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Abstract

This paper describes the unique characteristics of the religious clergy community. It assesses the amount of information and behavior research available on this population. It provides a clear description of the central research theme(s) emerging from the review of the literature. It examines selected theory used currently as a lens to examine the religious clergy population, and gaps about this population are revealed. The theory of Library Anxiety was discussed to address a specific gap in information behavior and provide a useful lens towards new research aimed at the population of religious clergy in North America.

KEYWORDS: Clergy, Cleric

The Information Behavior of Religious Clergy in North America

Religious clergy consists of a population of individuals vastly spread across the nation serving in a multitude of professional capacities. According to the United States Department of Labor, a cleric's job involves overseeing religious liturgies and related tasks, such as offering counseling and advice to their congregations towards achieving outcomes aligned to one's religious confession, denomination, or order (Department of Labor Statistics, 2008). As it relates, clerics are individually licensed and authorized by both religious and governmental officials.

Clerics consist of many titles including a priest, reverend, rabbi, bishop, curate, preacher, chaplain, rector, vicar, and others. On the other hand, such titles as a brother, Christian Science healer, practitioner, reader, deacon, elder, gospel worker, nun, Bible teacher, religion teacher, and missionary are not considered among the population. As an exception, however, theologians are often seen holding both the position of cleric and one who studies religion.

Rationale

Data relevant to the religious clergy is an essential acquirement to the knowledge bank on information behavior within the field of Library and Information Science. Such research can aid in a professional's ability to create better systems to allow for adequate public information access, retrieval, and application. Due to limited research on this population, LIS professionals do not have the potential to access wide varieties of tacit and explicit knowledge concerning the IB of this demographic. Thus, such limitations result in gaps in the available literature.

Population

According to a Religious Landscape Study provided by the *Pew Research Center*, US religions are comprising of 70.6% Christian, 5.9% non-Christian, 22.8% unaffiliated, and .6% who do not know (Pew Research Center, 2019). In terms of gender, men make up the most significant population of religious clergy. Data USA states that in 2016 there were 344,246 male clergies and 85,483 who reported female (Data USA, 2019). White is the most common race and ethnicity of the clergy, with Black or African-American and Asians resulting in second and third place, respectively (Data USA, 2019).

The Department of Labor Statistics (2008) reports on the number of industries with the highest levels of religious clergy employed, including, 1) religious organizations, 2) general medical and surgical hospitals, 3) home health care services, 4) nursing care facilities and 5) elementary and secondary schools (Department of Labor Statistics, 2008). Industries with the highest concentration of employment include 1) religious organizations, 2) home health care services, 3) general medical and surgical hospitals, 4) community food and housing, and emergency and 5) other relief services, and specialty hospitals (Department of Labor Statistics, 2008). Metropolitan areas with the highest employment level in this occupation, listed in order of rank include 1) New York-Jersey City-White Plains NY-NJ, 2) Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro OR-WA and 3) Chicago-Naperville-Arlington Heights IL (Department of Labor Statistics, 2008).

Methods

Several methods were used to assess the current research available on the religious clergy population. A literature review was conducted exclusively from the Library and Information Science (LIS) digital repositories and other field databases. From this survey, two articles were selected to examine the information behavior of this population carefully. Two theories contained in the articles were selected for a discussion to evaluate their effectiveness as a theoretical framework for the religious clergy population. Qualitative methods were then applied involving both digital correspondence and an open forum conducted after a class presentation to discuss gaps in the research.

Literature Review

Many themes related to the religious clergy population emerge from the review of the literature. Below is a chart of the most common themes found.

