Disciplinary Differences and Undergraduates' Information-Seeking Behavior

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JASIST, 53(8):631-638, 2002
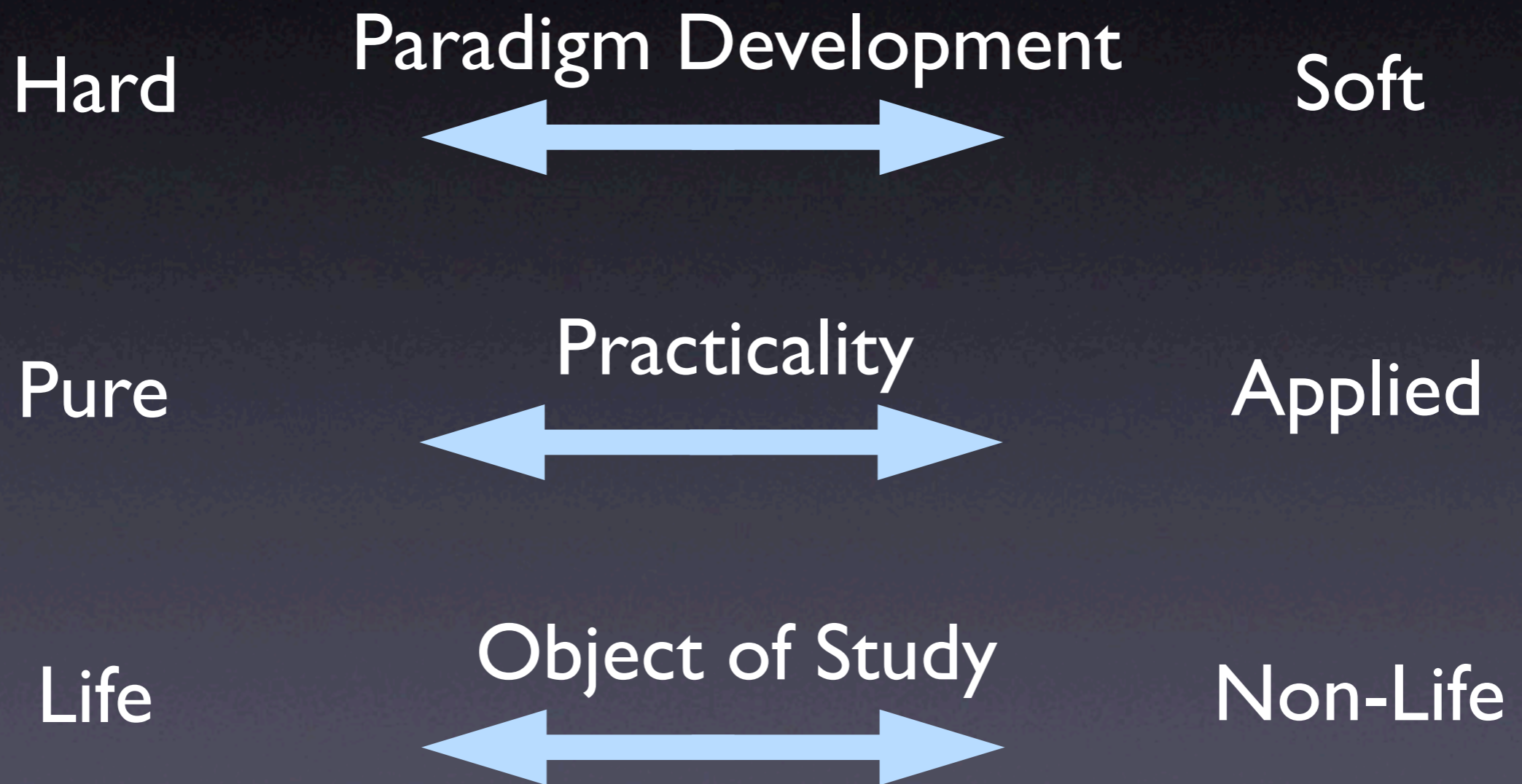
presented by Christopher Maier
2004-10-26
INLS 279: Bioinformatics Research Review

Motivation

- Previous works focused on faculty, graduate students

- Look at undergraduates

  - Differences because information-seeking behaviors are not developed yet?

  - Similarities because professors instill discipline-specific seeking habits?

