2005

The Use of People as Information Sources in Biblical Studies Research

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Recommended Citation

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L'utilisation des individus comme sources d'information dans les études bibliques

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Abstract: In this exploratory study, I examined the role that people play as informal information sources in biblical studies research. Using semi-structured interviews, I asked a group of seven biblical studies researchers specific questions about their information-seeking behaviour. The study demonstrated that the majority of the researchers regularly used people as information sources in their research. Sometimes they sought factual information from these sources but most frequently they sought affective information; they sought evaluation and affirmation from their colleagues regarding the direction of their research.

Résumé : Avec cette recherche exploratoire, j'ai examiné le rôle des individus en tant que sources informelles d'information de la recherche reliée aux études bibliques. Grâce à des entrevues semi-structurées, j'ai demandé à un groupe de sept chercheurs du domaine des études bibliques des questions spécifiques au sujet de leur comportement de recherche informationnel. L'étude a démontré que la majorité des chercheurs utilisent les individus comme sources régulières d'information pour leurs recherches. Parfois, les chercheurs désirent obtenir des informations factuelles à partir de ces sources, mais fréquemment ils sont à la recherche d'informations affectives. Les chercheurs tentent également d'obtenir une forme d'évaluation et d'affirmation de la part de leurs collègues concernant l'orientation de leur recherche.

The research problem

This study sought to determine what role, if any, people play as information sources in biblical studies research. In seeking to address this research question, I undertook a study of biblical studies researchers in the Atlantic Provinces to determine whether they use people as information sources and what role these people might play in the

information-seeking process. For the purposes of this study, the definition of biblical studies from the constitution of the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies (2000) was used. *Biblical studies* is the field of study that is concerned with the "critical investigation of the classical biblical literatures, together with other related literature." The discipline, although related, is distinct from religious studies. For the purposes of the present study, *people information sources* refers to human beings who provide information in an information-seeking context when approached directly, using face-to-face communication or through correspondence by traditional mail, electronic mail, telephone, or fax. The term does not include the presentation of seminar papers and so on unless there is dialogue or direct interaction between the parties.

Relevance of this study

The research process in biblical studies is complex, using information from archaeology, history, cultural anthropology, linguistics, and an ever-widening range of disciplines. The 2001 Society of Biblical Literature membership survey recognized thirty-nine research areas and an additional twenty sub-fields within the discipline of biblical studies. Consequently, in order to develop effective information resources and services for biblical studies researchers, it is increasingly necessary to have a good under-standing of the unique information needs and practices of these scholars. Many studies have suggested models for the information-seeking behaviour of humanities scholars that will have some application to biblical studies; however, there have been no studies that specifically focused on biblical studies as a discipline. Does the complexity of this field affect information-seeking behaviour? Additionally, in order for researchers to move beyond their traditional subject specialties in conducting research, they must either become conversant with a broader range of subject specialties or rely increasingly on other subject specialists. Again, little consideration has been given to the role of people as information sources generally in humanities research. Who are these information sources and how are they used in the biblical studies research process? This study seeks to explore these gaps in the literature.

Literature review

Information seeking of humanists

In the absence of studies on information seeking in biblical studies, it is necessary to consider the literature examining other disciplines, the

humanities being where biblical studies is usually situated. A few studies in religion should be noted. Brink (1995) examined information seeking in religion but did not consider information sources. One study of information seeking by Wicks (1999) found that the pastors studied used informal sources in care-giving and administrative activities. However, Wicks found that the use of informal sources decreased in preaching activities where biblical studies research would be undertaken. The relationship between the information behaviours of biblical studies academics and those of pastoral practitioners must still be explored.

