The Information World of Parents: A Study of the Use and Understanding of Information by Parents of Young Children

Christopher Walker

Abstract

Recent decades have seen change in social attitudes toward parenting within the United Kingdom. During this time, parenting has received an unprecedented amount of attention from government, through legislation and policy initiatives, as well as becoming a regular topic in the news media, television programs, and for book publishers. The consequence of this social change is that parents today, arguably, face far greater pressure in terms of sifting and weighing the wide range of messages, opinions, and information targeted at them. Despite these social changes, parents and parenting have received comparatively little attention from researchers specifically examining their information literacy needs. This article is based upon research conducted using constructivist grounded theory and examines how a group of thirty-three parents in Leeds, United Kingdom looked for, accessed, and assessed information. The primary outcome of the research is a substantive grounded theory, which is framed within five categories: being a parent (core category); connectivity; trust; picture of self; weighing. These five categories describe how parents look for, access, and weigh information on a daily basis. This theory has implications for how organizations, services, and professionals convey information to parents. It also supports the notion of a need to view information literacy as part of a complex socially constructed paradigm.

Introduction

The aim of this article is to provide a summary of the key findings and theory, which I developed from my research and to highlight its agree-

LIBRARY TRENDS, Vol. 60, No. 3, 2012 ("Information Literacy Beyond the Academy, Part II: Organizational Issues, Theoretical Perspectives, and Practical Initiatives," edited by John Crawford), pp. 546–568. © 2012 The Board of Trustees, University of Illinois

ment with developments in the sociocultural paradigm emerging in current information literacy research.

Recent decades have seen a steady increase in the range and type of information available to British parents. Information has taken a wide range of forms and has typically included parenting books, television programs, and even newspapers (Freely, 2000), as well as the large scale penetration of the Internet into homes (Dutton & Helsper, 2007). This period has also been accompanied by an increased political interest in the family and parenting (Great Britain, 1989, 2004; HM Treasury, 2004). A consequence of these sociopolitical drivers has been an agenda that has generally been focused on decreasing inequality, increasing parental responsibility and parental choice, in addition to a range of targeted messages, for example, healthy eating advice and parenting skills (Layard & Dunn, 2009; The Children's Society, 2006). Modern parents not only have greater access to information about parenting, through the media and the Internet, but also find themselves and their families under greater sociopolitical scrutiny (Department for Education and Skills, 2007; HM Treasury, 2003). This poses the questions: how and why do parents seek information, how do they assess it, and how do they use it?

Information Literacy: Context

Information literacy research has evolved from a concept ostensibly based upon a skills-based paradigm (ALA, 1989; CILIP, 2004; UNESCO, 2005). The current discourse within the information literacy community is both wide and varied (Andersen, 2006; Kurbanoglu, 2003, 2006; Lloyd, 2009, 2010; Shenton, 2009b). Notable contributions in recent years include those from Limberg (1999), who argues for a closer association between information seeking research and that of information literacy. Traditional skills-based views of information literacy have been criticized as producing "deficit models" (Lloyd, 2005, 2009) because of their perceived bias toward textual information, at the expense of considering prior learning or alternative sources of information. Bruce's (2008) current view is not dissimilar to that of Lloyd. Bruce tries to move the concept forward with the notion of "informed learning," the codependent relationship between information and learning. Lupton's (2008) phenomenographic research focuses on the relationship between information and learning, suggesting a two-stage cyclical process of information and learning. Tuominene, Salvolainen, and Talja (2005) follow a similar path, emphasizing that information literacy theory should take account of sociotechnical environments, encompassing the effects of community, social collaboration, and the current digital environment.

Lloyd's (2009, 2010) sociocultural paradigm views information literacy as a catalyst in which actors, through their personal experiences, construct knowledge about a context-specific practice, which cannot be learned in-

dependently of its setting. Here, information literacy is constructed by an individual's personal reflection of his/her interaction with information both subjectively and intersubjectively (Lloyd, 2010). The point of comparisons with the research present here is that Lloyd used grounded theory.

Methodology

Population

The aim of the research was to explore the information world of parents of primary school aged children. In order to fulfill the aim of the research, semistructured interviews were conducted with thirty-three parents of primary aged school-aged children.

Parents were recruited through local primary schools, this being done in order to provide control over the socioeconomic construction of the sample. The first phase, with the support and help from the local education authority, was to contact each of the 223 primary school head teachers in Leeds, with a view to setting up informal meetings to discuss the research. Meetings were then arranged with twelve head teachers who had indicated interest, resulting in six schools and a local church closely allied to a school being selected as parent recruiting grounds. Anonymity of schools and parents was guaranteed. Schools A and B are considered to be in more affluent areas of the city. Schools C, D, and E are located very near to, or in, areas of social and economic deprivation. School F is a pupil referral unit dealing with local children who have behavioral issues and are considered unsuitable for mainstream education. Finally, a local church based near the city center comprising of a mixed range of parents from diverse social backgrounds was included. Pseudonyms were given to every interviewee, the only identifier being the first letter of their new name, for example, Alison was interviewed from school A and Donna from school D.

The interviews followed a semistructured approach, the emphasis being on understanding how parents look for, access, assess, and use information. A second consideration was that the interview instrument had to allow for the flexibility required for a grounded theory study, as it sought to consolidate emerging theory from previous interviews and incorporate it into subsequent ones. In order to achieve this, an interview memory-map was devised (see fig. 1). This provided the researcher with an "aid memoir" of the primary topic areas while allowing for a divergence in questioning.

