

# **A Comparative Analysis of Librarians and Health Professionals as “Health Info(r)mediators”**

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**Nadine Wathen**

**The University of Western Ontario**

# In collaboration with

- Leslie Bella, Research Professor, School of Social Work, Memorial University
- Roma Harris, Professor, Faculty of Information & Media Studies, UWO
- Sally Wyatt, Professor of Digital Cultures in Development, Maastricht University, The Netherlands

# Our Main Questions

- How do people get health information?
- What kinds of actors “go between” the flow of health information from producers to users?
  - technological, human & hybrid forms
  - expert and non-expert
  - explicit, implicit and “hidden”
  - formal and informal
- What impact does the “go between” have on the information and its accessibility, utility, *etc.*?

# Is the mediation process like this...



From: Wathen, Wyatt & Harris (2008). *Mediating Health Information: The Go-Betweens in a Changing Socio-Technical Landscape*. Basingstoke, Palgrave.

# Or more like this... ?



From: Wathen, Wyatt & Harris (2008). *Mediating Health Information: The Go-Betweens in a Changing Socio-Technical Landscape*. Basingstoke, Palgrave.

# Definitions

Following Latour (2005)

*Intermediaries*: “transport meaning or force without transformation”

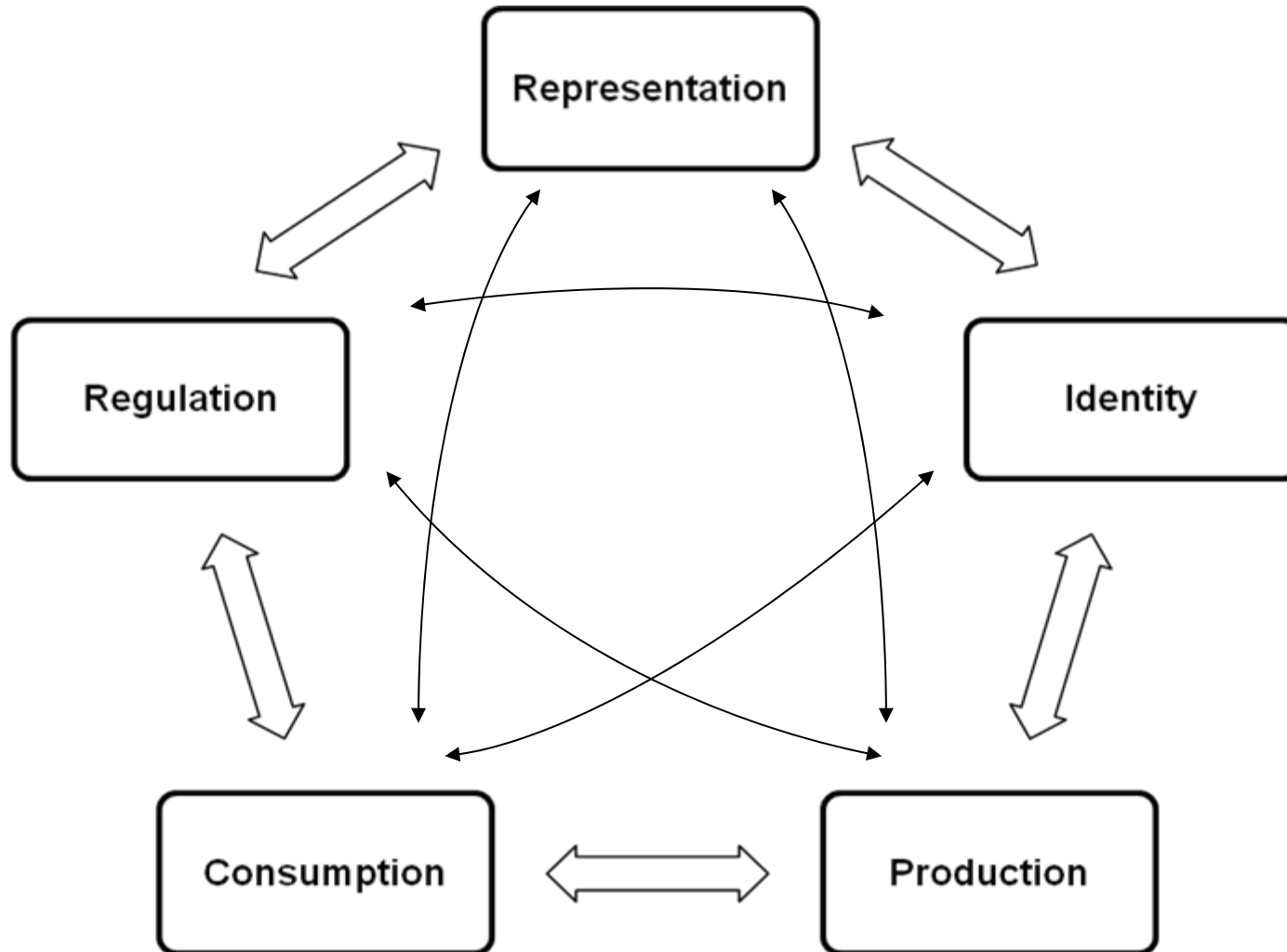
*Mediators* “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning of the elements they are supposed to carry”

