

REVIEW

Looking for Information: A Survey of Research on Information Seeking, Needs, and Behavior.
By DONALD O. CASE. San Diego, Calif.: Academic Press, 2002. Pp. xvi+350. \$89.95
(cloth). ISBN 0-12-150381-X.

Donald O. Case has created a thoughtful and much-needed introduction to and overview of research related to information behavior with his book, *Looking for Information*. Case identifies his audience as students of information behavior, ranging from readers seeking a survey of literature on information seeking from the past two decades to students looking for methods for researching information behavior. The literature review is limited primarily to research published since 1980 because, Case notes, before that time most of the research focused on information systems rather than the people interacting with information.

Since information behaviors are studied in the context of many different fields, ranging from education (student searches for information to satisfy imposed queries) to media studies (consumer use of information as entertainment) to the medical sciences (information avoidance by patients in stages of denial), this book is not limited to an audience of library and information scientists. In fact, in his introduction, Case explains that he did not include the large body of “information needs and uses” literature in his review, which encompasses much of the research on library use or information retrieval. He did this, he writes, because most of these studies focus on documents rather than individuals who need, seek, or use them (p. 13).

The book is arranged in textbook format, complete with figures and tables that complement the text. Each chapter concludes with useful summaries; chapters 3–12 end with recommendations for further reading. Also included is an appendix with questions specific to key points raised in each chapter that can facilitate classroom discussion or with other such applications of the material covered in the book.

In his introduction, Case writes that he divides the materials presented into four segments related to social information research, including “concepts relevant to information behavior; models, paradigms and theories in the study of information behavior; methods for studying information behavior; and research results and reflections” (p. 14). Following the introduction, Case begins with a basic overview of the concepts of information, information needs, and information seeking/information behavior. After an excellent review of historical definitions of information, Case embraces Gregory Bateson’s phrase, “any difference that makes a difference,” as the catchall definition that allows for great variety in the literature regarding information behavior he reviews throughout the book (p. 40). In defining information needs, Case notes that, while many scholars have objected to the notion that information needs are different from more general needs, such as psychologists Abraham Maslow and Milton Rokeach have indicated that information needs, as opposed to the general needs for sleep, shelter, and even understanding, are

Permission to reprint a book review printed in this section may be obtained only from the author.

centered on the human quest to discover “reality” (p. 74). He goes on to write that information-seeking behaviors or, more neutrally, information behaviors, are the active and passive activities in which a person becomes engaged when satisfying those information needs.

In sections 3 and 4, Case lays out research fundamentals for the study of these information behaviors. Section 3 covers the use of models, paradigms, and theories to describe information behavior phenomena. Case specifically reviews and compares four information-seeking models, namely, the Wilson, Krikelas, Johnson, and Leckie models. The comparison of the models is also represented within a table, and the models are referred to throughout the rest of the book as additional framing for the sections that follow. Section 4 provides a brief introduction to the research process and then reviews eleven methods used in information behavior research. Case illustrates each research tool with an example of its use in noteworthy information behavior research. These reviews of research methods are concise and are intended to introduce the reader briefly to the variety of methods, from surveys and experiments to historical methods and ethnographies, found in the literature with some amount of regularity. Case frequently cites well-known information behaviorists and communication researchers such as Brenda Dervin, Carol Kuhlthau, Karen Pettigrew, Tom Wilson, and Elfreda Chatman, giving frequent examples of their research along with the more than 750 other works cited throughout the book.

The final section of this book focuses on a broad review of information behavior research within the parameters set forth in the introduction, focusing primarily on literature on information behavior published since 1980 and excluding works centered on information systems or information retrieval. Case also limits this review to focus on information behavior in the context of occupation, social role, and demographic group. This quick scan of research related to information behavior notes the large body of literature available on this topic, estimates a range exceeding ten thousand citations, and is well organized and presented. Case has done a wonderful job of providing “a single current and comprehensive text that [reflects] the full breadth of research on information behavior” (p. xv).

As stated in his introduction, Case does not delve deeply into any portion of the literature, methods, or research related to information behavior. Instead, he provides a review of the general practices in information behavior research and a useful introduction to methods and practices for carrying out that research. In doing this, Case reveals trends in information behavior research throughout the years. He notes an increasing prominence of research that places information behavior within a context, focuses great attention on the roles of the information seekers, and habitually examines small populations of study in information behavior research.

However, although this book appears, for all intents and purposes, to be a textbook, both the font size (a very small font in general and an even tinier font for block quotes and tables) and the cost are burdensome. The miniscule size of the text font decreases the number of pages of the book but not the price, which may be daunting for students.

Kim M. Thompson, *School of Information Studies,
Florida State University, Tallahassee*

Copyright of Library Quarterly is the property of University of Chicago Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.