

Book review

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Hicks, A., Lloyd, A., and Pilerot, O. (Eds.).
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859-6. £55. Pbk.

Theorising about information literacy (IL), or better, interrogating the *idea* of IL theoretically, is the guiding principle behind the edited work, *Information literacy through theory* (Hicks, Lloyd, and Pilerot, 2024). The editors have deliberately, and quite correctly, not asked contributors to come up with a theory of IL, but rather to put IL in conversation, contact, and sometimes conflict, with other theory(s) to inform new ways to critique and conceive of IL as a concept and practice. Because of this, the book, while well-written and well-researched, can be a bit of a daunting read. For anyone not versed in thinking theoretically, rather than practically, the book will prove a challenge (though an often worthy one). Each chapter is dense with references and assumes a level of knowledge of the academic theoretical world that many librarians simply may not have. This should not deter potential readers.

While each chapter uses a particular theory, and there are also broader themes teased out over the work, the editors have done an excellent service to readers by providing each author with a set of guiding questions to help craft how each theory interacts and intersects with IL (writ large). The questions are as follows:

- What assumptions does this theory make, for example, about people, activities, contexts, knowledge, information, learning or information literacy (implicitly or explicitly)?
- What understanding about information literacy does this theory open us to us and what does it close us to?

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- How does the theory we use shape our methodological choices? (p. xiv)

None of the authors explicitly reference these guiding questions in their chapters, but they form signposts and signals that the reader can use to follow throughout each chapter. In particular, each author makes an explicit effort to introduce the theory they are putting in contact with IL in a fairly comprehensive way. This signals that there is no assumed prior knowledge of the particular theory being used. Paradoxically, this also means that the introductory sections of each chapter are often very dense, theoretically rigorous, and take time to digest. This will turn off some readers, but the journey through each theory is worth it as each chapter presents interesting, and complex, ways to use its chosen theory to interrogate IL's assumptions and practices.

Given the nature of this edited work, and its complexity, thoroughness, and rigor, a review of individual chapters or their content is not possible within the confines of a book review. Indeed, each chapter could be reviewed on its own, or potentially be given to Information Sciences students to review or critique. This may be one of the most useful things about the book. Each chapter provides a way into thinking through a particular theory and its intersection with IL which naturally leads to more questions and discussion. I can well imagine using this book as a foundational text for a graduate-level course and having each chapter inform a weekly discussion and analysis.

The theory(s) in this work range from complex theories of democracy, cognition and consciousness, through institutional ethnography, and on to embodiment, to name just a few. Each chapter is quite good, but a few do stand out as true must-reads and as excellent jumping off points, and models, for using theory (more generally) to interrogate foundational conceptions of IL. Annemaree Lloyd's chapter, *Surfacing the Body*, makes explicit claims about why the body as a "site and source" must be "foregrounded and not silenced or relegated to secondary knowledge." (Lloyd, 2024, p. 165). Lloyd's chapter provides the most explicit critique of IL research and scholarship in the book. By using theories of the body, from Foucault to Butler, this chapter foregrounds how theory can be used to push IL studies to examine some of its more problematic, deeply ingrained assumptions. The best chapters in the book also follow this path. Instead of just using the selected theory to suggest new ways to think through IL, they use it to actively suggest ways to disrupt IL, and its study, as it is conceived of currently.

In this vein, Amanda L. Folk's chapter, *Information literacy through an equity mindset*, challenges us to shift our "focus from summative assessments of individuals' information literacy skills ... to explorations of how information literacy is constructed within specific contexts" (Folk, 2024, p. 141). Folk then reminds us that in "equity-minded research, we do not seek to identify ways in which to 'fix' or remediate individuals who are marginalized – they are not broken" (p. 145). By using an equity-mindset as a methodology for IL research, Folk's chapter encourages us to think broadly about how IL, as it is currently constructed and conceived of, does indeed try to "fix" people. Powerfully, the chapter ends with the idea that perhaps this attempt to "fix" has made sure that only certain kinds of individuals can thrive.

Calling out these two chapters is not to say that the rest of the book, including the introduction and conclusion, is not well-written and thought-provoking. Every chapter offers excellent insights, and each is highly recommended. The editors have written an excellent conclusion that teases out themes that run through differing chapters. The conclusion, in fact, almost invites the reader to return to each chapter with these themes in mind. I, for one, am glad that these

themes are shown in the conclusion rather than the introduction because this enables the reader to find their own way through the book, and then to return to chapters with these editorially selected themes in mind. This is a powerful way to think of the iterative practice of doing theory as almost a meta commentary on, and thus invitation to, thinking theoretically about IL. This book will be invaluable to Information Sciences students and instructors, as well as anyone working in Library and Information Science who is looking to interrogate their own IL practices. Even though it can be, at times, a theoretically heavy lift, this book is enthusiastically recommended for anyone who thinks critically and deeply about IL.