situation contributed to an atmosphere of informality, even intimacy, in the shops. Here everyone, including the boss, addressed others on a first-name basis, knew most of the details of one anothers' personal lives, and labored together almost as if they were a family. (p. 134)

The informal atmosphere of this small world, readily accessible information about each member of that world, and a shared ethnic background created a stable environment in which Old World habits and social norms could flourish. As noted by the author, few rules governed shop life. "Hard work was expected, but any form of social behavior that encouraged it was usually tolerated. As a result, singing, talking, smoking, drinking, eating, and other 'merry makings' were a regular part of the routine in these shops" (Glenn, 1990, p. 135). Thus what is seen in this example is that social norm as a construct can shed light on a life-world that seems reasonable in light of its contextual factors.

ETHNOGRAPHIC THEMES AND PATTERNS

There are several ways to group ethnographic data. Only a few of them will be described that seem most appropriate for the purposes of this discussion. These are *contextual findings, co-associational findings,* and *causal data.*

Contextual Findings

Contextual findings are observations made by the researcher to show the context, situation, or scheme in which people live, work, and play out their lives. These descriptions provide a sense of richness of the narrative

and give the reader a sense of "being there." For example, Rose Cohen's (1995) memories about life in a small Jewish workshop:

> When we had been in the shop about an hour a grey-bearded little old man used to come in lugging a big basket of food covered with black oil cloth. He was the shop pedlar....The men looked at him with pity and Atta [the finisher] at the sight of him sometimes began to sing "The Song of the Pedlar." If the boss was not in the shop or the men were not very busy, one of them would take the basket from the pedlar and place it on a chair in the middle of the room. Then each shop hand picked out a roll and the little old man poured him a tiny glass of brandy for two cents. Father used to buy me an apple and a sweet-ened roll. We ate while we worked....At noon we had our big meal. Then father would send me out for a half a pound of steak or a slice of beef liver and a pint of beer which he sometimes bought in part-nership with two or three other men. He used to broil the steak in the open coal fireplace where the presser heated his irons. (p. 83)

These descriptive findings can be used in a variety of ways. They serve the important purpose of providing a portrait of a small world. But one can also refine the description to include a larger social perspective. For example, the illustration above could be applied to work environments during the time of the Industrial Revolution to show how small shops differed from factory work environments. It could be used to compare various shops or to give even a smaller view of the world, such as the role of children as laborers in a small tailor shop.

Co-associational Findings

Co-associational findings describe the association between a particular unit of analysis and context. A simple example from Karp's (1973) study of customers in a pornographic bookstore will address the association between unconventional behaviors and hiding as a form of information control. As the author notes, "embarrassment...frequently occurs when hiding fails, when a person's 'presented' self-image is publicly disconfirmed" (p. 433).

Karp reports several instances of men wanting anonymity in order to be viewed by others (in this case, strangers) as proper persons. One strat-egy employed was the act of waiting before going into the pornographic bookstore. In the author's judgment "such waiting behavior...serves the purpose of allowing the individual to check out the environment before entering the store" (p. 437). Another approach is the notion of "skip-ping." Here the potential customer walks out of one store, may skip the next available one, and so on. "Skipping behavior would seem to function to allow one to get back into the crowd and to appear simply to be walking down the street" (p. 438). Karp's conclusion provides a final example of the insight that co-associational data can bring to social reality:

> Hiding, in effect, lets us break certain rules without getting caught, thus preserving our social character....What hiding allows us to do,

in sum, is to engage in unconventional behaviors without revealing
ourselves as un-conventional persons.

The link between hiding and anonymity is a straightforward one.
The anonymous situation is one where persons are collectively hid-
ing certain of their identities from one another....It is, in this sense
especially, that the collective venture of anonymity can be described
as possessing a normative force. (p. 447)

Causal Data

Causal data are ways to observe patterned behavior. We suggest that
they indicate the strength of relationship between two or more concepts.
They may also suggest "the nature and direction" of this relationship
(Charmaz, 1983, p. 393). "Cats, Kicks, and Color" is a study by Harold
Finestone (1957) of drug addiction in the early 1950s. Using a Chicago
housing project for his research site, the author wanted to discover how
social types are constructed. It also shows clearly the relationship that
causal data bring to understanding how small worlds are created. For
example, in addition to the discovery of social types, the author was also
interested in discovering how appropriate attitudes were expressed in this
culture, what values they adhered to, and in general what were their gen-
eral outlooks on life. In this culture, "the cool cat" exemplified all that
was of value, for a cool cat had the ability to "play it cool" in an unruffled
manner when dealing with outsiders such as the police.

