Book review

Karen E. Fisher, Sanda Erdelez, Lynn (E.F.) McKechnie, Theories of Information Science Behavior, ASIST Monograph Series, Information Today, Inc. Medford, New Jersey, 2005, 431 pp., Cost: $49.50

When this book first was announced, I immediately ordered it, even before it was in print. Certainly, the need for theory within information science and related fields is extremely important. Finding good reference material concerning theory is difficult. Therefore, this book addresses a critical need in the research fields, for practitioners to frame their work objectives, and in the area of education. I believe that the book meets all three of these needs. This book would certainly make an excellent choice for a course on theory and methods in information science and is undoubtedly a must have resource for every researcher in the broad field of information science.

The book is 431 pages, divided into 75 chapters plus a preface. There are two sections to the book, a three-chapter introductory section and a 72-chapter section with each chapter presenting a point of view from which to study information behavior. Each chapter of the book and the preface contain references. There are a total of 1118 references to works from a wide variety of authors. Hence, the book draws upon a broad body of prior work. Oddly, there are also some theories and models missing from the book, including the stratified model (Saracevic, 1997), searching in hypermedia environments (Marchionini, 1995), and information theory (Shannon, 1948).

The "cover quote" from Tefko Saracevic is reflective of Tefko's always interesting, insightful, and well thought out writing style. The quote does an excellent job of pointing out the strength of the book, namely the presentation of a wide range of perspectives with short chapters written by advocates of that viewpoint. The cover quote also subtly points out the book's main weakness, which is, despite the title, that many of the chapters do not present theory but rather philosophies and experimental perspectives. I would also add approaches, viewpoints, and positions with regard to the study of information behavior.

The first section of the book is composed of three meta-articles, presented as integrative commentary. The first chapter is one of the strongest parts of the book. In this chapter, Marcia Bates discusses the theoretical concepts of theory, defines models, and discusses methodologies. I found the definitions of these three terms most useful, as supported by the short discussions of each. Bates offers an interesting example using the principle of least effort. Bates then addresses meta-theories in fair detail, progressing to meta-theories in library and information science. This introduction is a worthwhile read and valuable, even for those who are not interested in information behavior theory. In the second chapter of this section, Brenda Dervin expands on various meanings of theory. Dervin begins by means of a compelling link between theory and methodology, with the article coming across almost as a position paper concerning the tension between substantial theory and meta-theory. In the third chapter, Tom Wilson discusses the evolution in information behavior modeling. Although I found these three articles interesting, they were not as integrative as I expected or hoped.

The second section of the book is a collection of 72 perspectives on the study of information science. Readers will find many well-known information science theories, models, viewpoints, and frameworks presented in these 72 chapters, along with (I would expect) some lesser known ones. I use the string of labels (*theories*, *models*, *viewpoints*, and *frameworks*) on purpose because I do not believe that all of these chapters address theory. Most of these chapters are, however, very well written, a testament to both the skill of the chapter authors, and I am sure, the effort of the book's editors.

My concerns with the book are related to "what is theory?" and "what are the important theories?". First, the "what is theory?". To say that some of the positions presented in each chapter are theories is really pushing the label of theory. Certainly, many of the paradigms do not measure up to the definition of theory that the editors of the book state in the preface or which are in the leading chapter of section one.

The second concern "what are the important theories?", brings us back to Tefko's comment in the cover quote. Each chapter is presented by the advocates of that field, with little critical review. Certainly, there are some theories much more developed and with much more impact than others. Each reader must make this determination individually. However, I made an initial evaluation of the 72 chapters, rating each one in an x, y, z space in terms of "Theory, Model, or Approach", "Developed, Some Structure, Incipient Idea", and "Both Situational and Cognitive, Situational, Cognitive", assigning a rating of $\{3, 2, 1\}$ for each category, respectively. Fig. 1 shows a plot of the results. Appendix A provides a list of the chapter numbers and shorten chapter titles.

We see from Fig. 1 that most chapters present approaches to (not theories of) the study of information behavior. Most approaches are not well developed, and the majority of these approaches deal primarily with the situational aspects of information behavior. These results points to the need for more developed theories and models that incorporate both the situational and cognitive aspects of the searcher.

In conclusion, after reading the book, it also raised a question for me (this is not a criticism of the book). The question is "Are there no new theories?" Many researchers from a variety of fields, including communications, computer science, business, and sociology, would be very comfortable with many of the theories presented in this book. Some of the theories are borrowed directly from these and other fields. It leads one to hypothesize that there may be a "meta-theory" that unites all human behavior.