A constructivist grounded theory approach was used to analyze the data (Charmaz, 2006). The primary reason for the use of this approach was that it allows the researcher to try and understand the meanings and actions of actors.

Open-coding constituted the initial coding phase and commenced as soon as data became available after an interview had been transcribed

(Charmaz, 2006). Open-codes were further focused by use of a range of techniques, starting with the constant comparative analysis (Charmaz, 2006), which was supplemented, with varying degrees of success, by axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1998), theoretical coding (Glaser, 1978) and situational analysis (Clarke, 2005). Qualitative Research Solutions (QSR) NVivo 8 was used to collate, store, and interrogate the data as well as provide a useful way of linking memos with emerging codes.

Results

The findings of the research form a substantive theory, specific to a group of parents in time and space. The theory is centered on five grounded theory categories. Each category describes an element highlighting how the parents interviewed search, access, and use information. These categories are grounded through the core category. The five categories are:

- Being a parent (core category)
- Connectivity
- Trust
- Picture of Self
- Weighing

The theory is illustrated diagrammatically in figure 2. The figure shows the five categories and their associated subcategories. The theory in essence is a scaffold representing important elements and the various interactions influencing a parent's information world. It argues that parents inhabit varied information worlds unique to themselves, as well as any given situation or need. The decision by a parent to pursue an information need, the way they assess that information and then act upon it, is generally influenced by the five "categories" and their subcategories. Categories will at times interact with one another, and may be affected by influencing factors such as time, or resources.

Being a Parent

The core category, "being a parent," tries to define and explain the underlying motivation underpinning a parent's need to search for information in order to successfully fulfill their parental responsibility. In grounded theory a core category is one that has "the greatest explanatory relevance and highest potential for linking all other categories together" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 104). This category is therefore central to the theory and suggests that parents inhabit a world of "being a parent" where they both consciously and unconsciously look for information that will underpin, support, and inform their parenting. Influencing their ability to successfully search for information are external elements that include their social connectivity, their trust of people, organizations, and sources, their own emotional picture of themselves and their ability to weigh the

