

Life in a Small World: Applicability of Gratification Theory to Information-Seeking Behavior

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This research reports a study in which gratification theory (essentially, that certain populations live in an environment in which the emphasis is on immediate gratifications and satisfaction of needs) was applied to an information-seeking behavior of a lower-class population. The focus of the study was an investigation of the information-seeking behaviors of a lower-working class population. Respondents were janitorial workers at a southern university. Results show that, although members of this lower-working class population expressed a number of areas in which they needed information (e.g., employment, everyday coping advice, etc.), they were not active seekers of information outside of their most familiar social milieu. The findings indicate that a possible explanation for this was the perception that outside sources were not capable of responding to their concern. Thus, there was little motivation in exploring the relevance of these sources. Moreover, items of most interest to them were those things that were accessible, had a firm footing in everyday reality, and responded to some immediate, practical concern.

Introduction

A primary purpose of this study is to investigate why some members of our society do not benefit from sources of information that could be helpful to them. It also attempts to determine whether gratification theory sheds light on this phenomenon, especially as it applies to the problem of why information is not as effective as we think it should be in assisting members of our society who could benefit from it. The value of such an inquiry lies in its identification of theoretical propositions pertaining to the poor and their concept of reality. In this sense, the underlying hypothesis is that they live in a social world in which the emphasis is on immediate gratifications and satisfaction of needs (Schneider & Lysgaard, 1953, p. 142; Miller & Riessman, 1961, p. 87; McLeod & Becker, 1974, p. 138). The relevance

of a theoretical approach to gratification and information needs might lie in its usefulness in explaining why a disadvantaged person would fail to invest time, effort, or interest in a future endeavor that could address a problematic situation.¹

Conceptual Framework

Although deeply embedded and scattered throughout the social stratification literature, a number of propositional statements that comprise gratification theory have been used to guide research about poor people and their social world. A review of this literature reveals six theoretical propositions about poor people, their view of social reality, and ways in which they satisfy their intellectual, social, and physical needs. The *first* proposition is that, because lower class persons have a more narrow and local view of the world, information that originates outside of their social world is not of great interest to them. The *second* is that poor people have a lower expectation of their chances to succeed in unfamiliar endeavors and as a result, they do not attempt new opportunities. If success does occur, it is due to chance, fate, or luck. The *third* proposition pertains to ways in which people of the lower class become informed about noteworthy events occurring in their social milieu, which is primarily through people much like themselves. The *fourth* deals with time horizons and is perhaps the heart of the theory. That is, lower class people have a time budget system different from the middle class. For instance, their view of time is the immediate present and the very recent past. The *fifth* proposition focuses on the social world of poor people, which they view as very local, concrete, unpredictable, and often hostile. The *final* proposition is that the mass media, particularly television, is viewed as a medium of escape, stimulation, and fantasy.

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¹For an excellent discussion regarding why some people don't use available information, see Dervin's (1976, 1977) sense-making approach.

Proposition 1: Life in a Small World²

In support of the proposition that people of the lower social class generally experience a more restricted view of the world, Cooley (1956, p.1) notes that poor people experience a lack of contact with "inspiring personalities" and have a more limited outlook on the world. Subsequently, they are not as exposed as other groups to opportunities that could lead to occupational mobility. On the other hand, Garfinkle (1964, p. 225) observes that a small worldview leads to a great familiarity with the everyday events that provide a common, taken-for-granted sense of reality. Dervin and Greenberg (1972, p. 197) argue that, although this limited worldview leads to a closed system, there is a functional benefit to its members.

Researchers (Bogart, 1950–1951, p. 772; Dervin & Greenberg, 1972, p. 197; Park, 1952, p. 97; Rainwater, 1970, p. 146–147) note that a common characteristic about the social world of low income people is a strong emphasis on family and kin relationships that defines standards of behavior and appropriate approaches to future goal setting. In other words, recognition of the limits of one's potential and possibilities are established early in one's life by both elders and peers. The socialization process appears to be linked to informal neighborhood watching, talking with friends, and what Gordon and Anderson (1964, p. 414) note as the "engagement of events that are distinctly home-centered." Hoggart (1957, p. 27) defines this lifestyle as one of an extremely local life in which everything is readily accessible and within easy reach. This social world can also be described as our experienced existence (Douglas, 1970, p. 14) within a rather narrow and confined space (Cohen & Hodges, 1963, p. 305; Beeck-Jackson & Sobol (1980, p. 3) and as one in which "intelligence and understanding are...characteristically exercised on strictly local and personal matters" (Wilson, 1983, p. 152).

Perhaps it is the absence of cosmopolitan orientation that is an important factor in determining why the poor are characterized as seekers of immediate gratification. In this case, seeking gratification might not be a matter of attitudinal predisposition, but rather a combination of other factors, for instance: a risky environment, life in a marginal milieu, and the awareness that if one wants acceptance, future goals and aspirations must be constrained by the standards of one's family and friends.