Three notable reviews—Stone (1982), Watson-Boone (1994), and Wilson (2000)—surveyed the principal research on information seeking in the humanities, covering the period from 1970 to 2000. One significant conclusion Stone drew from her examination of the literature was that individual interpretations play a significant role in humanities research. "One consequence of this individualistic nature," Stone wrote, "is that collaborative efforts among humanists are less normal than in the sciences, and the notion of the invisible college, which has been explored more fully in the sciences, is less visible" (1982, 294). She made reference to a report by Fabian and Vierhaus (1978) that described the conclusions of a gathering of various humanities scholars to discuss the future of humanities research. In their report, they stated that "[t]o a large extent, humanistic research has always been individual research, research pursued by a single scholar, and this is likely to remain so in the foreseeable future" (550). Stone also cited the idea of the invisible college described by Crane (1972). Crane used a detailed questionnaire to explore how information is communicated and disseminated within scientific communities. Crane explored the role of informal communication and its impact on research, communication that she distinguished from formal, collaborative relationships. It is interesting that Crane understood her research as supporting an earlier study by Coser that concluded that "most intellectuals cannot produce their work in solitude...interaction with peers is necessary for the development of ideas" (1965, 3). It was Crane's intent to demonstrate that this informal exchange of information also takes place in the sciences.

Watson-Boone (1994) built upon Stone's review by presenting the development of research from 1982 to 1992. She revisited Stone's picture of the humanities scholar, noting particularly the characteristics of "working alone." Several studies described the materials used by

humanities scholars, notably Stern (1983), Culler (1985), and Broadus (1987). These studies used citation analysis and inter-library loan logs to determine the types and frequencies of use of research materials. Since these study techniques only uncovered formally cited works in completed studies, the results could not indicate whether people as informal information sources played a role in the information-seeking process. Watson-Boone (1994, 211) briefly noted a study that is a self-description and analysis of the information-seeking process followed by Stephen Nissenbaum to study the poem "The Night before Christmas". A closer examination of Nissenbaum's study itself reveals a description of the information sources used in his research, including, as his second source, a knowledgeable colleague's suggestion (1989, 206). Nissenbaum then went on to describe the exchange of ideas that were pivotal to the development of this research. Noteworthy, the interpersonal exchange occurred early in the research process, prior to a visit to the library, a point not likely to be uncovered since scholars rarely cite personal discussions in their research publications. Basker (1984) examining information gathering by British Philosophers concluded that 45% of those interviewed went to colleagues rather than the library as a starting point. In this study, librarians played limited roles, except for archivists and special collection librarians who might have been viewed as having a specialized knowledge of particular collections, and librarians with superior database searching skills that the scholars lacked. Sievert and Sievert (1989) examined the browsing activities of twenty-seven philosophers and determined that only three had formally collaborated on a research project. This study did not consider possible informal collaboration. Wiberley and Jones (1989) examined scholarly isolation in a study that also cited Stone's assertion that the literature states that humanities scholars work alone. They interviewed eleven humanities scholars and found that "all eleven were chosen for their year's fellowship based on projects that they conceived alone and were executed single-handedly" (639). However, Wiberley and Jones noted that two scholars made use of computers for e-mail correspondence (640). They also noted that bibliographies were considered a convenient but not essential tool for staying current, complementing "reading the literature itself and talking with other specialists" (642). In neither case, was an attempt made to follow up the role of informal collegial communication in information seeking. Of the studies Watson-Boone considered, seven were citation analyses, four were questionnaires, three were interviews, and two were personal reflections. Citation analyses, however, usually cannot identify informal information sources such as colleagues. Additionally,

as the Wiberley and Jones study suggests, even where interviews uncover the use of these sources, the assumptions of the researchers regarding information-seeking behaviours can inhibit exploration of the role of these sources.

In "Human Information Behavior" (2000), T.D. Wilson reviewed the literature in information studies that takes as its focus the user rather than the information system. Although his intention was to consider information seeking from the perspective of the human user, it is interesting to note that Wilson only alluded to the interaction with human sources in his initial definition of information behaviour, in which he included "face-to-face communication" (49).

Two other useful studies should be noted here. The first is Broadbent (1986), where questionnaires were used to discover how faculty would identify the library materials needed. *Word of mouth* accounted for 13.5% of the sources used. It is possible that some of the interactions included in the *other* category may also have been informal communications that were not identified as such by the researchers, who interpreted word of mouth as consisting only of face-to-face correspondence. This placed informal sources at fifth out of seven sources used. The researchers expected that more "mature" researchers would be more likely to utilize informal communication, such as "after dinner discussions, casual meetings with colleagues, and correspondence" (27). However, they discovered no significant variation in the use of formal and informal sources among faculty at different ranks. In the second study, Lonnquist (1990) explored the methods used by scholars to gather information. Interviews were used to collect data. Lonnquist concluded that informal information sources were valued when there was a need to obtain information quickly. Lonnquist also found that "if the research topic was very internationally oriented, the importance of an informal network increased especially abroad" (198).