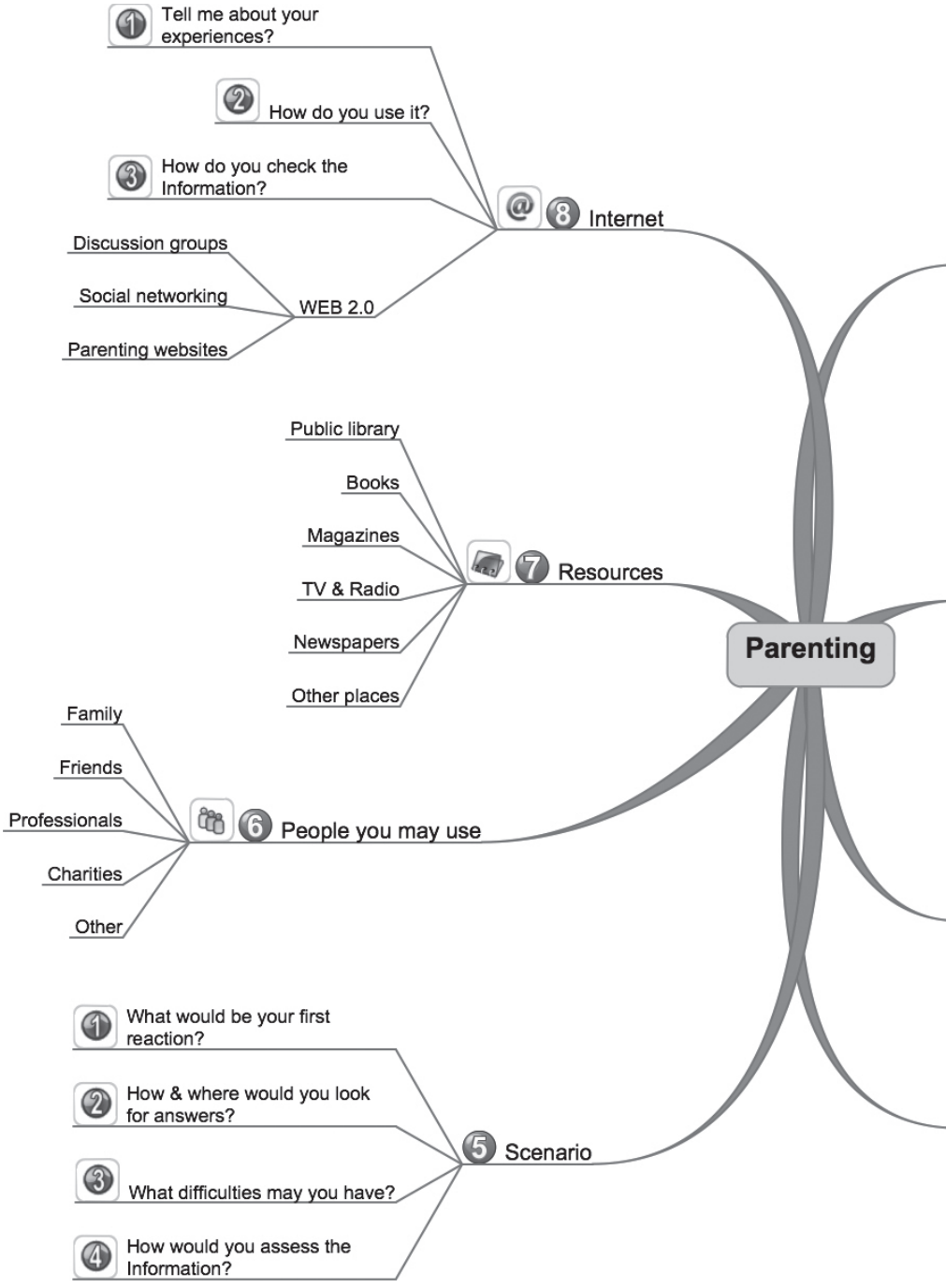
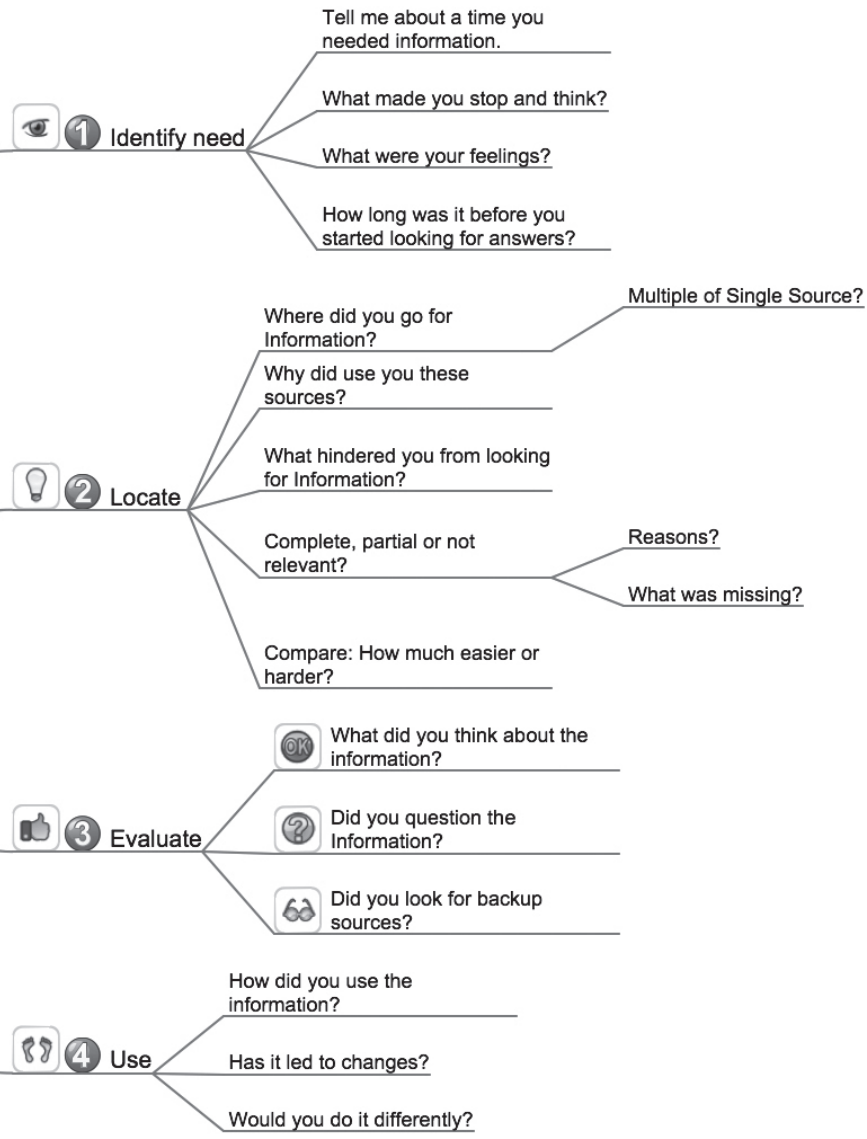


Figure 1. Interview questions "memory map"


1 Identify need
Tell me about a time you needed information.
What made you stop and think?
What were your feelings?
How long was it before you started looking for answers?
2 Locate
Where did you go for Information?
Multiple of Single Source?
Why did use you these sources?
What hindered you from looking for Information?
Complete, partial or not relevant?
Reasons?
What was missing?
Compare: How much easier or harder?
3 Evaluate
What did you think about the information?
Did you question the Information?
Did you look for backup sources?
4 Use
How did you use the information?
Has it led to changes?
Would you do it differently?

information. Parents therefore are constantly, on both a conscious and subconscious level, looking or on the lookout for information that will improve or help their parenting. Parents constantly avail themselves of sources of potential help or pay particular attention to types of information, such as news articles or television programs, or involve themselves in social discourse with other parents, without any specific or "formalized" question in mind. Where this occurs, it will increase the likelihood of serendipitous information encounters (Foster & Ford, 2003).

What differentiated parents was not their underlying desire to want the best for their children, but their ability to effectively help and support their children through their information searching. The differences between the parents' questions and their information needs were wide and varied, especially in terms of both complexity and emphasis, with those parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds generally recounting examples of more complex needs. An important finding was that the ability of a parent to successfully navigate and find answers was found to be influenced by a number of variables, notably their education and social capital (Bourdieu, 1984), something noted by Savolainen (1995) in his general model.

This category comprises mainly two ways in which parents search for information, namely "formalized" and "nonformalized." This distinction between types of searching is not unique and is widely written about in different contexts; for example, Savolainen (1995) uses "project of life" and "problematic situations" as well as other examples such as information encountering (Erdelez, 1997), berry picking (Bates, 1989), and information grounds (Fisher & Hinton, 2004).