# “Circuit of Culture”

(du Gay & Hall)

- A framework to help us understand the roles and interactions of these aspects of health information ...
  - ...Production
  - ...Consumption
  - ...Regulation
  - ...Representation
  - ...Identity

# Circuit, cont.



*(adapted from du Gay et al., 1997: 3)*

# Today's talk

- examines the role of health professionals as “go-betweens” charged with providing health information to people who want/need it
- highlights librarians as a specific type of go-between and discusses this role re: health
- proposes some key differences in roles
- raises some issues for discussion (I hope!)
- shamelessly promotes our forthcoming book

# Approach

- To understand how health information provision roles are articulated among selected health professions and librarians
- Comparative analysis of formal codes of practice, including:
  - Canadian, U.K., and U.S. Organizations' websites
  - examples of professional curricula (course outlines, readings and texts) re: the health information exchange
  - references to info(r)mediation work in recent issues of English language journals directed to practitioners

# Health professions

- In general, each profession articulates some type of “info(r)mediation” role, though the emphasis differs
  - this is also reflected in the content of primary and continuing education curricula
- Some professions see this role across multiple “levels” of engagement (family, community, etc.), others focus on individual interactions
- Some are very specific in the focus of their expertise, others more broad

# Librarianship

Specific types of info(r)mediation:

- Reference
  - analyse user needs & link to resources; finding aids
- Instruction
  - recent focus on new technologies, but also access to the collection and other resources more broadly
- Selection

# Info(r)mediation work

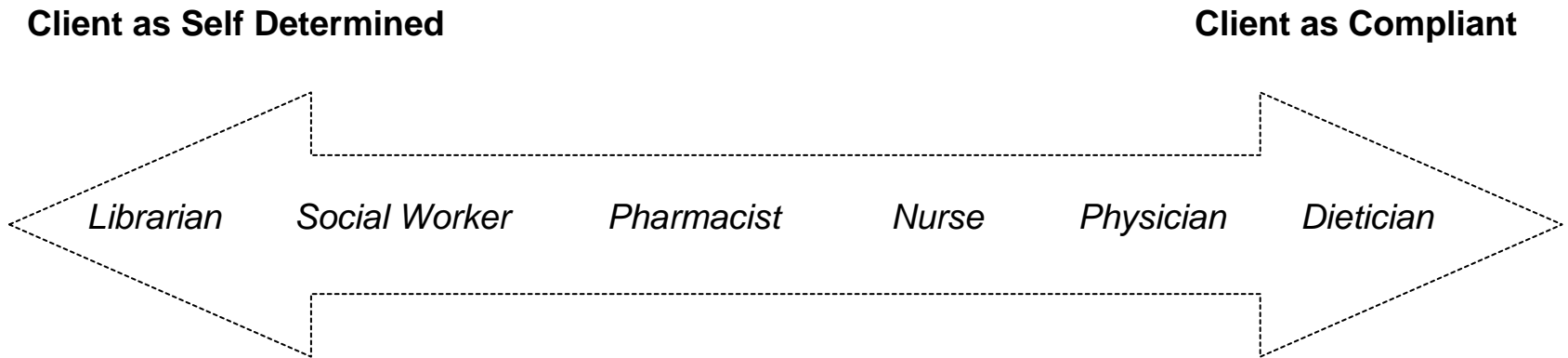
**Providing Information ::** *Librarian; Pharmacist*