Proposition 2: Lower Expectations and the Belief in Luck

In support of the notion that a world dominated by an unexpected, problematic lifestyle would result in a lower expectation regarding one's ability to overcome

this situation, Teahan (1958, p. 380) notes that a person who has lost hope that things will get better "concentrates...on his immediate surroundings gaining whatever satisfactions he can in the present." As well, researchers (Miller & Riessman, 1961, p. 86; Cohen & Hodges, 1963, p. 302; Pearlin, 1959, p. 258) contend that a reason why poor people do not defer gratifications is because they do not view themselves as being in a position to improve themselves. For instance, Gans (1962, p. 2) observes that if stability of their world was once sought, it has slipped from their grasp and therefore is no longer pursued. It would appear then, that because they no longer have a reasonable hope that favorable conditions will emerge, they emphasize the "getting by" rather than the "getting ahead." As noted by Lestran (1952, p. 589), because their future is so indefinite, its rewards are too uncertain to have much motivating value. On the other hand, a less elitist view is provided by Cohen and Hodges (1963, p. 307) who argue that it might not be the case that the striving for a better lifestyle is not worth the effort, but rather that resources are so meager that they are rapidly expended responding to current needs rather than future ones.

The concept of luck is closely related to the proposition regarding a lower expectation about the likelihood of improving one's status. As noted by several researchers (Veblen, 1899, p. 278; Webster, 1916, p. 272), luck is a response in which people are resigned to their situation in life and believe that, when something good comes along, it is due to chance rather than one's efforts. For instance, Surlin (1977, p. 588) observes that because persons of the lower class exhibit a greater degree of fatalism, they tend not to plan ahead or see any merit in the deferment of gratification.

Another advocate of the notion that immediate gratification is influenced by luck is Miller (1958, p. 11), who argues that lower class individuals feel that "if the cards are right...things will go your way; if luck is against you, it's not worth trying." The idea that things are meant to be is also noted by Kerr (1958, p. 169), who studied poverty-stricken people in an East Liverpool slum. The author reports that "the fundamental outlook of things being predetermined ties in with...a lack of ambition." Perhaps one of the most insightful observations pertaining to a heightened sense of fatalism by poverty people is voiced by Bakke (1935, p. 32) who states simply that there is a measure of hopelessness in a situation in which a person is aware that his fortune is determined by luck. The author concludes that this belief acts as a deterrent to future planning and as a barrier to incentives that might improve one's situation in life.

Proposition 3: First-Level Lifestyle

The third proposition pertains to sources of information accessible and used by the lower class in response to their information seeking. Although not reported by researchers as such, by and large, the information

²"Life in a Small World" is borrowed from Patrick Wilson, who has an informative discussion about characteristics about that world (see especially pp. 148–157 in *Second-Hand Knowledge*). For an earlier description of that notim see Benita Luckmann (1970).

world of the poor is a "first order" knowledge world. Attributes of information in that world include its need to respond to immediate concerns, its pragmatism, its focus on concrete situations and its reliance upon first-level experience.

In trying to examine the information environment of the poor, it might be useful to conceptualize a poverty of information in terms of first and second-level knowledge.³ First-level knowledge is knowledge *of* things. It relies either on one's own experience or on hearsay from someone else who is accepted as having knowledge of the thing being discussed. On the other hand, second-level knowledge is knowledge *about* that which does not yet exist in one's immediate awareness of things. That is, this knowledge originates in the world outside one's own experience. As a result, it relies on the acceptance of others' accounts about unknown or unfamiliar phenomena or events.⁴

As indicated in the preceding paragraphs, researchers have not discussed the information world of lower class persons in light of a "knowledge of" conceptualization. However, researchers (Duran, 1978, p. 55; Wallman, 1984, p. 33; Sussman, 1959, p. 335; Gilbert & Kohl, 1987, p. 13) note that a primary source of information is the casual, interpersonal exchange between family and friends. In support of this person-centered lifestyle, Miller and Riessman (1961, p. 3) observe that it is based on a belief that a person "learns more from other people than from books." Therefore, it would appear that the information acquired is of a situational, experiential nature. As such, the information might work in response to a particular situation but would not possess generalizable characteristics that could respond to a number of problematic situations.

In addition to the perception that the poor rely on friends and family for information, other researchers (Harrington, 1964, p. 273; Dervin & Greenberg, 1972, p. 210; Seeman, 1967, p. 105; Kerr, 1958, p. 105; Gordon & Anderson, 1964, p. 411) contend that many poor people choose not to seek or share information with anyone. Reasons for this lack of information sharing are that the information is too risky to share (Berger &

Luckmann, 1967, p. 46); poor people tend not to know a wide circle of friends (Knupfer, 1961, p. 256); their activities are focused on the house and television watching (Rainwater et al., 1959, p. 30); they rely more on their own personal knowledge and experience rather than the advice of others (Schatzman & Strauss, 1955, p. 330); and that they neither identify nor associate with neighbors (Ireland & Besner, 1965, p. 15).

In any case, the picture that emerges about the information world of this social class supports the "knowledge of," or first-level knowledge conceptualization. Whether they are seen as seekers of information from others much like themselves or skeptical of claims not personally experienced, the conclusion is that they live in an impoverished information world. This world can be viewed as one that has a limited range of new possibilities, and that other perceptions about reality are not adequate, trustworthy, and reliable.