Biglan's Typology

Hard	Paradigm Development	Soft
Pure	Practicality	Applied
Life	Object of Study	Non-Life

Biglan's Typology, Continued

- Used as a framework in numerous examinations of the differences between various academic fields

- This is the first use of the typology in information and library science research

Research Question

Using Biglan's Typology as a framework, will differences in information-seeking behavior be evident between different academic disciplines, as manifested by undergraduates in that field?
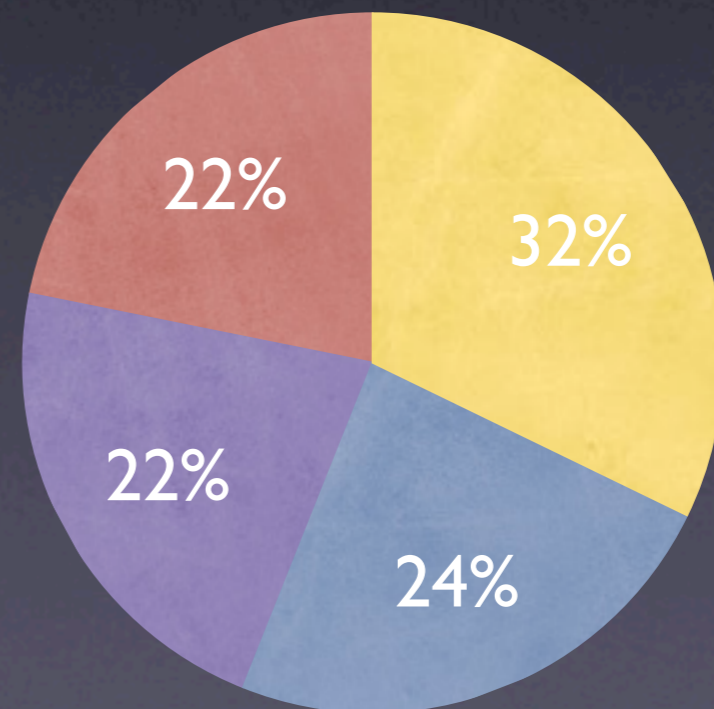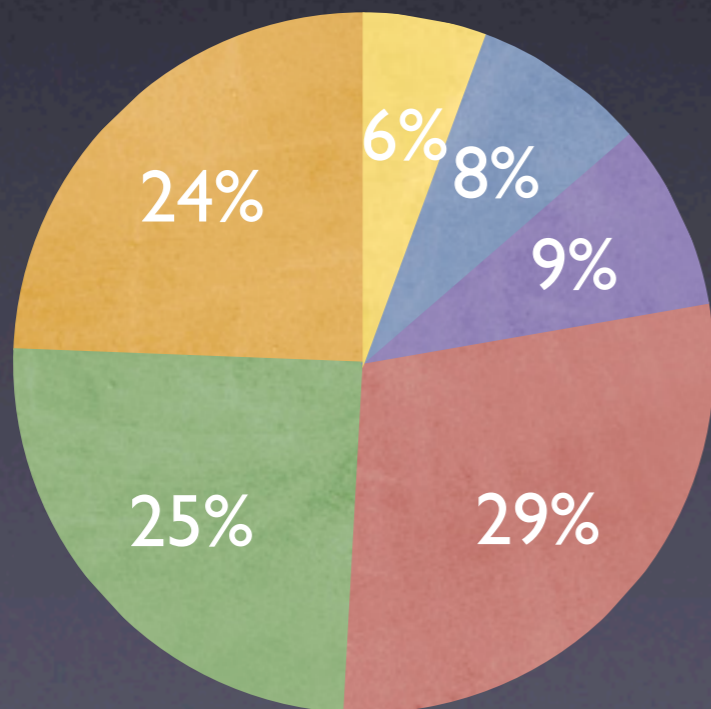
The Data

- Data drawn from 1996 College Student Experiences Questionnaire (collected by Indiana University)

- Covers 5175 students from 38 4-year institutions. Only majors in fields covered by Biglan's typology were considered for this study -- no Biologists :(

