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Book Reviews (editorially reviewed)

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Bonato, S. (2018). ***Searching the grey literature: A handbook for searching reports, working papers, and other unpublished research***. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN: 9781538100639; 1538100630; 9781538100646; 1538100649.

This book, one of a series produced by the Medical Library Association, is a splendid—and long overdue—introduction to the topic of searching the grey literature. While of potential interest to any information professional or searcher, Bonato, a reference and research librarian at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, makes it clear in her preface that “those working in the areas of health or social sciences will benefit the most from this book’s content” (p. x). Indeed, as a librarian who has participated in many systematic/scoping reviews, Bonato provides insights and resources that may be of particular value to information professionals who work in health contexts or, as is my case, support the research and learning needs of a university’s faculty of health.

In *Searching the Grey Literature*, Bonato stresses the importance of grey literature, especially in health contexts. For example, she argues that a thorough systematic review¹ *must* include a review of the grey literature, since it will “broaden the pool of available evidence” (p. 37). By “grey literature” she means, quoting Schöpfel (2010):²

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¹ According to [The Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions](#) (2011), a systematic review “attempts to collate all empirical evidence that fits pre-specified eligibility criteria in order to answer a specific research question. It uses explicit, systematic methods that are selected with a view to minimizing bias, thus providing more reliable findings from which conclusions can be drawn and decisions made” (section 1.2.2., para. 1).

² Schöpfel, J. (2010, December 6-7). [Towards a Prague definition of grey literature](#). Paper presented at the Twelfth International Conference on Grey Literature: Transparency in Grey Literature: Grey Tech Approaches to High Tech Issues, Prague, Czech Republic.

After defining grey literature in the first chapter of the book (entitled What is Grey Literature?), Bonato devotes the ensuing chapters to underscoring its value (going beyond its importance in systematic reviews), presenting general grey literature databases, detailing specific types of grey literature and where and how to find them, and providing tools and advice to guide the novice or experienced searcher. In short, Bonato addresses what is grey literature, why one should use it, where it exists and how to find it ... efficiently.

Each chapter begins with learning outcomes that set the stage for the balance of the chapter. Most also include a top ten, five or three list of the pros and cons of a specific type of grey literature as well as resources that may be used to find it. Typically, Bonato also provides relevant search tips as well as corny little quotes that serve as memory aids. For example, while discussing the importance of searching various sources for unpublished clinical trials, Bonato begins by noting “[a]s the Renaissance Italian poet Petrarch said, ‘Sameness is the mother of disgust, variety is the cure’” (p. 137). All chapters conclude with a current bibliography relevant to the chapter. The author needs not convince anyone that she has put a lot of research and thought into this book.

One of the other strengths of this book is its lists of databases that contain grey literature. For instance, through these lists, I discovered [CareSearch](#), a wonderful database containing information on palliative care that I will need to add to my health research guides.

While Bonato's database lists make the book worth every penny, she offers readers even more by recommending grey literature search checklists to help librarians find relevant material (since, as she notes, there are thousands upon thousands of pieces of grey literature!). One of the tools she mentions is of particular relevance to health contexts: [Grey Matters: A Practical Tool for Searching Health-Related Grey Literature](#). Bonato also emphasizes the importance of developing a grey literature search plan. Indeed, I believe her advice will prove particularly useful as I begin to incorporate searches for grey literature into the research support I provide to clients performing systematic reviews.

For those in need of a rapid reference tool, this book's chapters can also be read in isolation. In her preface, Bonato confirms that “although it would be worthwhile to read this book from the beginning, all chapters can be read individually or consulted on an as-needed basis. For example, if you are only interested in learning about Google Scholar for grey literature searching, you can consult that individual subtopic in Chapter 9” (p. xi).

This chapter-in-isolation approach, however, can occasionally lead to needless repetition for those who read the book in its entirety. This is particularly true of the resources related to health mentioned in the book. For instance, descriptions of the Cochrane Collaboration appear almost word for word on pp. 94, 115, 138, 154, 169, 185, and 216. To a lesser degree, the same can be said of other organizations mentioned, including the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality, the Campbell Collaboration, the Health and Medicine Division of the National Academies of Sciences,

Engineering and Medicine, and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. While these descriptions are supported by comments about the relevance of each source within the context of the chapter itself,³ an editor could have grouped the descriptions in an appendix or possibly generated a footnote referencing readers to the first mention of these organizations.

This quibble aside, *Searching the Grey Literature* is one of the most informative and useful books I have read on this topic in several years and a notable addition to the searcher's toolkit.

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³ For example, the chapter *Searching for Dissertations/Theses* notes after the description for the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality (AHRQ) that "AHRQ ...does not include specific resources for finding relevant dissertations" (p. 117). The same comment is made after the description of the Health and Medicine Division of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine; and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. With that, one might wonder why these sources were referenced in the chapter in the first place!