Proposition 4: Limited-Time Horizon

One of the most persistent generalizations about poor people is that they tend to view time differently from the middle and upper middle classes. That is, their lifestyle is one that is present rather than future focused. Several stratification researchers (Stone, 1972, p. 180; Sherif, 1965, p. 11-12; Schatzman & Strauss, 1955, p. 330) have attempted to explain the relationship between time perception and gratification. For instance, Ireland and Besner (1965, p. 4) argue that because the lower class perceive that the world has failed to make a positive place for them, they are oriented, by need, to the present. Other researchers (Schneider & Lysgaard, 1953, p. 142; Gans, 1961, p. 246; Lestran, 1952, p. 589) contend that an inclination toward the present is the result of a loss of the belief that if one were to exert energy toward a goal and to engage in long-range planning, one would obtain a better future. In support of the notion that loss of hope is a factor in a limited time perspective, Lewin (1942, p. 56-59) observes that when hope is lost, members of the lower class not only cease to plan, but they also cease to expect a better future. He concludes a "background of insecurity and frustration...has a paralyzing effect on long-range planning—and is closely related to time perspective."

A few researchers (Teahan, 1958, p. 379) identified a relationship between time horizons and motivation for a higher education. But even here, the seeking of education was found to be related to an optimistic perception that one's efforts would result in a better future.

For example, in his classic work of Italian-Americans in a blue-collar neighborhood in Boston, Whyte (1981, p. 106) was able to divide his respondents into two broad personality-types: the corner boys and the college boys. The author found that what separated the two types was a future orientation. The college boys cultivated an attitude about the future and the necessity for savings towards that future that was similar to middle class so-

³For a fuller discussion regarding the knowledge about debate, see James (1978). On the "need to know" see Wilson's argument in *Second-Hand Knowledge* pp. 149-151. On the extension of knowledge in relation to social class, see Hyman et al. *The Enduring Effects of Education*, p. 21.

⁴An example of second-level knowledge is my acceptance of an account about a world described by Ebert, an anthropologist, that I personally have not experienced. The author states that the Bushman of the Kolahari are able to predict the occurrence of food and other needed resources without engaging in future planning activities. I accept this information because I believe it is an anthropologist's business to report such events, that other worlds other than my own are possible, and, because what I have accepted as a reliable account fits within my social reality that such things as these are possible. For more detailed report of the Bushman, see Ebert (1981).

ciety. The corner boys typically resembled the lower class in their attitudes regarding status, gratification, and a free-spending lifestyle.

Proposition 5: An "Insiders" Worldview

The fifth proposition pertains to a world that is viewed by the poor as very local and most familiar. In some sense, this proposition is linked to the first that also deals with a localized, concrete worldview. However, a distinguishing characteristic of this proposition is that it permits researchers to examine how persons outside that immediate reality are perceived.⁵

For example, in a study of female-headed families, Bould (1977, p. 339–340) found that her respondents viewed the larger world with limited expectations that something worthwhile from that world would come their way. In another study, (Durand, 1976, p. 698) black and white respondents were queried regarding their perception and use of social caretakers. The author found that lower class blacks were suspicious of the caretakers and tended to use their services less than did whites.

The notion that persons residing outside one's familiar surroundings are seen with suspicion is supported by Rainwater (1970, p. 141), who observes that because poor people view the larger world as hostile and relatively chaotic, they tend not to trust others. On the other hand, Dervin and Greenberg (1972, p. 212) argue that mistrust of others is higher in this population because their lifestyle is such that they cannot afford to arbitrarily trust an untested opinion.

Apparently, there is some attitudinal influence on the decision whether or not to trust outsiders. Haggard (1957, p. 32) describes this attitude as embodied in the idea of "them." He states that "...the primary attitude is not so much fear as mistrust; mistrust accompanied by a lack of illusions about what 'they' can do for one." In further support of this notion, Miller (1958, p. 9) notes that one of the most common characteristics of lower class cultures is their strong and frequently expressed mistrust and resentment of outsiders. Miller and Riessman (1961, p. 91) attribute this characteristic to a feeling of estrangement and alienation experienced by the poor from the many institutions and their representatives that exist in the larger society. In addition to a fierce loyalty to the cultural norms of their family groups, the notion of stability and the desire for economic and physical security also have been noted by several researchers (Allen, 1968, p. 527; Berger, 1960, p. 21; Meyersohn, 1968, p. 103; Pearlin, 1959, p. 259) as an im-

portant contributor in explaining why information from the outside is not entering their world.

Related to the desire for security is the idea of cost. The idea of cost to one's acceptance of the information includes such factors as a possible loss of friendship and an identification with friends and family matters (Gans, 1961, p. 235–236; Whyte, 1981, p. 106; Havighurst & Feigenbaum, 1959, p. 399). Another cost might be an intellectual one, stemming from a belief that the information will not solve critical problems (Middleton, 1963, p. 973), that no significant outcome will occur as a result of acceptance of the information (Rainwater, et al., 1959, p. 44; Knupfer, 1961, p. 263), and that the only way to get out of a problematic situation is by one's own abilities and strengths (Sussman, 1959, p. 335; Harrington, 1964, p. 273). Finally, to accept information that might require a long range commitment will only lead to frustration and stress (Lestran, 1952, p. 589).

Based on the idea that the poor have a more restricted view, it would appear that a concept underlying this notion of the world is relevance.⁶ For example, Wilson (1983, p. 152) contends that the outside world is perceived as irrelevant to members who live a localized life. If one were to extend this idea, it might suggest that because the larger world is perceived as irrelevant to the poor, the acceptance of claims from that world would be minimal because the claims themselves are irrelevant. Relevance is also a principal theme in Berger and Luckmann's thesis on reality in everyday life. In this conceptual scheme, the authors argue that a relationship exists between relevance and pragmatism. And, in order for information to be relevant, it must be able to solve problematic situations. In light of this argument, it would appear that most information originating from the "outside" would not be relevant to this social class, because producers of that information are perceived as having little or no knowledge about the range or types of problems occurring in this environment.