Formalized Searching

Formalized searching is arguably the easiest form to identify and is the approach historically addressed by LIS research. In this context, I have defined it as "specific questions, requirements, or needs that require an answer or outcome." Within the scope of formalized needs, there is a sliding scale ranging from very simple to highly complex. The reason for this is because of the spectrum of information needs parents reported they had: each need being important in itself, but nevertheless quite different in scope and complexity. For example, one parent spoke about a relatively simple need when she helped her young son search the Internet for local history information for his school project. This contrasted with complex needs over many years as one mother fought for a diagnosis (and answers) to explain her son's extreme behavioral problems. Despite being quite different in terms of type and complexity, each of these needs requires parents to look for information as they each fulfill their parental responsibility.

Nonformalized Searching

Nonformalized searching is a concept that is more abstract and relates to times where actors "discover information in everyday life" (Wilson, 1977,

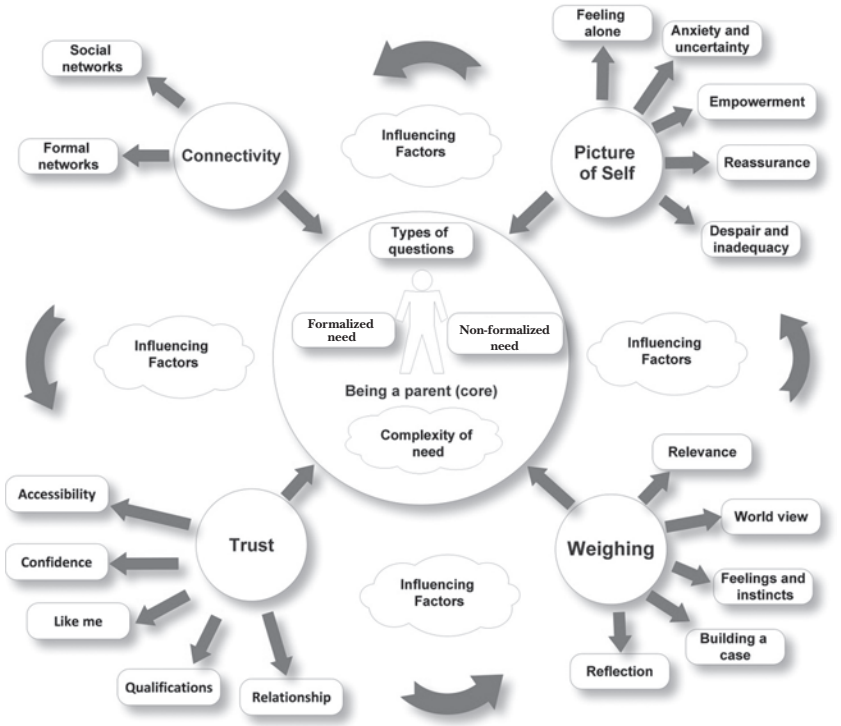


Figure 2. Being a parent: looking for information

p. 36). Nonformalized searching can be either verbalized (recognized and acted upon) or unverbalized and even unrecognized information need, operating at either conscious or subconscious levels. An example of the subconscious level is illustrated by one parent who reflected how her own parenting style was largely influenced through observing how a friend had difficulty disciplining her children. On refection, all parents recognized times when they assimilated or obtained useful information without realizing they were either in need of it, or that they were really searching for answers. Nonformalized searching is very evident as parents construct their own parenting styles and values, as they develop and adapt parenting skills through their family life stages. Types of questions can be similar to those asked during formalized searching such as issues relating to child behaviors and access to services, local clubs and societies; and indeed a need may overlap.

Connectivity

Connectivity is analogous to a conduit acting as an interface between the parent and other people and is divided into two subcategories: social networks and formal networks. Every parent interviewed recounted the importance of personal communication (face-to-face) as a means of finding information. There were divergences however, between the ways in which personal communication as an information source occurred. The findings clearly differentiated between two types of connectivity, namely social connectivity and formal connectivity, the latter focusing on the interface between help systems such as health professionals, schools and professionals and the parent, while the former concentrated on those social connections the parent used.

Social Connectivity

Social connectivity plays an important role for people utilizing information in an everyday context (Beer, Marcella, & Baxter, 1998; Chatman, 2001; Fisher, Erdelez, & McKechnie, 2005; Hersberger, 2001; Pettigrew, 1999). The results of this research reveal that there were two distinct types of social connectivity used by parents, namely: family and close friends; and neighbors and other parents.

Family and Close Friends

Parents generally reported that they have a trusted source who they would consult at an early stage when they had any information need, typically their own parents, siblings, or close friends. Common defining qualifications were that they were someone who is either ahead of them in terms of parental life stage, or who is collegiate to them and could share experiences. From the perception of the parent, this can either be beneficial or negative because much is dependent upon the quality of the information. These findings have similarity with Granovetter's "strength of ties" theory (Granovetter, 1973, 1983), which offers an explanation of the ways actors look for and receive information (Chatman, 1999; Savolainen, 2009).

Neighbors and Other Parents

Most parents reported that they had used their social networks of colleagues and friends as sources of information. Typically, where an acquaintance was used as a source of information for a formalized question, the parent perceived that he/she held some unique or special knowledge. This approach was particularly apparent with those parents interviewed from the higher socioeconomic backgrounds especially for information needs relating to schooling and health concerns.