EMERGING THEMES FROM THE LITERATURE	
Women Clergy	African-American Clergy
Open Access	Human
Behavioral Sciences	Christianity
Political Activity	Theology
Adulthood	Clergy and Laity
Calling	Catholics
Church of England	Sociology
Spiritual Leaders	Church and Sense
Civil Rights Activists	Pope
Training	Pastoral Counseling
Priests	Conduct
Non-Fiction	Attitude (Psychology)
Death	John Paul
Bishops	Conferences
Episcopal Church	Child Sex Abuse
Gay Clergy	Catholic Clergy
Ordination of Women	Pedophilia
Clergy Office	Priest Sexual Behavior

(Peyton, 2019)

Two articles were selected from among these themes. The first selected article, The information-seeking behavior of pastoral clergy: A study of the interaction of their work worlds and work roles are a study that seeks to answer, “whether the information-seeking behavior of pastoral clergy is governed by the interaction of their work worlds and work roles” (Wicks, 1999, p. 205). Demographically, this experiment was conducted among Christian religious clergy in Canada. The hypothesis of this research suggests that clergy seeks information in exclusivity “when world and role are significantly dependent upon each other,” and in inclusivity, “when world and role are less dependent upon each other” (Wicks, 1999, p. 205).

This study involves the use of qualitative measures, including literature reviews, surveys, questionnaires, structured interviews, and qualitative techniques to analyze the data. Such data were obtained from the clergy of six different denominations, including Roman Catholic, United Church of Canada, Anglican Church of Canada, Presbyterian Church, Baptist churches, and Pentecostal churches. This experiment was grounded in sense-making, social network, and role theory.

The second article, The information behavior of catholic women discerning a vocation to

religious life is a study that seeks “to understand how women seek out and retrieve information about religious life” (Hickey, 2017, p. 2). Sense-making was used as both a method and theory involving interviews, surveys, and questionnaires among 129 participants. Participants were between the ages of eighteen to sixty-one, various race and culture, geographically dispersed and with different educational backgrounds. This experiment was grounded in sense-making theory.

Theoretical Framework

Two theories were extrapolated from among these two selected articles as a lens to decipher the information behavior of two related populations, the religious clergy, and Catholic women clergy. They include social network and sensemaking theory. The use of social network and sense-making theory were carefully examined in its use among this existing research.

A social network is another way to describe the co-existence of two or more individuals who are joined dependently or interdependently of each other. These networks may include librarians, library branches, families, employees, choirs, troops, organizations, communities, political parties, and countless other groups. The term social network came into fruition during the digital age of the internet, and “focuses on the role of social relationships in transmitting information, channeling personal or media influence, and enabling attitudinal or behavioral change” (Rossler, Hoffner, & Zoonen, 2017, p. 1).

Relatedly, social network theory is primarily used within the context of analyzing social networks. According to social network theory, a social network consists of actors, more specifically, a set of nodes which are connected through relationship (Yang, Keller, & Zheng, 2016, p. 5). These relationships are also described as “ties, links, arcs, or edges” (Yang, Keller, & Zheng, 2016, p. 5). One attractive characteristic of a node is the ability to apply its description to any group or calculative context. For example, when using two data sets, which is the minimum needed when using social network analysis, the first data set would consist of the actors, the subjects being observed. The second data set would consist of what defines the relationships between the actors. For instance, if the first data set consists of the names of each person in a scout troop, the second data set would be used to define the relationship between the data set (i.e., male/female, the origin of birth, religion, etc.).

Analyzing human behavior amid a social paradigm is how the use of social network analysis is applied. Although nodes do not have to represent people, “sociologists often take the individual as the node, focusing on the formation of friendship, liking, trust, and support between different individuals” (Yang, Keller, & Zheng, 2016, p. 8). An example of different nodal use could include exploring the relationship between Facebook accounts and how many likes or friends a specific population has.

When we consider the use of social network analysis among the religious clergy population, there are many types of formulations one can experiment with. For example, one can use religious clergy within the first data set, and social media in the second, and the link connecting the two nodes could be established profile accounts. From the resultant data, one can observe one’s tie of dependency or independence with social media. Such use of data is an example of the most straightforward application of social network analysis called a “binary network” (Yang, Keller, & Zheng, 2016, p. 8). A binary network is used to distinguish whether a tie does or does not exist between a pair of actors.

Sense-making theory, in contrast, involves the concepts of “time, space, horizon, gap, bridge, movement, power, constancy, and change” (“What Methodology Does to Theory: Sense-Making Methodology as Exemplar,” 2005, p. 27). Sense-making is interested in the psychological correlations between how one makes sense of their environment and how one responds when placed under specific scenarios. Such theory suggests that everyone operates from a paradigm when responding to societal conditions. Sense-making suggests that mental paradigms are formed because of conditioning based upon one’s experience. Thus, the ways that people look for or offer knowledge vary on specific social conditions.