Proposition 6: Use of the Mass Media

A consistent observation made by stratification researchers is the positive relationship between greater mass media use, particularly television, and a lower class lifestyle. A related finding pertains to media content. That is, researchers found that persons of the lower class were more likely than others to be viewers of police activities, accidents (Carter & Clarke, 1963, p. 550), violence (Comstock et al., 1978, p. 123), and generally news of a descriptive nature (Allen, 1968, p. 527).

A few researchers contend that lower socioeconomic persons are more exposed to such news because these

⁵For a deeper understanding of the insider-outsider conceptualization, see Robert K. Merton's discussion pertaining to reference group theory (pp. 342–352 and 480–488) in *Social Theory and Social Structure*, Howard S. Becker's work on deviance in the *Outsiders*, and Colin Wilson's, *The Outsider*.

⁶Although not identified in this proposition, it is quite possible that relevance, with its potential to explain and predict acceptance behavior, is the critical concept.

events are viewed as most relevant to their everyday lives (Frett, 1975, p. 429; Tau & Gerdeau, 1979, p. 134; Ozersky, 1977, p. 103). For example, Beeck-Jackson & Sobol (1980, p. 5) report that heavy television viewers perceive news to be a reflection of events that occur locally and close at hand. Subsequently, they are more likely than light viewers to be mistrustful of others and afraid of being victims of crime, and they acquire dogs and guns for purposes of protection. Researchers also observed that television is the preferred medium because members of the lower working class are "devoid of the cultural equipment" necessary for high culture (Graham, 1954, p. 167; Gordon & Anderson, 1964, p. 408); television is used for escape and distraction (Eastman, 1979, p. 496; Kline, 1971, p. 219); it serves as a reliever of anxiety and stress (Pearlin, 1959, p. 258; Dervin & Greenberg, 1972, p. 201); it responds to a general attitude of anti-intellectualism more prevalent in this social class (Miller, 1958, p. 9-10); and it fits in with their home-centered lifestyle (Slater & Elliott, 1982, p. 71).

When the second most popular medium, the newspaper, was examined, researchers also discovered a heightened sensitivity by the lower class to descriptive news and a lesser concern for other features in the paper (Wilensky, 1964, p. 191; Miller, 1958, p. 9-10; Gordon & Anderson, 1964, p. 408). For instance, Stroman and Becker (1978, p. 769) noted that the only stories read more by the poor than by other social groups were those pertaining to crime and accidents.

A final assumption about poor people and television use pertains to the link with gratification. That is, stratification theorists note that members of the lower class watch television to get instant enjoyment and stimulation (Eastman, 1979, p. 496; Ozersky, 1977, p. 103); and because it responds to their heightened preference for fantasy shows (Kline, 1971, p. 219; Katz & Foulkes, 1962, p. 378; Miller, 1958, p. 9-10; Geiger & Sokol, 1959, p. 176).

Summary of the Six Propositions

To recapitulate the major point about gratification and the lower social class, it would appear that a prevailing finding is that poor people seek immediate gratification because of behavioral characteristics not found in other classes. That is, because they are more inclined toward quick arousal, pleasure, or excitement, and they engage in activities that result in instantaneous pay-offs.

What importance is gratification theory to a study of information seeking behavior? For one, the theory provides a means by which researchers are able to explore a minimally understood area in information studies. That is, the theory allows for questions pertaining to such notions as, how to define problematic situations for poor people and how conceptual factors influence their choice of a strategy. More importantly, it attempts

to address a central issue in studies of information use among poor people: even though their constrained environment is fraught with information problems, they do not appear to be active seekers of information that might address these problems.

As indicated in Dervin's work (Dervin, 1977; Dervin & Nilan, 1986), if we could examine attributes about what constitutes *a problem* for a population, then we are a bit closer to predicting, with some measure of certainty, how that problem is being resolved. For instance, when applied to a low income population, gratification theory allows for the influence of luck or chance in the resolution of a problem, such as the chance to succeed at some desirable goal. A sense of fatalism might explain why there would be a parsimonious search for advice or information that could enhance positively one's chances to succeed.

Method of Data Collection

This study was undertaken to discover whether the six propositions of gratification theory could increase our understanding of the use of information by a lower-working class lifestyle. The researcher selected janitors as respondents for the study because they typified in many ways the lower working class. Because the researcher wanted to explore the information environment of janitors in a natural context, data for the present study was collected over a two-year period (1984-1986) using ethnography or participant observation and an interview guide consisting of 28 items. Where appropriate, supervisors and other members of the Physical Plant were also contacted, although the primary respondents were the janitors. The setting for this investigation was a major university in the southeast United States. Places of data-gathering included classrooms, bathrooms, janitorial closets, and front steps.

A representative profile of the janitors includes the following characteristics: predominantly a black female, average age of 38, three years short of a high school education, head of a household that consists of three children. She has been at her job for almost seven years and earns a little more than \$3.35 an hour. The major requirements of her duties are that she has "the ability to follow oral instructions," and the "physical ability to perform manual work."⁷ Examples of her duties are dusting, mopping, waxing, picking up and removing garbage, cleaning, and sweeping porches and sidewalks around the various buildings. In order to provide examples of the applicability of gratification theory, the six propositions summarized above will be examined in light of the social world of janitors.