Pettigrew (1999) and Fisher have written extensively on the concept, developing and applying it to a range of settings that have included parents (Fisher & Hinton, 2004; Fisher & Landry, 2007; Fisher, Marcoux, Miller, Sánchez, & Cunningham, 2004). Information grounds are

"environment[s] temporarily created when people come together for a singular purpose but from whose behavior emerges a social atmosphere that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information" (Pettigrew, 1999, p. 811). This statement is generally supportive of the findings. Examples cited by interviewees include discussions with other parents in the school playground, mothers groups, church groups, and coffee mornings. These have all been mentioned as places where parents, both formally and informally, share information about a wide range of subjects, for example: sleep, feeding, bedtimes, and pocket money.

Social Divergences

The findings show that a significant minority of parents from the lower socioeconomic backgrounds claimed not to have a family member or close friend who they felt that they could turn to for information or advice. The findings revealed that those parents who were facing the most challenges in their daily parenting were those who had, or felt that they had, the least support. It is interesting to note that all of these parents have some ongoing parenting challenges centered on child behavior issues. The parents express feelings of being stigmatized or worried about being labeled bad parents for not being able to cope; a consequence of this being, in a few cases, that parents attributed the stress of their child's behavior to their own health and well-being as they reported depression, feelings of despair, and hopelessness. One parent spoke about feelings with which she has to "cope" because she does not want to be seen as a failure. This attitude of self-sufficiency or coping was a common theme that only emerged from parents interviewed from the lower socioeconomic groups and was in direct contrast with the general attitudes expressed by those parents from the higher socioeconomic backgrounds and their apparent willingness to share with, and ask, for help and support from whosoever they thought had the relevant experience.

Formalized Networks

Formalized networks are those that relate to any external agencies and can include doctors, teachers, and social services. Chatman's (1996) notion of "small world lives" has influenced a lot of recent LIS research (Savolainen, 2009), especially her notion of the role of the outsider. These results suggest that similar attitudes exist between parents from different socioeconomic backgrounds when it comes to approaching formalized networks. The clearest picture is provided by parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and was contextualized by a range of emotions, attitudes, and fears that were expressed in terms of mistrust between themselves and support services, particularly doctors, schools, and social services, who were invariably people they perceived to be different to themselves.

One parent has had many problems with her son's mental health and behavior and blames professionals for not helping. She spoke despairingly

and dismissively about the "lack" of help and support she has received, particularly from his school. She tried to justify why she personally had not done more to help her son, for example by taking him to the family doctor. Her response was one of apathy, simply stating that there was nothing that could be done. She also asserted that her beliefs centered on a "them and us" mentality, an attitude that the professionals are there to sort the problems with minimum input from herself. This attitude was not uncommon among a number of parents from the lower socioeconomic group. As with anything, there are exceptions to the general finding that parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds do not fully utilize external agencies or support. David and Denise were willing to access all available help. It is interesting to note that in these examples both are retired grandparents looking after their respective grandchildren, and both have been in full-time employment and as such were different from the other interviewees from the same housing estate in terms of their age, attitudes, and life styles. Andersen's (2006) adaption of Habermas' (1989) theory of the "public sphere" may help provide insight into this phenomenon. He uses the "public sphere" to describe an actor's ability to search and use information from within a social context, based upon an actor's own social-experiences and familiarity with the sphere in which they are searching. This may explain why parents from the higher socioeconomic backgrounds differed from those parents from the lower socioeconomic backgrounds in that they seemed very willing to use and exploit any potential sources of help and advice. It is interesting to note that these parents reported no problems in relation to their children's behavior, and so arguably had less stigma attached to their information needs and seeking in these contexts. There was also a consensus that formal help networks consist of people "just like me," those who are educated and so called "middle class."

The Parent Support Advisor (PSA)

The roles of local support workers or parent support advisors (PSA) need particular mention. PSAs are typically based in local primary schools in areas of deprivation. Their aim is to be a nonthreatening source of help and advice, as well as offering educational opportunities for parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Examples of PSAs include Sue who has a track record of helping parents in her community for nearly twenty years and has become a trusted community source of information as parents approach her for help and advice even when their children have left the local primary school. Another PSA, Sally, is seen as equally important by those parents who she helps, although she is relatively recent in post. She complains that she is unable to cement relationships with the parents on the housing estate on which she works because of long-term planning and funding issues.

Where PSAs are established and have relationships with parents, they can provide an invaluable role in enabling parents to access a wide range

of information. PSAs such as Sally and Susan have managed to dismantle some of the potential barriers that a social outsider may face in the context of Chatman's (1991) small world. This may be because they are not seen as "suits," but rather as people not dissimilar to those they are trying to reach. In Susan's case, she has a very long track record of helping the community and so is viewed as "one of them."

PSAs themselves identified a number of concerns. The first is about the long-term sustainability of PSAs within communities. One problem that Sally mentioned was that there are not enough PSAs and it is only a small number of parents who can be helped at the present time, thus failing parents who are perhaps the neediest. A second concern is local planning. Sally noted that, in the past few months, different managers had changed her area and that she was being given only six months to develop "results." A third concern is that since the PSA is the source of a lot of information for those parents they support, there is a real danger that these parents do not learn or develop the necessary information literacy skills themselves, thus becoming dependent on the PSA, a concern identified by both Susan and Sally.

Trust

Trust is important because it has a direct relationship with the way in which parents look for information. Chatman suggests that "trust is critical . . . [as] . . . members of a particular small world accept information from those they know and can reasonably trust" (Huotari & Chatman, 2001, p. 353).