Subject Break-down

- Physical Sciences
- Engineering
- Humanities
- Business
- Social Sciences
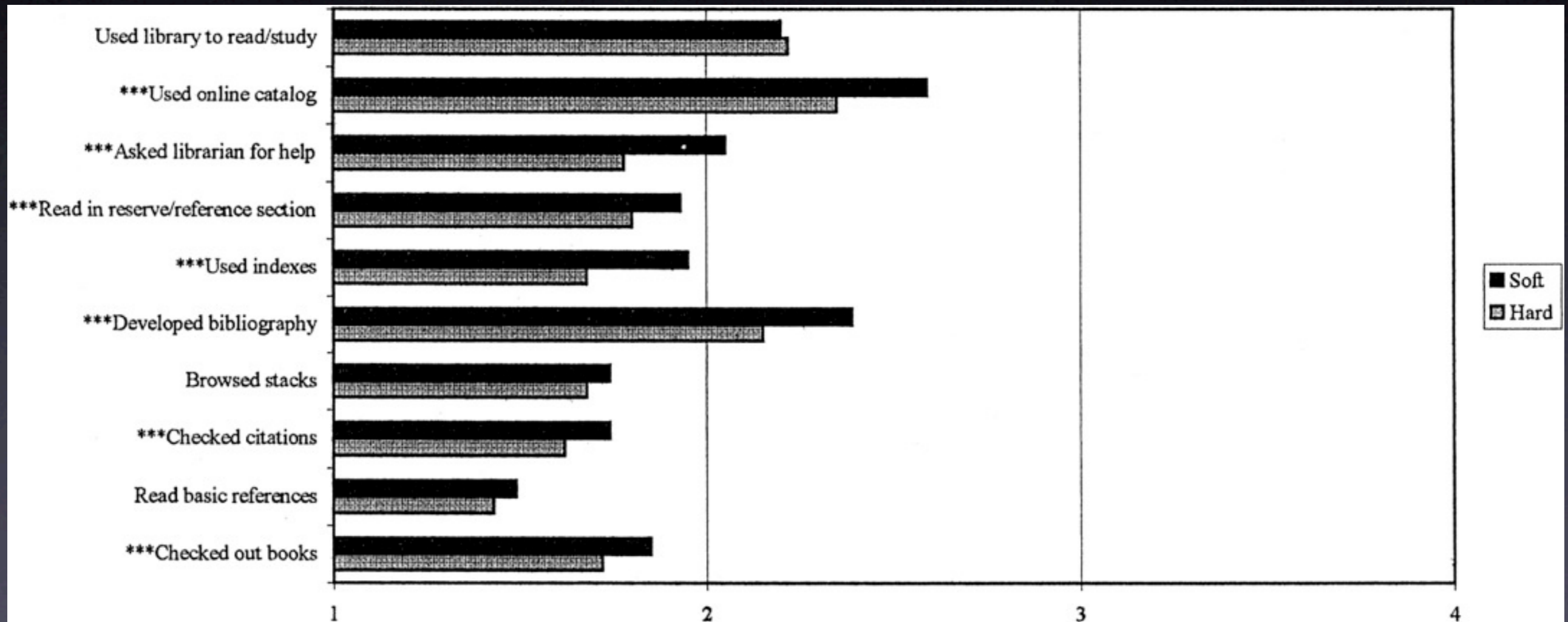- Education

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

Questions

- Information-seeking behavior assessed from self-reported measures of library usage
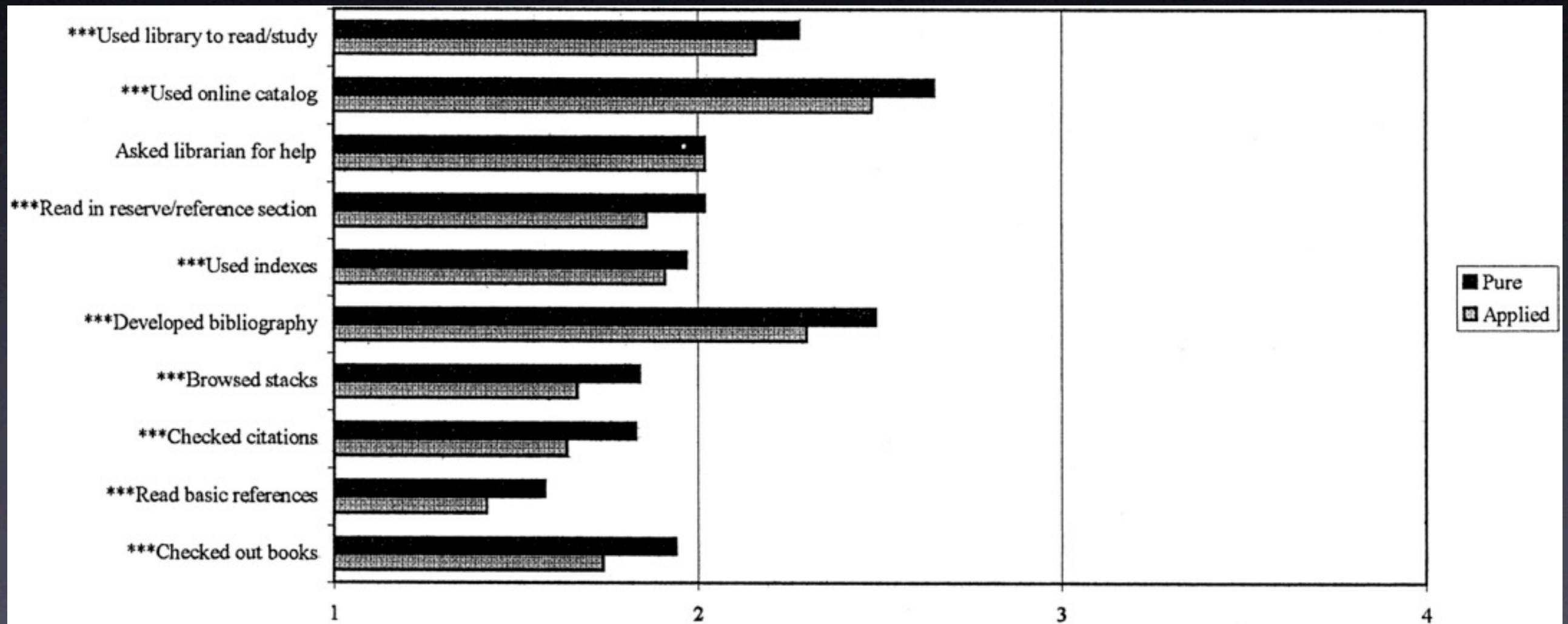
Analysis