⁷Louisiana State University, "Distinguishing Feature or Characteristics of Work: Custodial Workers II," Code 3018R; I-C70. Physical Plant Department, 1983 (mimeographed).

Proposition 1: Life in a Small World

Several questions relating to job-search strategies were asked. Focusing on ways in which janitors went about job searching could reveal how local or extensive were their uses of information that could lead to employment.

The first question was: "How did you go about searching for a job?" Twenty-two (42%) heard about a job through friends and family; 13 (25%) from newspapers; 10 (19%) without any assistance; and seven (13%) through the employment agency. Examples from workers who were assisted by friends and family are: "My sister and brother already worked here;" "I knew some fellows who worked here."

Some persons found employment on their own: "I went from building to building asking different people if they can find me a job." "I walked this campus down." And, "I went from place to place, talked to people and say, 'such-and-such', any jobs where you're working?" "Sometimes they'll take your application but not call you back for work."⁸

A second question asked how the workers found out about their present place of employment. Although not markedly different from the first set of responses, there are some slight shades of variation. For instance, 27 (51%) secured their job because they knew family and friends who were already employed there. Six (11%) were told about an opening from neighbors who were also employed, while only four (4%) got hired through the employment agency. Eight (15%) workers were hired after reading about an opening in the newspaper, and five (9%) were hired through their own efforts. Two (3%) attributed their employment to luck.

Since the workers repeatedly mentioned how underpaid they were, a question asked if they were searching for another job, even though they had this one. Thirty-two (64%) said they were not looking, while 20 (38%) remarked that they were. Comments from the workers not looking included, "No, but I'm trying to get a transfer out of this job into another one, so I can make more money and have a trade." "I started to three or four times. And then, I thought this thing out. I said, 'I have a job here, no sense going no place else'." and, "No, I feel like I be out here going on 20 years. I'm not really qualified for another job."

A third job-related question asked respondents how recently they became aware of a possible job vacancy at the university. As interpreted by the janitors, a vacancy pertains to either transfer to a more desirable building, or an opportunity to apply for a promotion

within the custodial ranks. From their comments, it would appear that the janitors perceive minimal opportunities to better their present condition. A primary reason is their perception that they don't have any way to tap sources of information that might increase their advantage. For example, 33 said they heard job news later than anyone else; one, the same as everyone; but only 12 mentioned earlier. The other workers said they either were not looking ($n = 2$) or didn't know one way or the other ($n = 4$).

Based on these responses, there does not appear to be some support for the first proposition that describes disadvantaged people as living in an impoverished information world. The fact that the workers are seeking needed information regarding promotions or transfers but are unable to locate that information (or if they locate it, they are unable to use it to their advantage) supports the argument that their world is indeed an information impoverished one. The findings also lend support to the observation that members of the lower working class tend not to be involved in long-range planning that could improve their situation. In this case, the data reveal that, for the most part, the workers (72%) are not actively seeking other kinds of employment or spending energy on additional training opportunities to prepare themselves for a better-paying job.

Proposition 2: Lower Expectations and the Belief in Luck

A world dominated by an unexpected, problematic environment necessarily results in lower expectations regarding one's ability to overcome this situation. As noted previously, a concept closely related to a lower expectation about one's likelihood to improve one's status is a belief in luck.

Comments from the respondents suggest support for this proposition. For instance, a worker remarked, "I made three job trips down here before I got the job. The one who gave me this job told me I was lucky. I got here just in time 'cause they had only two openings." And, "I feel pretty lucky right now. I don't have no problems right now, but you never can tell when they will arrive."

One respondent comments that she is *unlucky* because:

I be trying to get a transfer to a different job but you don't know where they are. They should post stuff and not let a few people know about it and get the grab. Although, I get along pretty fair with everybody, I know what get the job is favoritism.

In linking this proposition back to its theoretical base, findings indicate that the janitors perceive their chances of gaining a better position for themselves to be minimal. Even though they wanted a promotion, etc., the data did not reveal strategies that would lead to a more enhanced job opportunity. Plausible reasons for this lack of activity that might produce a desirable result are that the administration gives little consideration "for

⁸The findings suggest that respondents who did not mention personal referrals as an aid in the job search process were not successful as those who did. This is not surprising in light of other research that reported similar phenomena. For an insightful discussion on this topic, see Mark S. Granovetter (1973, 1974); George J. Stigler (1961); and Albert Rees and George P. Schultz (1970).

the time you put in," and, a conviction that to get ahead takes knowing someone, being "buddy-buddy with bosses," and, "luck."

Proposition 3: First-level Lifestyle

Some information sources are accessible to members of the lower working class. However, these sources respond to immediate concerns, are pragmatic, and focus on concrete situations. Another dimension of the information is that it relies heavily on first-level experience. As such, "knowledge of" information might work in response to a particular situation, but would not be generalizable to different or perhaps even to related problematic situations.

In addition, the "knowledge of" conceptualization pertains to the privatization of information. That is, if the pertinent information arises from one's own ability to "figure out things," there doesn't seem to be much need to seek information. As it stems from a subjective interpretation of the world, it carries an intrinsically personal stamp that, if shared, might give others too many clues about one's social history, problems, and ways of dealing with them.