As described by Finestone (1957), despite the location of his social
world, the "cool cat" strictly eschewed the use of force or violence in achiev-
ing his goals. Rather, he achieved his goals:

by indirection, relying...on persuasion and on a repertoire of ma-
nipulative techniques. To deal with a variety of challenging situa-
tions, such as those arising out of his contacts with the police, with
his past or potential victims, and with jilted "chicks," etc., he used his
wits and his conversational ability. To be able to confront such con-
tingencies with adequacy and without resort to violence was to be
"cool." (pp. 3-4)

What we see in this example, then, is a relationship between choice
of role valued by the addicts, "the cool cat," and values of the dominant
social order. The latter assigns value not to persons who "hustle" for a
living but to adult males who work. However, the "cool cat" does not value
the work ethic. "The self-constraint required by work was construed as an
unwarranted damper upon his love of spontaneity" (Finestone, 1957, p. 7).
In a more telling statement, the author suggests that the real reason for
the addict's rejection of work was that his feeling of superiority would be
challenged if he were to confront the world of work:

in emphasizing as he does the importance of the "kick" [getting high]
the cat is attacking the value our society places upon planning for
the future and the responsibility of the individual for such planning.

> Planning always requires some subordination and disciplining of
> present behavior in the interest of future rewards....the "kick" ap-
> pears to be a logical culmination of this emphasis. (p. 7)

With this example, this discussion can be concluded with the finding
that qualitative research can be used as a method to explore patterns of
collective behavior. We are convinced that linking individual behavior
with what appears to be patterned routine activities will allow the applica-
tion of conceptual schemes in order to anticipate normative behavior.
The next section will continue this discussion by addressing the role of
the public library in small world lives.

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND RESEARCH

Many of the pockets of populations that surround a public library can
be viewed as small worlds. Although often unknown to us, these tiny com-
munities exhibit many dimensions that hold their world together. For
example, cultural norms, common language, sense of location in the larger
social order, perspective about the value of their world and, to some, the
valueless impact of the world at large. From the review of the literature
and studies that were conducted, it is known that certain persons within a
small world play a critical role in sustaining the standards of that world.

It is suggested that, as a profession, the prominent and often sole role
that information-seeking behavior has played in explaining user behavior
should be reconsidered. Based on the assessment of small world lives, an
alternative model, namely "Information Behavior," is suggested. This con-
cept connotes a broader view of information in the lives of people. It
seems that many members of a social world do not feel compelled to en-
gage in information-seeking strategies. Yet they can still exhibit informa-
tion behaviors. For example, they can assume a passive posture in which
they receive information, do not act on it, or use it to add to their general
stock of commonsense knowledge. Others may be active information gath-
erers. For them the world is a large reservoir of facts and events that help
to shape their world and, in the sharing of what they know, modify the
world of others. We also know that, in a small world, there are people who
avoid information, not because the information might not be useful, but
because it currently has no place in their information supply. On the other
hand, information might be helpful but inaccessible. Or the acquisition
of the information, even if helpful, would cause more problems than the
information is worth. It is also argued that, if a social world is functioning
quite normally without new information, there is no sensible reason to
browse outside sources for it.

Additionally, it was found that the "world view" concept had a pro-
found effect on the value attached to information—i.e., there was little
conviction from the studies that were examined that information origi-
nating in the outside world held much value to small world lives. From

our observations, it is suggested that we could increase our understanding of how situations determine information behavior by examining this phenomenon in its natural context.

Another area that information professionals might consider is the influence of social typology on information behavior. We cannot emphasize enough the robustness that such an examination can bring to studies of information. This is a critical area in understanding everyday information. It appears up to now to have been ignored by researchers in public librarianship. However, experience has shown that classification of persons can tell us much about the information world of ordinary people. For example, it is known that the way people seek advice depends on how a person has been typecast. In any community of people living on a small stage, information is flavored by the type of people who are allowed to seek and share it. We also know that the motivation to seek advice is related to the roles that one's "type" is allowed to play in society. As was evident in the earlier sections of this article, the merit of a type depends on the situation.

