

Presenter: Nancy Baker

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Paper: Ellis, David; Cox, Deborah; Hall, Katherine. (1993). A comparison of the information seeking patterns of researchers in the physical and social sciences. *Journal of*

Summary of paper:

This paper combines two studies of Ellis. The first study chronologically studied information seeking behaviors of social scientists. The second, which we also discussed in class, focused on the information seeking behavior of physical scientists. In this paper Ellis combines the results of the two studies, a synthesis, he says, which has not been successfully achieved before because studies of the different groups of people have been designed differently and carried out differently yielding results too diverse to synthesize reliably.

The conclusion of his paper was that the information seeking patterns of the two groups are not particularly different when looked at using the categories he characterizes (starting, chaining, browsing, differentiating, monitoring, extracting, verifying, ending). There were differences in small things.

Discussion:

The presenter asked the class participants whether they were surprised at Ellis's conclusion. Since these groups of researchers are often studied separately, it was thought by the presenter that there was a good reason, such as the fact that their information seeking habits were too diverse to be looked at together. Some participants, including the presenter, admitted they were surprised, while others were not.

The paper sparked several lively discussions. With many interesting anecdotes from KT, we talked about which researchers prefer which publications and in what form (electronic or paper). Several themes arose. One, the older researchers are more attached to paper, and two, as the internet matures more research is done on the internet. The Ellis paper was written before many of the current features of the internet were fully developed – ability to email documents, newsgroups, on-line journals, extensive databases. This fact weakens some of his observations by rendering them outdated. This topic led us to a discussion of electronic publishing and the changing views about its acceptability.

We walked through each of Ellis's categories and critiqued them and discussed whether or not they were complete. We thought his definition of browsing was weak and ambiguous. We thought too that *differentiating* was part of browsing, perhaps a secondary step. We also thought that he left out an important step – organization of materials. We agreed that this step is often time-consuming, frustrating, and needs attention.