In order to investigate the notion of a first-level lifestyle, mass media exposure and a willingness to accept or reject the information of others were examined. As expected, regarding the mass media, the two primary sources used by the respondents for everyday information were newspapers and television.⁹ Both media provided information that reinforced beliefs about the insecurity of their social worlds (accidents, bank robberies, frequent contacts with the police), ways to cope with these events (staying away from areas of trouble), general information about everyday events (social or church activities, sales and bargains, various household hints), and legislative news about state benefits and raises.

Two questions were also used to examine the acceptance of information from others. An assumption underlying these questions pertains to the construct of believability. In order for the information to be acceptable, there needs to be some measure of plausibility which, in this case, is a fit between that which is being said and that which is already known in the common-sense reality of the janitors. As noted earlier, if the "knowledge of" proposition is applicable, information stemming from first-hand experience will be the most

acceptable because it would best meet the above criteria.

The first question asked, "If, at first, you don't believe what somebody told you, what would convince you that it is true?" Three areas were identified by the respondents that met this believability requirement: one's own experience; testing the reliability of the information by asking a number of persons; and, the trustworthy rule, i.e., if the person sharing the information is perceived as reliable or trustworthy.

Examples of the first are: "You got to show me;" "Till I see it for me, it didn't happen. Hardly any stuff folks tells you is true." "I have to see it, I can't go on hearsay." One respondent remarks that acceptance of information occurs for him because it is related to his own perception of reality, even if the information was not directly experienced, "If somebody said somebody won a \$1,000. Well, like gambling, I would believe them 'cause I know there's a lot of gambling be going on."

The second area is where respondents accepted the information because they investigated the validity of the information by asking a number of persons

I'll do a lot of research behind that information, like I'll go ask this person and that person. If everybody say the same thing then I knew it's be true. I always try to find more detail. I never believe stuff if I just heard it once.

Comments also suggest that if the information is to be accepted, more than one person has to verify the truthfulness of that information. Two examples: "I would wait to hear more about it, more about it generally. And, not from one person." The other mentions, "I would have to directly talk to the people. There has to be at least two people to witness the event."

The final area that leads to information acceptance pertains to a perception that the person sharing the information is credible. For example, a respondent observes that her neighbor is a credible source because of, among other things, her age: "My neighbor is at home everyday. She's an old lady. She watches out and sees a lot. If she told me, then, it's the truth." The final comment sums up the relationship between credibility and information acceptance, "If it's a responsible person, I'm going to believe it. If they ain't responsible, and I know it; even if they was telling the truth, I won't believe it."

The second question, "What is your most believable source of information?" extends the notion of credibility testing, to the case where the source is perceived as a trustworthy one. Findings indicate that more respondents ($n = 19, 36.5\%$) believe in themselves than any other source, followed by the Bible ($n = 14, 26.9\%$). Of the interpersonal sources ($n = 5$), the most believed were persons perceived to be reliable in character ($n = 3, 5.7\%$) and family members ($n = 2, 3.8\%$). The mass media were also cited, primarily television news ($n = 7, 13.4\%$), newspaper news ($n = 5, 9.6\%$), and the radio news ($n = 1, 1.9\%$). One worker mentioned that there was no source that she would believe.

⁹Regarding the use of the mass media, it should be noted that, when compared to the rest of the population, newspaper and TV use are not unique to this population. What is different, however, is the close attention poor people pay to certain events, particularly, items of violence, and also the use made of this information to protect themselves against possible danger or harm. On the other hand, although the general population might be interested in the same news, for the most part it would not motivate them to alter their behavior.

Reasons given for belief in oneself is due to a common sense notion that one cannot doubt what one knows or has experienced first-hand. For instance, as respondent comments: "Cause it's like this; I got to believe in myself, whether I'm right or wrong. I ain't going to do wrong to myself."

Regarding the Bible, respondents comment that, "If you read the Bible, you know it's true;" "God is first, and without Him, I can't survive." "I believe what's in the Bible really happen. I just wish I could have been there when it did happen."

The other major category was the mass media. Although respondents may have identified a particular medium, characteristics of that medium were similar to the mass media generally. These include events that are plausible in light of one's own experiences and whether they appear in more than one medium. For instance, in responding to the first characteristic, respondents comment, "Stories about killing and stuff;" "death notices;" "if they put it in, it's true or they wouldn't put it in. I believe it 'cause it's local;" and, "they don't have no reason to be lying." Additional examples are, "television is most believable because, maybe something—I go past and see for myself, then, they show it on TV and explain it to me. Plus, they send those people out to get those pictures and sometimes I see them do it."

In light of these comments, findings indicate that there is support for a "knowledge of" conceptualization. If information is going to be accepted, it must be of a type that can be verified and that is derived from one or more familiar, accessible sources.

Proposition 4: A Limited Time-Horizon

The present study lends support to a limited, time horizon. Though the respondents were aware of more beneficial opportunities requiring some investment in the future, they were either resigned to their present position or convinced that the effort was not worth it, because somehow events were stacked against them.

Regarding the former case, respondents mention, "Jobs nowadays is so hard to find. If you got one, it's better to keep it." "This job ain't nothing to brag about but it's more better being with people than being at home." "It's a job. If I could afford to do better, I would get a better job. But I'm here and so have to make the best of it." "I feel like what I work for, that's mine. What I do, well, it's a job. It's honest work."

Finally, there were a few workers (mainly younger women) who displayed a future orientation. The following case indicates that, at least for them, the university played a role in providing the possibility that they themselves might one day become students, "Hopefully, if the job works out, O.K., with no problems, I can go back to school. I feel positive about my future. Maybe I can come to school here."