Evaluation is a concept often found within the wider LIS literature (Bawden, 2001; Case, 2002) that describes a process where an actor assesses the integrity of any information obtained and may be associated with a set of skills or steps (Fitzgerald, 1997). As a term, "evaluation" formed part of my early coding phase. Through the refining of the coding, two distinct categories of "trust" and "weighing" emerged in its place. The wider information literacy literature usually views "trust" as an element of the evaluation process (Andretta, 2005; Bawden, 2001; Fitzgerald, 1997). This research does not contradict this view, however in the context of this research "trust" emerged as an important and distinct element of the way in which parents look for information. My findings showed that information received from a "trusted" source was generally accepted without any form of evaluation or real assessment as to the accuracy of the information, or it may form part of a wider "case" where a parent "weighs" the information. This means that "trust" and "weighing" may be either mutually independent or interconnected, depending on a range of factors, for example: complexity of information sought, or who the parent is.

Trust comprises five subcategories, each of which were identified as trust enablers. These trust enablers may be wholly or partially present at any given time, but each contributes to the development of trust in any given source.

Accessibility

Accessibility was found to be an important element of any trusted source. Accessibility does not necessarily mean that a source is trusted per se, but rather that a parent feels that they can easily obtain an answer that will satisfy. Previous studies have identified accessibility as an important factor affecting the choice of information source (Julien & Michels, 2000; Warner, Murray, & Palmour, 1973). Accessibility can be viewed on two levels, the first relates to its availability or the "proximity" of the information to the parent. The second relates to "comprehension" or the ability of a parent to fully and easily understand a particular source.

Proximity

Proximity simply relates to the ease with which a parent can access a given source of information. Trusted people, for example consisting of family or friends, were most often cited as the first place a parent may go to for information, simply because of relationship and availability. The Internet also seems to be, for a certain section of parents, an increasingly popular "first port of call" and used even before trusted people were consulted.

It is easy to speak in generalities, however, the reality is that a parent's information world consists of a wide and diverse range of types and levels of need in terms of complexity. It is within these contexts that parents make decisions about where to go for information. For example, a number of parents suggested that the Internet, despite its accessibility, was not an appropriate place to look for information relating to important questions such as health. However, they considered it a valid source for less important questions. Another important finding about the Internet in terms of its accessibility is that in seven cases, parents gave examples of where it was the only source of help and advice available to them and therefore it became the *de facto* source of information. Parents take their parental responsibility seriously. However, they have to be able to access information with comparative ease. In this context they gravitate toward accessible sources, be this in the form of books, the Internet, or other people.

Comprehension

Comprehension goes beyond the important element of simply understanding the information, but also includes the complexities of attitudes and nuances of expectations that are often present when communicating with professionals such as teachers and doctors. On a fundamental level, comprehension is the ability of a parent to be able to understand any given source. For example, doctors have long since been aware of the need for clear and effective information (Kai, 1996a, 1996b).

Parents, mainly from the lower socioeconomic groups, recounted discussions with a variety of health or social care professionals, in terms of their line of questioning and the information given. One parent spoke about her frustration and anguish when given apparently contradictory

advice regarding weaning her young son, when all she wanted was a simple "black and white" answer. Another parent spoke about the frustrations she had trying to talk with her son's teachers, who were unable to help, resulting in her son not receiving appropriate assistance. In this example there seemed to be unreal expectations as well as an abdication of the parent's own responsibilities and what she expected from the school, in terms of them looking at, and dealing with, her son's emotional and behavioral problems. Such examples support Andersen's (2006) argument for a greater acknowledgment of the role played by Habermas' public sphere in an LIS context and that an actor's ability to effectively search for information is framed within the discourses and ideas that formed the information and where that information is located.

Confidence and Credibility

Confidence and credibility are closely aligned to the subcategory, "Qualifications." They relate to the believability or the confidence a parent has in any given source. Many of the parents interviewed spoke predominantly about their confidence in a given source. The findings in this context were particularly weighted to a group of parents from a lower socioeconomic group who were heavy users of their local PSA. However, across the general sample, family doctors are generally viewed with confidence in most spheres. There were times when this relationship temporarily or permanently broke down, such as situations involving the divisive triple vaccine for measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR), where parents from the higher socioeconomic backgrounds reported that in this specific context they were unwilling to trust the view of their family doctor.

Like Me

It was quite apparent from the interviews that parents would generally, unless there was any specific incident or need, approach people with whom they had a natural affinity and who held similar values and beliefs.

There are times where this kind of reliance or trust in other people who have similar views to them has unhelpful or even negative consequences. There were a number of examples of unhelpful consequences, such as a local perception and underlying hostility to a new large (1,500 pupil) senior high school. This new school replaced two local and formally ethnically segregated schools in an attempt to integrate Asian heritage pupils with those from a poor white housing estate. The result of this seems to be local resentment by many of the parents interviewed from School D, as it reinforced attitudes of isolation (not sharing problems, or looking for help) as they complained that professionals (teachers and those in authority) went ahead and built the new school against their wishes. The isolation was further reinforced because there was an aggrieved belief that the Asian heritage pupils were favored above their own. A consequence of this was to distrust or blame the system, in particular the school, for not of-

fering the right help and support, despite them not attempting discourse with the school. Similar behavior has been observed and widely reported by LIS researchers (Fisher & Hinton, 2004; Fisher, et al., 2004; A. Marshall et al., 2009; Pettigrew, 1999; Pettigrew, Fidel, & Bruce, 2001).

Qualifications

Qualifications relate not only to academic or professional competency, but also to a perceived experience or "track record" that parents regard other people to have (trusted sources). A number of parents reported that they liked to speak with other parents who they saw as more experienced, or who had been through similar life stages. A large number of the parents interviewed, particularly those from the higher socioeconomic groups, reported that they relied heavily on listening to the experiences of other parents for many of their everyday needs.