**Patient Education ::** *Dietician; Nurse; Physician*

**Psychoeducation ::** *Social Worker*

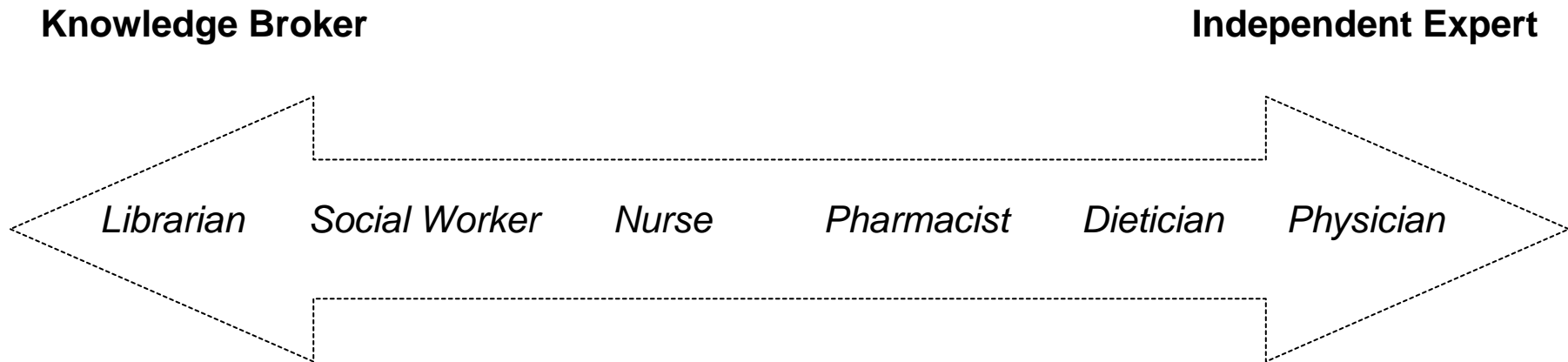
From: Bella et al., (2008) 'Everybody's talking at me': Situating the client in the info(r)mediary work of the health professions. In: Wathen, Wyatt & Harris. *Mediating Health Information: The Go-Betweens in a Changing Socio-Technical Landscape*. Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2008.

# Situating the user



From: Bella et al., (2008) 'Everybody's talking at me': Situating the client in the info(r)mediary work of the health professions. In: Wathen, Wyatt & Harris. *Mediating Health Information: The Go-Betweens in a Changing Socio-Technical Landscape*. Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2008.

# How expert knowledge is represented



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# Librarians as health info(r)mediators

- Are librarians “intermediaries” or “mediators”?
- How are these roles enacted in different kinds of health information service?
- High degree of engagement in health sciences, evidence-based health care, etc.

# BUT...

- What about in the public library?
  - Are health queries “higher touch” than others?
  - Are librarians ready and willing to deal with them?
  - Have we abdicated some/all of this role to internet public access terminals?
- Policy decisions, including space planning, can significantly effect “socio-technical configurations” of service, leaving some with unmet needs (e.g., Henwood chapter)

# Forthcoming Book

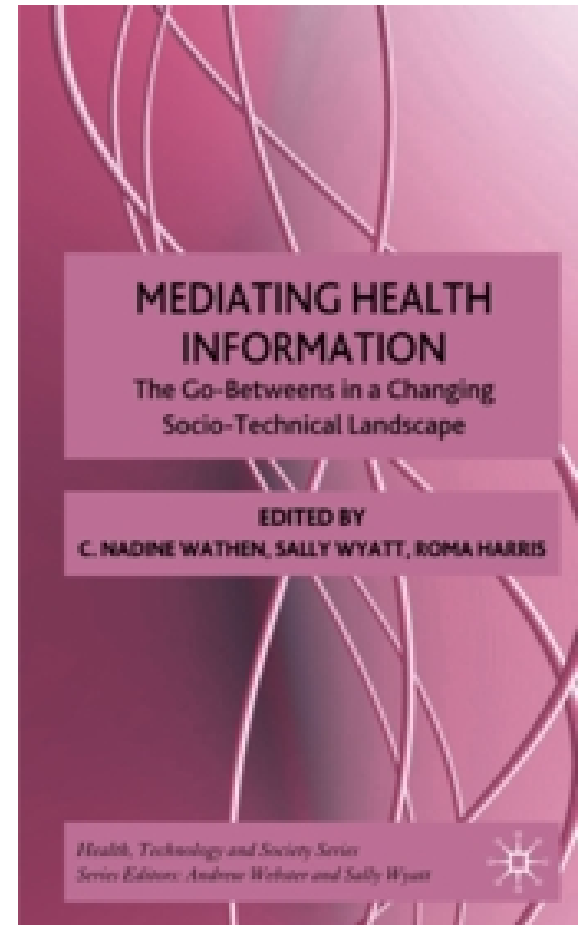
N. Wathen, S. Wyatt, R. Harris

## **Mediating Health Information**

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Contact: [nwathen@uwo.ca](mailto:nwathen@uwo.ca)