Two additional questions focused on their subjective view of time and ways in which they were using time.

The first asked about leisure-time activities, and, how the second they see themselves 10 years in the future.

Regarding their use of time, the janitors mentioned: doing nothing, resting, watching TV, working around the house, reading the newspaper or Bible, and visiting friends. Some used the time to simply be alone.

When asked to provide a 10-year future view of themselves (except for mentioning becoming older), a number of respondents placed themselves in activities very similar to their present lifestyles: "Very depressed. I let everything get next to me." "I don't see myself in any good positions." "Fishing, working around my own home;" and, "I'll still be working hard." Others saw themselves in a worse state: "Getting older with bad nerves, just about crazy, I guess;" "I'll be an old woman, tired and run-down, trying to hold two jobs to try to survive and make ends meet."

However, others did anticipate a better future for themselves. Primarily, these images pictured them doing better physically

Looking good if I live long enough to see it. I've gotten a little "finer," having an old-age spread. I be having gray hair. I love gray hair. I be looking forward to that.

Or having the leisure to do favorite activities

I want to be more active in my church. To participate more in other activities at the Y. In other words, I always want to be active, to get myself involve in classy things. I like it when you can learn from people and you can always learn something.

Other responses included, having more material things, and returning to school.

These few cases are the only ones that reflect an inclination toward a present, rather than future orientation. The majority of respondents reflect the limited time perspective as illustrated by the view of most of the workers that their chances to get ahead are tenuous, and, by their almost complete attention to the performance of daily, routine activities.

Proposition 5: An "Insiders" World-View

An aspect of an insider's view is that the world as experienced is a very parochial one with an emphasis on the practical dimensions of life. Because that which commands the most attention are those things centering on the everyday, members of an insider's world are informed of newsworthy events through their use of local, familiar sources. Additional facets of an insider's mentality are a greater reliance on self and a general distrust of outsiders.

Presumably, the longer a person has lived in the same environment, the greater the chance of that individual's being socialized into particular mores, norms, and standards of behavior appropriate to that milieu. More importantly, longevity provides a familiarity with a specific social and cultural landscape. Therefore, in order to examine this phenomenon, respondents were asked how

long they had resided in their community and whether they derived anything from television viewing that was interesting enough to discuss with family and friends. Again, it was assumed that insiders spend most of their social activity talking with other insiders about everyday happenings and events. In other words, would insiders describe this content in light of its significance to their own social world?¹⁰

Regarding length of residence, the findings reveal that most of the respondents ($n = 11$) have lived in the same locale for most of their lives (35 years); 18 between 15 and 35 years; 11 between 41 and 55 years; and only eight for under 14 years. If one can argue for longevity in a social milieu as a contributing factor to socialization, the data might indicate support for the possibility of an insider's world-view.

In addition to becoming informed about norms, etc., appropriate to one's social landscape, the survey of television viewing revealed that most of the respondents ($n = 46$) shared some aspect of television-viewing with their friends. Categories receiving the most support were: news ($n = 19$); movies ($n = 15$); soap operas ($n = 12$); movies based on real-life events ($n = 7$); and local events ($n = 5$). Miscellaneous categories identified were Christian shows ($n = 2$), specialized news shows, i.e., "20/20," "60 Minutes" ($n = 2$), weather ($n = 1$), world news ($n = 1$), and sit-coms ($n = 1$).

Examples of news items worthy of discussion appear to be primarily focused on some aspect of calamity. Topics discussed include crime, killings, accidents, shootings, and other general acts of violence. For instance, a respondent comments

Like, if I see something on TV that happened in the neighborhood, crime and stuff. Murderers, who went to jail for drunk driving. Mostly, basic stuff. If I see violence, like victim of rape, house got broke into, if I can relate it to the next person, I'll discuss it.

In addition to movies, episodes occurring on soap operas were also sources of chit-chat. In this category, respondents observed that, although they were aware that they were watching a drama, they could still learn from them, because they were "true-life stories," dealing with "real people," and focusing on "everyday stuff."

Episodes of domestic violence were also noted. For example, a number of janitors mentioned the "Burning Bed," (a movie about an abused wife who, eventually, burned her husband to death). Another was a movie in which a physician at a military base murdered his wife and children.

¹⁰As indicated in an earlier note, poor people are not the only ones sensitive to particular news events. However, it would appear that where one resides in the urban landscape would determine those things that are especially newsworthy. In this case, for most audiences, general items of everyday violence would be a casual news event. However, those same items would be of such relevance for the poor that routine behaviors would be modified in response to this information.

Thus, the data add credence to the notion that, in their everyday conversations, events that provided sources of conversation are those that reflect and reinforce their view of reality. It is not only that they have first-hand knowledge of issues like violence, crime, and confrontations with the law, but more importantly, that the types of programs of greater interest to them also focus on these themes. It would appear that their exposure to television acts as a mechanism that solidifies their belief that their world is one in which one must be constantly wary and on guard against some unforeseen catastrophe.¹¹

The prevalent attitude that ill-fortune is imminent might explain why people of the lower working class are more suspicious of outsiders. The mere fact that outsiders are strangers carries some degree of potential risk. Although a sense of watchfulness is usually discussed in the literature to refer to persons who live outside one's social world, findings from this study reveal that an "outsider" is anyone who is not an intimate member of one's social network. Thus, a sense of guardedness was found to be directed even toward supervisors, administrators, and even fellow-workers.