Furthermore, that an individual’s social responses are a result of “placing stimuli into some kind of framework,” which helps one to “comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate, and predict” (Snook, Nohria, & Khurana, 2011, p. 4) Through the lens of sense-making theory, one can use data to understand better the information behaviors of how one responds while actively in social participation. By using stimuli related to achieving victory and failure, the sense-making theory can analyze one’s thought process when making decisions.

Overall, the sense-making theory involves how “all dimensions of one’s body, mind, heart, and spirit intersect, affecting positioning towards and response to the information” (Hickey, 2017, p. 5). When examining the population of Catholic women, the sense-making theory allows them to “create a narrative that focuses on humans moving through time and space which begins with the experience and knowledge” of the population and not the researcher (Hickey, 2017, p. 5). Thus, first-hand accounts of one’s experience take precedence over one’s scientific judgment.

Discussion

Religious clergy is known to display closed information-seeking behavior and often possess their private book collection sometimes consisting of various Bible translations, Strong's concordance, and other denominationally-based spiritually-related texts. Religious clergy tends to seek information using personal meditative techniques. Issues on privacy rights are always a significant consideration when examining how clergy publicly and privately seek information. Reclusiveness is understandable since so much in the media today involves the subject of religious clergy who are often defending their character against widely spread accusations involving sex scandal, child abuse, pornography, fraud, lavish lifestyles, and infidelity.

The use of social network analysis within the field of Library and Information Science can be beneficial. As a lens, it can be used to help analyze the collaborative involvement of clergy towards a productive assessment of their information behavior needs and habits. It can also be used to examine the social value and frequency that this population places upon LIS services and technology use.

Using sensemaking theory is also highly effective, particularly in determining the motivations behind the choices that the clergy makes in using and deciphering information. Through examining clergy over the course of time and space, patterns are developed towards the formation of discernment allowing for data to be recorded. Such data then gives way to new ideas of dealing with complex thinking and problem-solving.

The religious clergy community displays unique characteristics, and much is still to be known about their information behavior. Through assessment, it is concluded that there is little research

available on this subject in both LIS and other field archives. Further research is needed toward acquiring data for this population. Currently, there are a handful of peer-reviewed journals that share the research mission related to this population. Two of these include *Advances in the Study of Information and Religion* and *The Journal of Religious & Theological Information*. From time to time, they both feature research articles on religious clergy related to information behavior.

Limitations of These Studies

Although research is readily available on various themes related to the information-seeking behavior of religious clergies, such as how one seeks information related to sermon creation, there is still much research to be gained. Such gaps cause scholars to question the information-seeking behavior of clergy when it comes to addressing other topics related to mental health, domestic life, parenting, and politics. In 2014, *The Journal of Religion and Health* published an article exposing the gaps in determining how prepared clergy and healthcare providers are in addressing the mental health needs of returning service members.

The chart below displays informational gaps that directly affect current statistical data on the religious clergy population. For example, current research does not take into consideration the number of volunteer clergy who donate their time in serving a particular church or order but instead chooses to make their living in a field outside of religion. Instead, current reporting data on this population is provided solely on the number of religious clergies who are tax-based employees, and those who report their salaries to the IRS. Such data does not provide conclusive evidence of the existence of a diversified population of religious clergy.

GAPS EXPLORED IN TODAY'S LITERATURE	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is a non-reporting gap on the number of volunteers and donation-based clergy currently holding cleric positions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is a lack of information concerning the information-seeking behavior related to ordination practices within diverse denominations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is a gap related to the amount of available research on the information-seeking behavior of clergy within urban planted storefront denominations.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is an information studies' gap on the subject of how privacy affects the personal information-seeking behaviors of clergy in public

- There is a gap in the lack of research related to information behavior practices of Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and other world faith clergy, as well as clergy who practice unaffiliated religions

(Peyton, 2019)

One significant gap that has not been explored in the literature involves determining the amount of anxiety that religious clergy experience when using the library. According to the theory, Library Anxiety is described as a lack of power “due to an inability to navigate the library and a feeling of inferiority when they compared their library skills to those of others” (Fisher, McKechnie, & Erdelez, 2005, p. 235). Ultimately, this theory focuses on individuals who have become lost because they do not know how to begin their “reference research and are unable to find the materials they needed in the library” (Fisher, McKechnie, & Erdelez, 2005, pp. 235).