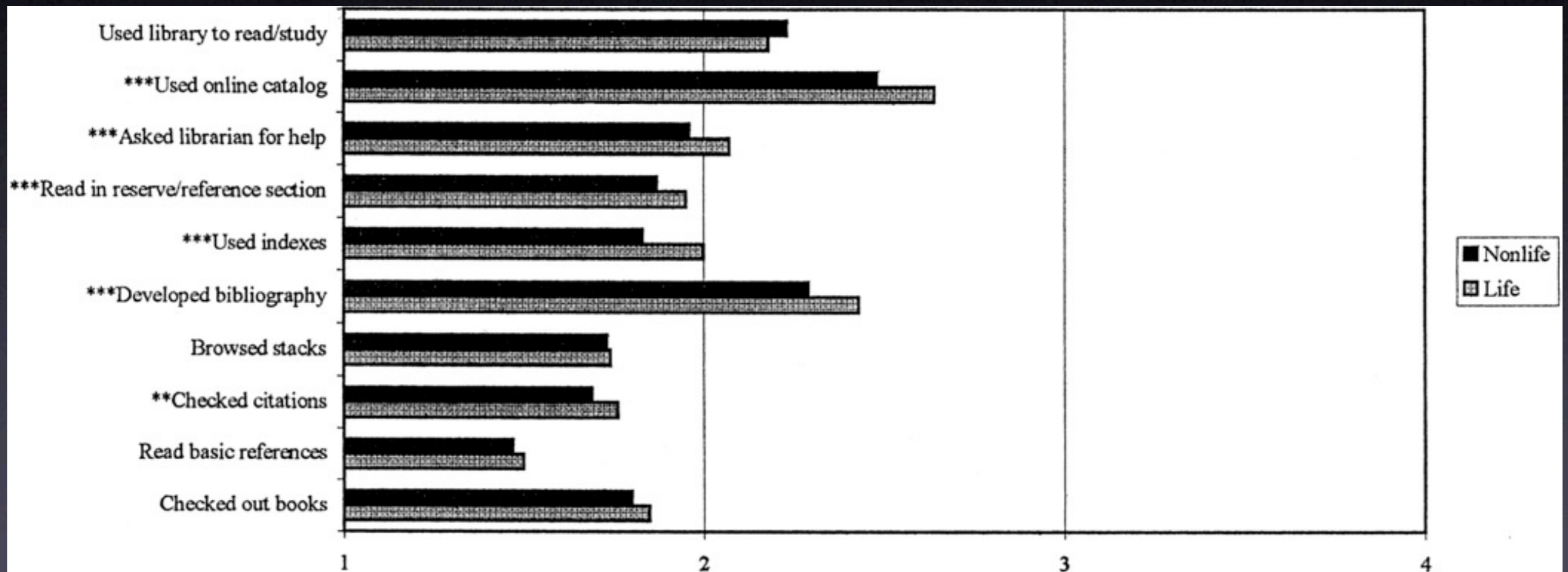- t-tests for each of three typology dimensions

Findings: Hard vs. Soft

Findings: Pure vs. Applied

Findings: Life vs. Non-Life

Results

- Majors in soft, pure, life disciplines engaged in more information-seeking activities than hard, applied, non-life majors

- Biglan's Typology can be a useful framework in ILS research

Considerations

- This study looked at undergrads, not researchers established in their field -- maybe undergrads don't know what the important resources in their field are yet

- Lots of freshmen in sample -- not advanced in their field, still doing basic stuff

- Also looks at "current" or "anticipated" major, not necessarily what the student graduates with

Discuss

- Averages all hover around 2, which translates to "occasionally"

- Did hard, applied, non-life majors not seek information? Problem with this study is that it couches information-seeking behavior in terms of physical library use.

- How about different combinations, such as e.g. hard, pure, non-life majors? Author suggests tailoring library services to each "tier" of disciplines

Comments

- Good
  - Large sample size, many universities
- Bad
  - Limited to physical library services
  - "Paradigm" and "Practicality" axes of the typology not equally represented
  - Interesting to see results if limited to upperclassmen, or students doing "research" (as opposed to e.g. finding information for a report)