People as information sources

Lonnquist (1990) found two specific reasons for the use of people as information sources: speed and, perhaps, remote access. Lonnquist presupposed that perceived expertise in an area was also a reason. Julien and Michels (2000) explored the use of personal information sources in information seeking. In their study, information source selection was

explored as the respondents attempted to solve problems that occurred in daily life. It was found that, in 45 of 88 interviews, participants turned first to personal sources of help for their questions (18). Julien and Michels wrote, "The apparent preference of information sources was direct personal contact. People talk to people when they face a problem or issue in their daily lives" (19). It is significant that respondents described both instrumental reasons (e.g., perceived expertise, speed) and affective reasons (e.g., developing social ties, enjoyable encounter) for their preference for personal contact. Although convenience may play a role in the choice of people as information sources, it is not necessarily central, as individuals can go to considerable effort to interact with people sources. The role an informal source plays in the information-seeking process may, therefore, be complex and may not be related only to instrumental information needs. This may be significant: If informal sources are used predominately in the early stages of information seeking, with its associated feelings of uncertainty (Kuhlthau 1993, 339), then informal sources may provide encouragement and assurance as well as instrumental information.

Anticipated findings

It was expected that it would be found that the literature relating to information sources used in the humanities underestimated the use of people as information sources and that biblical studies researchers made use of these information sources. Although the use of people as formal information sources was expected to be similar to that described by Stone and Watson-Boone, it was expected that informal sources would be found to be used much more frequently. As noted above, several studies, such as Nissenbaum (1989) and Wiberley and Jones (1989), demonstrated that the significance of people as information sources was assumed to be minimal and that the question of people as information sources was, therefore, not adequately explored. It was expected that Coser's hypothesis, as presented by Crane (1972, 141), that most researchers require interaction with their peers, would be further supported. It was further expected that people information sources would play an important role in the exploratory stages of the information-seeking process of biblical studies researchers engaged in solving research problems, as was suggested by Basker's study (1984) of information seeking by British philosophers.

Methodology

Theoretical framework

This study assumed a constructivist paradigm; in other words, it was assumed that individuals are engaged in a continual process of interpreting their experiences and constructing personal knowledge. Schwandt (1994) described the research process, in a constructivist manner, as follows: "The act of inquiry begins with the issues and/or concerns of participants and unfolds through a "dialectic" of iteration, critique, reiteration, reanalysis, and so on that leads eventually to a joint (among inquirer and respondents) construction of a case (i.e. findings or outcomes)" (128). While not specifically using the timeline-interview methodology associated with Dervin's (1992) sense making, several characteristics of the sense-making approach informed this study (63–67). Information was regarded as subjective and as not existing apart from human behaviour. Information seeking, therefore, must be studied from the perspective of the actor rather than of the observer, and information seeking must be viewed as a process of behaviours. Dervin asserts that we bring to a problem a set of internal intellectual, emotional, and psychological "filters" that determine how we perceive, evaluate, and respond to that problem. Therefore, how we define a problem and determine a course of action to solve that problem is subjective and personal. Dervin also maintains that people exist in a context that has social and physical dimensions and that these factors affect their perceptions of problems and appropriate solutions.

Research design

Since no research has been conducted on information-seeking behaviour in biblical studies and little has been done on the use of people as sources in humanities research in general, this study was exploratory. The majority of studies reviewed were quantitative in nature, seeking to identify statistical patterns in the data gathered. Data were gathered using questionnaires and surveys, and the research studies sought to obtain as large a sample of data as possible. This approach was successful in identifying sources used, types of sources used, frequency of use, and means of access, and in answering related questions. However, my study sought to ask questions of a different sort: How do researchers define their research problem? How do they determine appropriate tools and resources? and How do they use those tools to resolve their research problem? Answering these questions requires a greater depth of description than can be provided by a survey.