Over the years, the theory of library anxiety has been expounded upon and has “benefitted from a number of contributions” (Fisher, McKechnie, & Erdelez, 2005, p. 236). One of which is the development of the Library Anxiety Scale. It was created to “quantify feelings about the library” (Fisher, McKechnie, & Erdelez, 2005, p. 236). It is marked by five levels, including “barriers with staff, affective barriers, comfort with the library, knowledge of the library, and mechanical barriers” (Fisher, McKechnie, & Erdelez, 2005, p. 236). Later, the Library Anxiety scale was changed to the Multidimensional Library Anxiety Scale and was expanded to include categories of “gender, online source preferences, and use of off-campus information resources” (Fisher, McKechnie, & Erdelez, 2005, pp. 235-237). One exciting inclusion of this theory is the categorical use of stereotype threat, which “is the fear of being seen as reinforcing a negative stereotype” (Fisher, McKechnie, & Erdelez, 2005, p. 238). When examining religious clergy, consideration of stereotype threat as a factor can be useful when examining the effects of the media upon the information behavior of religious clergy.

Through the lens of the Library Anxiety theory, one can apply research findings to examine both the public and private behavior of religious clergy, particularly, towards obtaining data as to the causes that prevent one from seeking information in a public library setting. Themes to consider can include how anxiety inhibits clergy from utilizing the library for personal enjoyment or research --- as well as, public-related inhibitions towards fulfilling one’s work obligations (sermon and counseling preparation).

RESULTS

The results from the literature survey produced many research articles from across the discipline on several different themes. Listed in the chart below are the names of each journal and the current amount of article hits resulting from the use of the keywords clergy, cleric, and other clergies-related terms.

RESEARCH ACROSS THE DISCIPLINE			
Economist	918	American Journal of Public Health	21
Pastoral Psychology	899	Social Work	13
U.S. News and World Reports	529	Educational Gerontology	10
Journal of Education	425	Journal of Counseling and Development	7
Human Development	359	Psychology Today	7
Mental Health Religion and Culture	347	Adolescence	5
Social Forces	116	Bioscience	5
Journal of Mental Health Counseling	110	Journal of Religious and Theological Info	4
Family Relations	72	Advances in the Study of Information and Religion	3
Psychological Reports	30	Baptist Quarterly	1
Child Abuse and Neglect	26	Journal of Communication and Religion	1
Journal of Child Sexual Abuse	26	American Journal of Psychiatry	1

(Peyton, 2019)

On the other hand, when using only Library and Information Science databases, a reduced amount of empirical and theoretical studies resulted when entering the term ‘clergy’ alongside the term ‘information behavior.’ Among the results, very few overlapping themes appeared from the available research.

RESEARCH IN LIS			
Library Journal	513	Journal of Information Science	1
Theological Librarianship	57	Canadian Journal of Information Science	1
Journal of Documentation	4	Librarian and Information Science Research	1
The Australian Library Journal	1		

(Peyton, 2019)

Conclusions and Future Study

There were many gaps expressed in the literature that inhibits one from learning about this population, as well as assisting. However, places like the Center for the Study of Information and Religion is making considerable efforts to support research studies. Including, efforts “1) to investigate the importance of information in the religious world, 2) to understand the relationship between the

Running head: THE INFORMATION BEHAVIOR

information-seeking behavior of clergy and the body of knowledge that exists to serve their information needs, and 3) to advance our understanding of the role of information in religious practice” (Kent State University, 2019).

Through the scholarly use of Library Anxiety theory, a study based on the information behavior of religious clergy and Library Anxiety could provide some foundational data on how this population perceives public library use. The data gained could aid in addressing other gaps in the literature, as well as provide a useful lens towards building future research aimed towards the population of religious clergy in North America.