Another aspect of the category "Qualifications" relates to the professional or academic expertise of the information source. Professionals such as those in social services, medicine, health, and education occupy roles of influence and are primary sources of information for all parents, to some degree and at various life stages. In the formalized information context, professionals relate to the "societal" view of trust (Kelton, Fleischmann, & Wallace, 2008), however Haider and Bawden (2007) note that a professional's legitimacy and status is wholly dependent upon the level of trust and recognition of those people subject to his/her oversight.

Relationship

A parent's own relationships or connectivity provide an important source of information, unless there are grounds for the source to be avoided. It has long been recognized that parents have a tendency to seek information from easily accessible interpersonal sources (Dewdney & Harris, 1992). Family, friends, work colleagues, and support workers (PSAs, family doctors, and teachers) all provide parents with important relationships. The quality of these relationships directly influences a parent's ability to access information.

Picture of Self

Recent years have seen an emerging trend in information behavior research examining the role of affect or emotions within the wider information literacy (Fisher & Landry, 2007; Nahl & Bilal, 2007).

Feeling Alone

The sense of feeling alone arose when parents were unable to find a source of help or advice from social sources, either because they had no one they could describe as a trusted source or because they felt that existing support systems were failing them. This was particularly evident with a large number of the parents from the lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

These findings contrast markedly with those parents in the sample from the higher socioeconomic groups and those with greater social capital, who were better able to find support from within their social groups.

Being alone also covers a wide range of circumstances and does not necessarily simply relate to social isolation. For example, one mother, despite working in the health service, felt the weight of responsibility and loneliness about granting permission for her daughter to have elective surgery. Another example relates to parents not being able to find answers, especially for illness or behavioral problems. This was exemplified by Denise, as she sought an explanation, help, and support for her granddaughter's chronic but very rare health problems. She eventually found support via the Internet from a self-help group based in the United States.

Anxiety and Uncertainty

Fisher and Landry's (2007) study of American "stay at home moms" (SAHMs) suggests that worry acted as a motivator for many mothers. Certainly all parents interviewed for this research reported that they worried about their children at some time, and that it acted as a "motivator." There was often a distinction between general worry and anxiety as the level or intensity of the worry or anxiety varied widely depending on its root cause. Examples included the MMR vaccine or choosing the right senior high school.

It was mainly those parents from the higher socioeconomic groups who spoke about their anxiety about making the right decision when selecting schools. Conversely, the findings show that parents from the lower socioeconomic backgrounds seemed "resigned" to the fact that their children would attend the local school and were thus less likely to search and investigate alternative options.

Empowerment

Empowerment is a positive affective emotion and one that acts as a catalyst for the information searching process (Fisher & Landry, 2007). Kurbanoglu's (2003, 2006) research is particularly interesting because it centers on an actor's self-efficacy and the belief in his/her own capabilities to successfully search for information. Importantly, it is possible for an actor to either have a view of his/her skills that is too low or over confident, each of these affecting the ability to search successfully.

Skills and Education

The findings support the notion that a parent's own skills and education seem to have a direct effect on his/her information literacy (Childers & Post, 1975; Moore & Moschis, 1978; Niederdeppe, 2008). The findings suggest that skills are not simply educational, but also relate to interpersonal and relationship skills that affect the way parents interact socially and also with professionals.

Reassurance

All the parents interviewed recounted times when their information needs had been about obtaining reassurance. Parents, out of their parental responsibility, wanted to try and ensure that they were doing a "good job" or that any decisions they had made were appropriate. Seeking reassurance is an attempt to reduce uncertainty. Uncertainty has long been viewed as a central defining criteria for information need (Atkin, 1973).

Parents seeking reassurance is an affect-based need to allay their fears about a specific context. Examples given by parents covered the whole spectrum of parenting and included issues ranging from weaning to health concerns. It is important to note that seeking reassurance can provide false hope. One example of this was where Andrew and his wife initially started seeking reassurance from family and friends because they were worried about their son's early development. The consequence of this was that they delayed seeking medical advice, his son later being diagnosed as autistic.

Despair and Inadequacy

Despair and inadequacy is an emotional state that occurs either because or as a component of an often complex and unresolved information need. Notably, within the interview group, it is related to conflict and child behavioral problems. In all of the cases identified within the interview sample, all parents were "in the system," either being seen by a health professional or having received help or having been assessed by social services. There is comparatively little LIS research in this area. Childers and Post (1975) make mention of despair in the context of information poverty, something that is implicit with the later and influential work of Chatman (1999), who also uses despair as a symptom of information poverty. The consequence of a parent being caught in a situation without an apparent end can be potentially tragic. This was particularly highlighted in the interviews with Cyndy and Dominique each with a teenage daughter who had recently attempted suicide, both of these cases being set against fractious and difficult family relationships.

Weighing

Weighing is the way in which parents make sense of the information they obtain. I argue that parents, as a rule, do not assess or evaluate the information that they receive in the sense of a formal logical examination of data, but rather they weigh the information according to a set of systematic criteria (subcategories). The category of "weighing" was developed from an *in vivo* reference used by parents when they were asked to describe the ways in which they "test" information or make decisions. Parents do not necessarily assess or test information in a logical or formalized manner, something attested to by Marshall and Williams (2006). This is exempli-

fied by Alison, who as a senior nurse is trained in critical appraisal skills. The following being taken from her interview helps illustrate the point:

> You would have to look if it was a fair sample size . . . whether or not it was a group you could trust . . . was the research done in a way that could be trusted?

