“The **philosophy behind the theory**, the fundamental set of ideas about how phenomena of interest in a particular field should be thought about and researched.”

metatheory

“...the often unarticulated premises upon which empirical research and theorization is based...broader and less specific than theories, they are orientation strategies to the world.”

METATHEORY
PARADIGM
SENSIBILITY
WORLD VIEW
APPROACH
PERSPECTIVE
metatheory in the natural sciences

theory of evolution
metatheories in information science

(Bates, 2005)
conflicting metatheories

socio-cognitivism & cognitivism
compatible metatheories

cultural studies & historical approach
ethnography & socio-cognitivism
impact of metatheory

methodological
impact of metatheory
ontological
research concepts
What is “information?”

Example

106...(1.0) all my adult life,
107I’ve been a --
108...an active republican,
109except those little times when I was --
110when I was locked up.
111...(2.0) and er,
112there’s a slow coming to terms with that past.
113...(1.0) the --
114...(1.0) how do you put it?
115...(2.0) I’m an active republican.
116I was an active republican,
117but I’m not a reformed terrorist.
118...neither am I a pacifist.
119...(1.0) er,
120...(1.0) I believed at one point
121...still believe at one point,
122and er,
123that er --
124...(1.0) the armed struggle was necessary.
125...(1.0) that er.
126...(1.0) partition wasn’t just.
127...(1.0) and that there --
128the means weren’t there.
129to,
130politically and constitutionally,
131correct that situation.
132...(3.0) er,
133thirty years later.
134I think the means are in place to do that.
135...(1.0) so that’s --
136represents my journey.
impact of metatheory
social
impact of metatheory

social
impact of metatheory

personal

What’s your metatheory?
impact of metatheory

personal

What’s your metatheory?
contribution from Finland

"Metatheoretical Snowmen"
(Hartel, ALISE poster, 2005)
gedankenexperiment
“thought-experiment”

The process of employing imaginary situations to increase understanding.
five panelists will address:
(in 5 minutes each)

• What is the snowman’s reality?
• What is information?
• What is information behavior in the snowman’s world?
the jury

academic
non-academic
student

1 (incomprehensible) ---------------------- 10 (eureka!)
grand prizes

Your Name Here

WINNER

Metatheoretical Snowmen 2011
panelists & their metatheories

Jonathan Furner – philosophical-analytic
Soo Young Rieh – user-centered design
Michael Olsson – critical theory
Marcia J. Bates – evolutionary approach
Nicholas Belkin – cognitivism
“...the classical techniques of the discipline of philosophy are brought to bear on information-related matters ”
user-centered design

Soo Young Rieh
School of Information, University of Michigan

“the development and human testing of information organization and information system designs is seen as a path to both scientific understanding and improved information access”
critical studies

Michael Olsson

Journalism, Information & Media Studies Group, University of Technology, Sydney

“the hidden power relations and patterns of documentation within society are revealed and debunked”
evolutionary approach

Marcia J. Bates
School of Education and Information Studies, UCLA

“the insights of biology and evolutionary psychology are brought to bear on information-related phenomena”
cognitivism

Nicholas Belkin
School of Communication, Information & Library Studies, Rutgers University

“the thinking of the individual person operating in the world is the dominating focus of research on information seeking, retrieval, and use”
discussant

Andrew Dillon
School of Information
University of Texas, Austin
And the winner is...

Jonathan Furner – philosophical-analytic
Soo Young Rieh – user-centered design
Michael Olsson – critical theory
Marcia J. Bates – evolutionary approach
Nicholas Belkin – cognitivism
Thank you

Presentation slides are available upon request to jenna.hartel@utoronto.ca