For this reason, this study was qualitative and used a series of informal, semi-structured questions, as described by Ellis (1993) in his portrayal of the grounded-theory approach. Ellis included an interview guide of twenty-seven questions to be used for a study of information seeking in an academic context (475). Ellis' guide was adapted for this study. The responses to the questions were coded using the scheme set out below.

Selection and description of participants

Several criteria were used to select the researchers to be interviewed. The first was that candidates must reside in the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, or Prince Edward Island. This criterion was intended to limit interviewing to a manageable geographic region. The second was that candidates possess an earned doctorate in biblical studies. This qualification was intended to ensure that the candidates who were chosen had attained expertise in this field and had had the opportunity to refine their research skills through academic writing and publishing. The third was that candidates must be active in research and teaching in biblical studies on a regular and consistent basis, and accordingly, it was assumed that they were engaged in this field as a vocation.

Six institutions in the Atlantic region that offered formal instruction in biblical studies were identified. In all, 14 instructors who taught in the area of biblical studies were employed at these institutions . Among the instructors in this group, 9 possessed earned doctorates in biblical studies. Additional potential candidates were identified using the Society of Biblical Literature member directory, university catalogues, and referrals. These candidates were in religious studies and classics departments at six universities. Candidates with education in religious studies, rather than biblical studies, or candidates who were teaching primarily in the area of religious studies were excluded. In total, there were 12 potential candidates. One potential candidate was eliminated due to a conflict of interest.

Interviewing all the potential candidates would be the ideal. Gay (1996) proposed that, for "smaller populations, $N < 100$, there is little point in sampling. Survey the entire population" (125). However, not all potential candidates were willing to participate or were able to meet with the interviewer within the given time-frame. After several attempts to contact potential candidates, I was able to identify seven candidates willing to be interviewed within the necessary time-frame. This raised the concern of

whether there would be an adequate number of interviews for analysis. Leedy (1997, 210) discusses three factors to be considered when determining sample size: the degree of precision between the sample and general population, the variability of the population, and the sampling method to be used. The size of the pool of potential candidates was limited in the geographical area studied (Canadian Atlantic provinces). Seven participants represented a 64% response rate and a majority of the candidates. The selection criteria ensured that the group was largely homogeneous as to their occupation, research interest, and educational background. Prior to the interviews, the educational attainment of the respondents was confirmed using the UMI digital dissertations database and the British thesis index. Any potentially relevant variations within this group—such as age, gender, experience, and type of institution—seemed to be represented in the group being considered, suggesting that a good cross-section had been achieved. The respondents represented four institutions in Atlantic Canada; two were theological institutions and two were universities. Five of these candidates were tenured faculty and two were untenured. Two were women and five were men. Three were new PhDs (within the past 10 years), while the remaining participants had significantly more experience. I was confident that my sample fairly represented the population of biblical studies researchers in Atlantic Canada. Additionally, in a study of physicians, Duggan (2000) found that a sample of seven respondents provided sufficient data for analysis. My study was similar to Duggan's in terms of the type of information sought and the use of interviews as a data-collection method.

There were identifiable patterns in the educational backgrounds of these respondents. Five had an academic bachelor's degree in the humanities and two had an undergraduate professional ministerial degree. Six of the seven respondents had completed a graduate academic degree in the humanities in the areas of religion, the Bible, and/or theology; four had completed graduate professional ministerial studies; and one had a second academic master's. The respondents all had doctoral degrees in biblical studies.

All the research projects being conducted by these respondents were qualitative in nature. Only one research project involved students as well as faculty, while the remainder were directed to academics and clergy. A primary role of the research projects for all respondents seems to have been to instruct and to serve a cognitive goal. One study also was

concerned to address affective issues. Another intended not only to educate but also to motivate the recipients towards a particular change of behaviour. All the respondents indicated a desire that their research be practical and applied. Most of the participants intended to produce a journal article, book chapter, or book. In one case, there was also a plan to apply the research directly in a classroom setting. There was a significant degree of uniformity in the data collected. In all of these situations, the research problems grew out of a long-term interest in the subject matter, which often made it difficult to rigidly define the research process. Many times, research was built on earlier projects and borrowed from the conclusions of those earlier projects.