What the larger society might view as "deviant behavior" might make for the most desirable social type. For example, in *Bowery and Bohemia*, Bunner (1894) identifies the "jackal" as the enviable social type. At the turn of the century in New York City, this was a particular type of gentleman who enjoyed literature, fine dining, and shared a perspective with other gentlemen of bohemian subculture about outsiders. In essence, since the outsider was not a member of their social world, they became easy targets for theft. Theft, of course, was a means to keep the jackal in fine clothes, entree to the theatre, and so on. As described by Bunner (1894):

> A jackal is a man generally of good address, and capable of display of good fellowship combined with much knowledge of literature and art, and a vast and intimate acquaintance with writers, musicians, and managers. He makes it his business to haunt hotels, theatrical agencies, and ... to know whenever, in his language, a "new jay comes to town." The jay he is after is some man generally from the smaller provincial cities, who has artistic or theatrical aspirations and a pocketful of money. (p. 455)

It is the mark of the jackal to use his wits to steal the money. Actually, if he is successful, the outsider will hand over the money. To conceal his true identity (thus avoiding being pursued by the police) once the "jay" realizes what has happened, the true jackal "does not carry his true address on his card. . . .[Rather] he communicates it confidentially to those with whom he has business dealings, but he carefully conceals it from the prying world" (p. 456).

As the example of the jackal shows, social types can be desirable or undesirable participants in a social system. It all depends on the social

world in which that type resides and how others view it. To this end, we recommend that we search for new ways to describe categories of persons who reside in our communities. Traditionally, we have used the terms "users" and "nonusers." We could find no equivalent for this category in any of the literature that we examined. It conveys the notion of one information world in which the library plays a fundamental part and one in which libraries (thus, information) have minimal value. Our backgrounds in public librarianship and extensive experience with outreach services lead us to believe that use or nonuse of public libraries has little bearing on the information world of ordinary people. We believe that the professional literature should reflect a more valid picture of the information world outside. We might then be able to use that information to help people understand their worlds. To this end, we support Scott's (1984) observation regarding information-seeking behaviors and the public library that, "a strong association was found between knowledge of the functions of the library and library use, fostering a greater awareness of the functions of the library that might have some potential for increasing library use" (p. 136).

Although we have not formally addressed the effect that classification of persons has on their approach to their information needs, programs and services seem to indicate that we cater to the "users" because "they" are like "us" and therefore understand the world of libraries. Very little is known about nonusers, but they are known as a "social type." They, too, share a world view about us and the manner in which they may or may not approach us for needed information.

Not much has been discussed about the public library's role in the larger society. We do acknowledge and support this role as a vital one. In fact, libraries have a unique place in the lives of many people. What this discussion intends to accomplish is simply this: If we are to remain the "common man's university," we need to look a little closer at where that common man resides in the information landscape called the Knowledge Society. In these authors' opinion, information must be understood as information *in* something. In the cultural sense, we mean that information is in the definition of how practical lives are played out. It is in the act of forming a world view that determines what is important in a world and what is trivial. Information is what brings meaning, purpose, order, and predictability to a social world (Chatman, 1997).

Again, it is acknowledged that this discussion has failed to provide practical and useful solutions to the social and information problems identified. However, by careful analysis of the work done by qualitative researchers, a picture can be constructed of social worlds which broaden the view of "nonuser" lives. Herein lies the true contribution that we hope to have made to the growing body of literature investigating information behaviors. We anticipate that the issues we discussed, the theo-

retical model that we developed, and the lives that we shared will increase the understanding regarding the potential role that libraries can play in response to the everyday needs of people.

This discussion will conclude with an observation made earlier about knowledge-gap and information:

> One way in which we might begin to bridge the gap...would be to introduce both ourselves and the items we provide as trustworthy, reliable, and useful to their situation. It is not sufficient to respond to inquiries. We suggest a more active role in which we engage in some basic research that would identify all members of our information community. (Chatman & Pendleton, 1995, p. 143)

It is suggested that this article, with its emphasis on a conceptual scheme to help examine the social world of ordinary people, coupled with empirical studies to indicate contextual use of information, is a beginning. It would make a significant contribution to everyday lives if it could be fully appreciated how libraries might make information more useful to small world living—a place, by the way, where many of us reside.

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