# Grey Literature Survey 2004
# A research project tracking developments in the field of grey literature

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## Introduction

Last December, at GL5 in Amsterdam, many of the authors and researchers reiterated the Luxembourg Convention on grey literature. Some questioned if it were not time to rethink the definition, some offered moderations, but not one called for its complete elimination or abolition. During the course of the authors' presentations, specific attributes of grey were brought to lively discussion and debate. However, time and circumstance being known limitations on this kind of interaction and communication, ensured that more issues and questions were raised than could be adequately addressed. At the close of GL5, the idea came to devise a research project capturing the main issues and questions raised and to systematically hold them up to the Luxembourg definition of grey literature to examine where redefinition if any is needed. Both authors are well aware of crossovers, bypasses, and at times a *Fata Morgana* as to what is grey or commercial on the information highway, but then they poise the question, where would be today without definition?

The dichotomy grey versus commercial is one found both in the definition following the York Seminar (Wood, 1984) "…not available through normal bookselling channels" and the definition redefined at the Luxembourg Conference (1997) "… not controlled by commercial publishing". Like any dichotomy, this one serves as a cognitive tool in the process of reduction, analysis, and understanding of information - from authorship and production to its further use and application. This dichotomy also allows for the simplification of widespread terminologies, where grey literature becomes an umbrella term for a host of expressions among which include the terms: secondary, unpublished, unconventional, fugitive, refugee, fringe, minor, open, and etcetera.

Further, this dichotomy has allowed information workers to group the types of documents such as reports, working papers, proceedings, and 100s of other document types that are grey literature; and, in so doing set them apart from what is commercial literature. In this same process of typology, grey literature distinguishes itself from yet another category of information, which includes ephemera, black literature, vanity press, web trash, classified information, etc. Thus, the dichotomy allows one to distinguish not only between that which is grey and commercial but also it excludes that which belongs to neither.

Like any tool or instrument, its purpose serves as a means to an end, and is not the end itself. The dichotomy grey versus commercial has allowed information professionals to continue their work in progress without becoming lost in the mass and gigabytes of information available in every conceived means of print and electronic format. Furthermore, if this definition continues to have meaning for information professionals, then should the average net-user also at least recognize the term grey literature?

## Method and Procedure

This survey was held in advance of the Sixth International Conference on Grey Literature (GL6). The instrument used is an open-ended questionnaire consisting of twenty-two questions or items designed to compile information for further analysis with the aid of SPSS software. It is not only important to know if a respondent agrees or disagrees with the questions, but also their comments stand central. While this questionnaire is not anonymous, the identity of an individual respondent will remain undisclosed. An estimated 10-12 minutes of the respondent's time is needed to complete the online questionnaire.

The questionnaire was mounted to a Webpage on GreyNet's website in late February 2004, where it remained online for 7 months - yielding 104 completed and valid forms. As the forms arrived via email, they were recorded by the project administrator and sent in batches of roughly 20 each to the data controller, where they were further entered and processed via SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. The first online questionnaire was completed on February 25, 2004 and the last was completed on September 20, 2004. During this period, the project workers met on five occasions to examine preliminary results and address the responses in the open-ended questionnaire that needed to be further grouped and labelled. By the end of October, the final results of the questionnaire had been tabulated and were ready for further analysis and interpretation.