Data analysis

Each interview was examined and a descriptive statement was composed that outlined all the steps taken in the same order as that of the respondent's description of them. Each statement was analysed and key terms and phrases, descriptive of each step's activities, were identified. The activities were listed in chronological order and mapped onto a descriptive term from the process steps used by Ellis (1993): starting, surveying, chaining, selection and sifting, monitoring, and assembly and dissemination (483).

Results

All the researchers began with the identification of a research problem. Four of the researchers identified the research problem themselves, usually through some earlier research on a related topic. Frequently, the research projects were problems that had been identified previously and the researchers had not had the opportunity to pursue the projects until now. This may suggest that the researchers had devoted some degree of thought to framing the research projects prior to formally engaging in them. In the case of three researchers, the research problem was posed by an external source. In one case, the research problem arose from a thesis examiner, who had challenged the researcher to pursue the implications of a particular problem raised by the thesis, an area that the researcher had not previously recognized. In the remaining two cases, the research project was initiated in response to editors' requests that the researcher write a monograph on a particular topic.

Significantly, in the respondents' descriptions of their respective research processes, only three of the seven mentioned going to individuals for assistance at any point in the process. One described consulting colleagues early on for help in clarifying the research problem. This activity happened in the "starting" phase of the research process. A second discussed the research problem with a colleague after reviewing secondary sources. This discussion, which occurred in a late stage of the process of "monitoring" the literature for new materials, was a prelude to revising the research problem. The third respondent consulted a knowledgeable colleague in the process of gathering useful secondary sources, an intermediate step in the process of "chaining"—that is, seeking references to good materials. The data to this point suggested only limited use of people as information sources, with no consistent patterns as to when and how people were consulted.

The respondents were then asked directly to recount whether they had spoken to or corresponded with any one about this research project. They were asked to focus on individuals who provided some sort of information or assistance with the research process. Six of the seven described consulting specific people as information sources, having together contacted a total of 22 different people. One researcher communicated with 2 people, two researchers with 3 people, two with 4 people, and one with 6 people, for a median of 4 people per researcher using interpersonal sources. There was a significant discrepancy between the number of people sources cited here and in response to the earlier question, "Could you describe your information-seeking process?" The discrepancy suggests that, although they may have used these sources frequently, most respondents did not consider people to be true information sources. This was most strongly illustrated by one respondent. When asked, "Could you describe the process of gathering information for your research project from the first step to final reporting," this individual did not report a single use of a person. However, when then asked specifically if she or he had spoken to or corresponded with anyone about the project, the respondent identified 6 people information sources!

Sometimes individual people sources could be classified into more than one category (e.g., colleague, instructor, librarian, friend, student, knowledgeable stranger, or spouse). In such cases, the primary category or role was selected. Participants in this study turned most frequently to colleagues ($n = 10$ of 22 interpersonal sources). Former instructors were contacted four times, while students were approached twice. Friends were

consulted twice and a knowledgeable stranger once. The respondents conferred with librarians three times. Spousal contacts were not reported. However, one respondent, after the interview was over, admitted that her or his spouse was frequently consulted in general about issues of argument flow and clarity, as well as occasionally about theology.

The respondents were asked to describe their encounters with inter-personal information sources. They described 22 encounters, of which only 6 were in formal settings; 16 were in informal contexts. While half of these informal contexts ($n = 8$) involved meetings arranged to discuss the research problem, they were considered to be casual encounters, such as meeting over lunch to chat about the project. Four encounters were informal, spontaneous meetings, such as running into someone in the corridor or "popping in" to someone's office with a question.

The means of communication chosen by respondents varied. In five cases, a person was contacted more than once about the same project. One respondent described contacting a person by e-mail and then arranging an appropriate time for a phone call. Another situation involved follow-up by e-mail of a face-to-face encounter. In cases such as this, the primary information-sharing means of communication was selected for analysis. Of the 22 encounters, 15 (68%) were face-to-face meetings, 5 (23%) were by e-mail, and 2 (9%) were by telephone.