My recommendation? Buy this book! Every researcher, practitioner, and student in the field should have one. Additionally, no professional or university library is complete without a copy. The content is valuable, and the royalties of the book go to support ASIST SIGUSE.
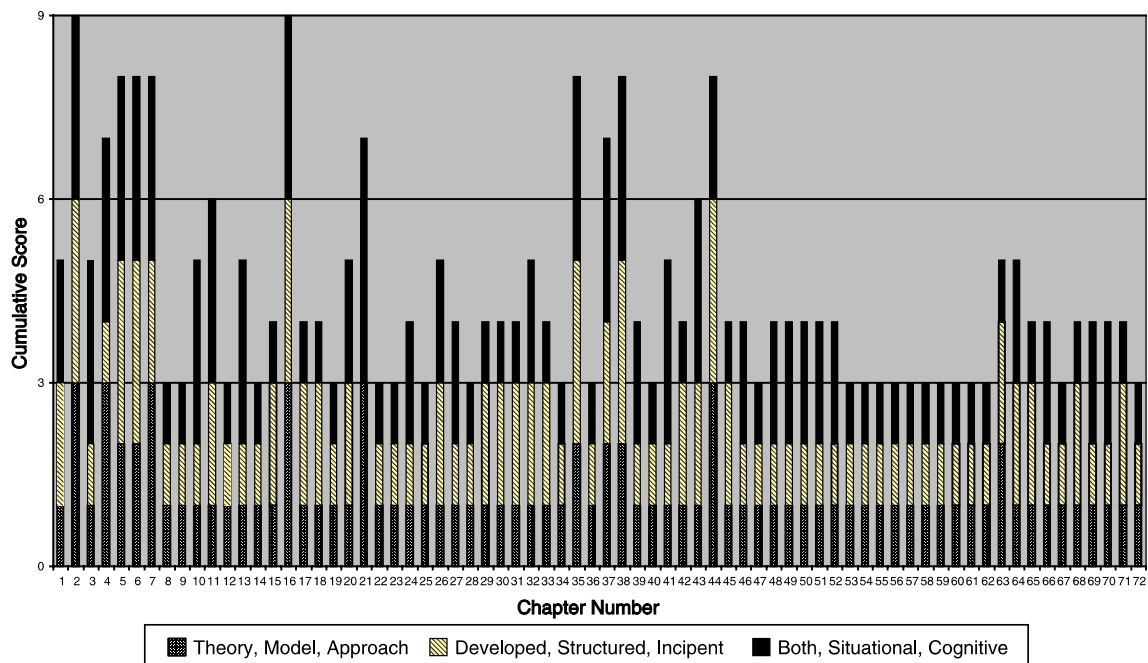

Fig. 1. Evaluation of each chapter along three metrics.

Appendix A

Chapter no.	Chapter title
1	Affective load
2	ASK
3	Archival intelligence
4	Social cognition
5	Berrypicking
6	Big 6
7	Browsing
8	Information poverty
9	Life in the round
10	Cognitive authority
11	Cognitive work analysis
12	Collective action dilemma
13	Communication action
14	Communities of practice
15	Cultural models
16	Sense making
17	Diffusion theory
18	Domain analytic approach
19	Ecological
20	Elicitation
21	Information seeking behavior
22	Everyday life
23	Face threat
24	Flow theory
25	Information seeking professional
26	Imposed query
27	Information acquiring and sharing
28	Information work tasks
29	Information encountering
30	Information grounds
31	Information horizons
32	Information intent
33	Information exchanges
34	Institutional ethnography
35	IIR
36	Interpretative repertoires
37	Information seeking
38	Information search process
39	Library anxiety
40	Monitoring and blunting
41	Interface design
42	Network gatekeeping
43	Non-linear information seeking
44	Optimal foraging
45	Organizational sense making
46	PAIN
47	Embedded information behaviors
48	Phenomenography

Appendix A (*continued*)

Chapter no.	Chapter title
49	Practice of everyday life
50	Principle of least effort
51	Identities
52	Radical change
53	Reader response theory
54	Rounding and dissonant grounds
55	Serious leisure
56	Small-world network exploration
57	Social capital
58	Social constructionist
59	Social positioning
60	Socio-cognitive view
61	Weak ties
62	Symbolic violence
63	Information use environments
64	Question-negotiation
65	Health behavior
66	Value sensitive design
67	Zone of proximal development
68	Organizational workers
69	Willingness to return
70	Women's way of knowing
71	Work task
72	WWW information seeking

References

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Shannon, C. E. (1948). A mathematical theory of communication. *Bell System Technical Journal, 27*(July/October), 379–423, 623–656.

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