A worker mentioned that she doesn't engage in everyday conversations with people at work because she simply doesn't trust them

A lot of things I hear, I don't agree with. You can't trust everybody. Some people I talk to, like I'm talking to you now. But I don't always want to talk to the people I work with. They may lie or say they didn't say it, later on. So, I just listen and don't try to make trouble for myself.

The comments indicate that the respondents illustrate an "insider's" mentality regarding social reality. This attitude was shown by their attention to localized events, their belief that it's better to rely on self, and their mistrust of anyone who was not part of an intimate social network.

Proposition 6: Use of the Mass Media

In order to investigate if the janitors watched television for its fantasy content, as a means of arousal, to pass time, or as a means of diversion, types of programs preferred by the janitors were examined. The data do not lend support to the findings that the lower working class have greater exposure to fantasy shows than the middle class. Although this study did reveal that fantasy programs were enjoyed by some respondents (e.g., Superman, Tarzan, Westerns), the majority did not express a preference for fantasy.

However, as expected, television was used to pass the time and as a source of diversion, "I'm a freak behind

¹¹This notion is supported by the "mean world" hypotheses intensively researched by Gerbner et al. See for example, Gerbner, Gross, and Morgan (1984).

TV. It's a good company-keeper. Plus, I ain't got nothing else to occupy my mind."

In addition to television being viewed for its entertainment content, a few respondents noted its utilitarian value. Areas in which television was a source of information include bulletins about the weather, local and national news, events in sports, talk-shows, and tidbits about "protection, learning how to be safe, how to stay alert."

Conclusion

The prior research indicates that poor people seek immediate gratification because of behavioral characteristics not found in other classes. Their world view is one in which problematic situations occur frequently and unexpectedly. They do not engage in long range planning primarily because they believe such ventures will probably result in failure. In this light, a fatalistic approach to life's events seems realistic and reasonable. It would seem, therefore, that gratification theory provides a means for information researchers to explore questions such as what defines a problematic situation for the poor and what factors influence their choice of information seeking strategies.

In other words, as suggested by Dervin and others, if we can examine what constitutes a *problem* for a population, then we are a bit closer to predicting how that problem is currently being resolved when applied to a low income population. Gratification theory emphasizes the influence of luck or chance in the resolution of a problem. A sense of fatalism perhaps explains why there might be a limited search for advice or information that could influence (in a positive way) one's chances to succeed.

In summary, this research supports previous studies regarding a lifestyle that focuses on present reality and suggests that attention to that reality indicates an orientation toward immediate gratification. An underlying explanation for this present-day mentality is that financial and psychological resources are consumed in meeting current problems and needs. As a result, expenditure of any "extra resource" toward some intangible gain is not a viable alternative. What is most real to the janitors are those experiences that take place in a small world. Furthermore, there is a minimal link to activities or persons who reside outside their social milieu. Finally, things of most interest to them are those that are most accessible, have a firm footing in everyday reality, and respond to some practical concern.

Discussion

As indicated in the introductory paragraphs, this project was guided by two research problems. The first was to discover if gratification theory is a promising conceptual framework for an examination of economic

poverty. The second was to discover its applicability to information-seeking behaviors.

Findings indicate that the theory can be used to explain immediate gratification behavior and to advance propositions as to why these behaviors appear more prevalent in the lower working classes. In addition to explaining behaviors that center on current reality, this conceptual scheme is useful for an examination of information-seeking. For instance, it permits speculation regarding what motivates a person to seek information. That is, research findings suggest that no information seeking will occur if respondents are convinced that good fortune is more attributed to luck, rather than to one's investment of time or energy.

What are the data's implications for librarians and information specialists? One indication that this study reveals is the need to know more about information that is intrinsically bound to everyday problems and concerns. Inherent in this notion is the requirement to broaden an understanding of what information means to populations that live a here-and-now existence. As we become more sensitive to causal information, we might begin to learn that this does not mean that the information is trivial. It simply implies that most of the everyday problems requiring solutions will not be met by the typical bibliographic sources that occupy the effects of most information scientists.

In this case, one can predict that information-seeking will not occur, primarily because the janitors do not have a positive perception that the information sought will lend some significant benefit to their situation. For them, printed records (typically collected by libraries) will not be used. Furthermore, the findings suggest that television is the preferred medium because of the comparative ease with which the medium can be used, especially for those whose educational background may not have given them the skills needed to pursue other kinds of media. For instance, theaters cost more, books require an advanced reading skill, libraries require extra effort to get to and to use. An inexpensive television set takes care of all those problems, and in addition, caters very heavily to an audience for which these *are* problems.

In view of this observation, perhaps the major contribution that this study provides to information professionals, is what the inquiry tells us about the usability of a conceptual framework to explain information-seeking behavior. It would appear that, if we are going to examine everyday information in a more critical light, we will need to understand (as argued by Dervin) its a priori relationship to immediate reality.

For some members of the lower working class, their reality is so time-bound, so situational in its immediacy, that the library is not able to respond easily to needs other than those expressed by middle class life. Perhaps what this study illustrates most is our need, as members of an information profession, to increase our knowl-

edge of information steeped in everyday reality, its perception by specialized populations, and what we will need to accomplish in order to provide that information in its most accessible and useable format.

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