Participants had varied expectations of their interpersonal sources. Of the 22 encounters, 8 were described as providing specific factual information. These included four queries seeking citations to print sources, one query looking for specific help with a research problem, one query addressed to a librarian for assistance locating materials, one request seeking assistance in using technology, and interestingly enough, one query looking for names of expert people in the field. In 14 of the 22 encounters, the reason for seeking out an individual was to obtain some sort of feedback, affirmation, or confirmation regarding the need for and direction of the research. These respondents did not appear to consider a need for confirmation as a sign of weakness. One respondent was very frank in describing the importance of this kind of information. Despite the reality that negative feedback can be, as the respondent described it, "personally crushing," the respondent felt that it was essential for improving the quality of the work. There was a real sense of the need for the wider community to be part of this process. It is clear that an important reason why these biblical studies researchers sought out people sources was to gain affirmation and confirmation.

This may have been the reason many of these respondents did not recognize these people as information sources. The motive for talking with others was to obtain opinions and feedback, rather than factual information. In order to situate this information within the context of regular practices, the respondents were asked, "Is this type of informal communication typical of your research and has your practice changed?" Four stated that it was typical for them to consult people in the course of their research. Of these four, two were very clear that they believed this was both valuable and necessary and that they specifically sought out others. Responses from the three participants who identified themselves as not usually using informal communication were interesting. Even though she or he had already had already described a very well-established network of contacts, one replied, "In my experience I would say no." Another respondent stated, "I guess I've never really thought about how much I do that one way or another." Upon further reflection, this respondent decided regular informal communication with other research-ers did happen, though without conscious thought. "I need to discuss this research with others," she or he said. The last respondent initially stated that she or he did not seek informal communication about her or his research. After some elaboration, this respondent changed her or his mind and stated, "So, I guess, yes, there continues to be an interactive element." Overall, consultation with interpersonal sources was evident in the responses ($n = 4$ direct responses; $n = 2$ after reflection) and actions ($n = 1$) of all seven participants. The remaining questions sought to determine whether respondents viewed their informal communication practices as changed or changing, and, if so, why they thought that these changes were occurring. Five respondents indicated that their practice had changed. Of these five respondents, four suggested reasons for the change. All four described an increase in their use of people sources as being related to their increasing self-confidence as researchers. Surprisingly, as one might expect self-confidence to grow with research experience, there was little correlation in the data between the experience of the respondents and their use of people as sources.

Participants were given an opportunity to comment on anything else they thought might be relevant to the study. Only two comments were given. Both related to librarians, perhaps because respondents had expected more questions in this area, given my self-identified role as an academic librarian. One participant commented on the role the librarian played in teaching information technology skills for research—this was seen as a valuable and appreciated service. The other respondent noted that

librarians seldom played a significant role because of the perception that they were often unfamiliar with the subject area and could offer little assistance with research apart from providing inter-library loan services.

The data present an emerging picture of the use of people as information sources by biblical studies researchers. The participants in this study had homogenous educational backgrounds rooted in the humanities. Their research projects were qualitative in nature, with the results directed to academic or clergy audiences. The projects all had cognitive goals, but affective and behavioural goals were also cited in two cases. The participants were experts (five cases) or very familiar (two cases) with their research area. The data demonstrated that people sources were frequently consulted in information seeking, usually in informal settings (22 times in six projects). The respondents used face-to-face communication in 68% ($n = 15$) of the encounters and e-mail ($n = 5$; 23%) and telephone ($n = 2$; 9%) in the rest. Confirmation and affirmation was named as the most common reason for seeking out people sources. Although most respondents felt that their use of people sources had increased with experience, there was no evidence in the data that level of experience was directly related to the frequency of use of people sources.

Conclusion

With six out of seven respondents using interpersonal sources in their most recent study and six out of the seven describing the use of people as information sources as a regular or frequent practice, it is clear that biblical studies scholars regularly use people as information sources in conducting their research. No significant variations appeared in the data in use of these sources based on experience of the researcher, educational background, intended audience of the research or format of reports. However, most respondents felt they were using people sources increasingly as they become more self-confident as researchers. People were not readily identified as information sources by participants until they were directly and specifically asked if they consulted people in their research process. The primary need being met by human information sources was affective in nature. Respondents sought opinions and feedback from colleagues concerning the direction and viability of their research projects. They reported that this helped them to build confidence in their research projects and motivation to continue.

It was suggested that published literature relating to information sources used in the humanities may underestimate the use of people as information sources and that biblical studies researchers may make use of interpersonal information sources. The data collected in this study suggest that this may be the case for biblical studies researchers. It seems that people are not considered to be information sources even when, upon more careful examination, they function in this way. Stone's (1982) and Watson-Boone's (1994) finding that there is little formal collaboration in humanities research was supported by my study in respect to biblical studies researchers. However, the results of my study suggest that informal interaction, which can be easily overlooked, is indeed a source of information during the research process. In earlier studies, human sources were missed because they were not specifically asked about. In my study, when respondents were asked generally about their information-seeking processes, most did not identify people as sources. However, when more direct and specific questions were asked, the results were very different, with most respondents naming interpersonal sources. This suggests that researchers need to use methods such as direct and specific questions to effectively explore the use of interpersonal sources in scholarly communication in the humanities.

As suggested by the studies by Basker (1984) and Curley (1989), I had anticipated that people information sources would play an important role in the early stages of the information-seeking process of biblical studies researchers engaged in solving a research problem. However, it was found that there was only minimal use of people sources in the initial stages of the projects. People sources were most frequently consulted after considerable research had already been completed. They were used to verify work already completed in anticipation of the final phases of assembly and dissemination.

My findings were consistent with those of Broadbent (1986), who found little variation in the use of formal and informal sources by experienced and inexperienced researchers.

The findings of this exploratory study suggest several areas for further exploration. The role played by opinions and feedback from colleagues in the formulation and reformulation of research problems and hypotheses merits deeper examination. I did not attempt to gather names of interpersonal sources; however, it may be valuable to study patterns, if any, of relations and networks of informal, people-source use. It would be

interesting to look more closely at the selection and effectiveness of human information sources. How do biblical studies researchers select appropriate interpersonal sources? How do they evaluate the responses they receive? Should interpersonal sources be acknowledged in scholarly communication? If so, could such acknowledgements provide data that would enable researchers to track the use of informal people sources?

Although not immediately apparent, it seems that biblical studies researchers do participate in an informal, invisible college. This has implications for library services. Libraries can and should play a role in connecting researchers to others with relevant expertise. For example, perhaps librarians could assist in developing new research tools for biblical studies scholars, like the Biblical Archaeology society's now defunct *Who's Who in Biblical Studies and Archaeology*, or in creating digital versions of tools similar to those proposed but never implemented by Saghir Iqbal (2001). Attendance at discipline-specific conferences would provide an opportunity for subject librarians to become familiar with researchers in the field. If interpersonal information sources play a significant role in information seeking in biblical studies, librarians working in this area must become familiar with these human as well as with the print and digital sources.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix 1: Interview questions

How biblical studies researchers find their answers: The use of personal information sources in information seeking

Name:

Institution:

1. Could you please describe your educational background especially noting education that may have been outside the formal discipline of biblical studies?

2. Could you tell me about a research project on which you are currently or recently working?

3. Have you done considerable research in this area or is this a new research area for you?

4. Could you describe the process of gathering information for your research from the first step to the final reporting of your finding? (If you have not completed your research, could you describe the remaining steps as you foresee them?)

5. Could you tell me about anyone with whom you have spoken/ corresponded about this research project? (You need not mention names or personal information. This question intends to determine the role the individual plays: librarian, fellow faculty member, member

of another faculty within same institution, faculty member at another institution, etc.)

6. Could you describe the encounter with them? (Means of communication, setting)

7. Could you describe your reasons for discussing this project with them and how did this interaction help or hinder your research?

8. Is this type of informal communication typical of your research and has your practice changed?

9. Why do you believe it has or hasn't changed?

10. What else could you tell me about the role that personal contacts play in your research in general?