Alison paused and then reflected, and changed her reply:

> As a parent I don't think I would go as far as that . . . parenting shouldn't be as difficult as that and you do look for more like logical stuff that sounds reasonable. . . . It shouldn't be that hard work it's sort of, if something feels right you go for it. (Alison)

Building a Case

This subcategory relates to both formalized and nonformalized searching and occurs when a parent "gathers" data that supports his/her information need. It is akin to consulting multiple sources of information. It enables parents to orientate themselves into a way of sifting and gathering enough data in order to draw some kind of conclusion. In the case of looking for a new high school, the most pro-active parents spoke about consulting a wide range of sources such as the Internet, other parents' experiences, gossip, and also the feelings and desires of their own children, before finally weighing the information. It is important to note that not all sources carry equal weight. This approach is similar to Lloyd (2009) who suggests that actors develop a knowledge based on a combination of both social and textual information. Parents stop looking for information when they feel they have "enough" information to make a decision. This finding supports the wider notion of satisficing (Simon, 1955).

Relevance

For their everyday needs, parents ascertain the most expedient and efficient way of finding, accessing, and weighing information; to aid this process they try to determine "relevance." In order to determine relevance, parents weigh information according to a number of factors such as their worldview, accessibility of the information, the trust they have in the source to meet their need, their instincts, and ultimately, the practicality of the information—as one parent said "it either fits our situation or it doesn't." Seeking relevance is often imprecise and certainly fits with the area of "inferential information-seeking" (Shenton, 2009a).

Worldview

A parent's worldview greatly affects his/her receptivity toward types of information given. This has been mentioned previously and links into the "small world" theory (Chatman, 1991, 2001), Savolainen's (1995) model of ELIS, and Andersen's (2006) exploration of the Habermas's public sphere related to an LIS context.

Feelings and Instincts

The phrase "gut feeling," "seems logical," "if it's common sense," along with other synonymous expressions were used by parents to express the ways in which they described making decisions. The findings suggest that a parent's evaluative processes are often centered on general acceptance of information, based upon experiences, both his/her own and also those provided through trusted people or trusted sources. An important criteria for a large proportion of the information accepted by parents is that it simply meets a need or "satisfices" (Mansourian & Ford, 2007).

Where there is a formalized and specific challenge, some parents developed an "expert body of knowledge." This means they feel they are able to make informed opinions about information they come across, although as one such parent noted, he "still misses many things." In the absence of any form of specifics, parents feel that they have to base decisions about the information they obtain on their own personal frame of reference.

Reflection

Reflection presented itself as an *in vivo* term. A number of parents recounted gathering the information and reflecting as a way of sorting the information they had obtained and gaining some perspective. Reflection can be seen as a constructivist approach, insofar as parents devise and develop a view of a problem by way of sorting, analyzing, and testing their own experiences against the information they have accumulated. These findings are similar to those reported by Lloyd (2009), whose research reported that reflection helps to contextualize prior knowledge and can consequently help an actor to make a decision, especially for complex information needs, albeit in a workplace context.

Conclusion

The findings produced a substantive grounded theory explaining how a specific group of parents look for, access, and weigh information as part of their role and responsibility of being a parent. The findings reveal a complex pattern of information use, occurring both consciously and unconsciously through meeting formalized and nonformalized information needs. The results clearly show that even parents conversant with critical thinking and information literacy skills, tended to default to a form of satisficing. For specific and formalized information needs many parents instinctively displayed elements of trying to validate information through known and trusted sources as well as weighing the information in a form that was comfortable to them. In these instances, parents arguably demonstrate instinctive elements associated with an information literate person; a caveat associated with this statement is that a trusted source is not necessarily an authoritative source. Additional factors that had either negative or positive effects on influencing parents information worlds

include: the quality of their trusted sources, their state of mind, their educational background, their social connectivity (habitus), and their ability to effectively weigh all of the information. Negative influencing factors were particularly, even disproportionately, prevalent with parents from the lower socioeconomic group. This group of parents were willing to seek and accept information from local PSAs but were suspicious of professionals such as teachers, health visitors, and family doctors. Conversely, those parents from the higher socioeconomic group regard professionals as collegiate and equals. Understanding the dynamics of these influencing factors and its relation to the complex social worlds of parents requires future research. A related finding, again focusing on parents from the lower socioeconomic group, suggests that a number of them have become overly dependent on, or have unreal expectations of, their local PSAs.This has meant that for some parents in this group there appeared an uneasy dependency culture and an inability for them to develop their own information literacy skills.

References

American Library Association (ALA). (1989). Presidential committee on information literacy. Final Report. Washington, DC: American Library Association.

Andersen, J. (2006). The public sphere and discursive activities: Information literacy as sociopolitical skills. *Journal of Documentation, 62*(2), 213–228.

Andretta, S. (2005). *Information literacy: A practitioner's guide.* Oxford: Chandos.

Atkin, C. (1973). Instrumental utilities and information-seeking. In P. Clarke (Ed.), *New model for mass communication research* (pp. 205–242). Beverly Hills: Sage.

Bates, M. J. (1989). The design of browsing and berrypicking techniques for the online search interface. *Online Review, 13*(5), 407–424.

Bawden, D. (2001). Information and digital literacies: A review of concepts. *Journal of Documentation, 57*(2), 218–259.

Beer, S., Marcella, R., & Baxter, G. (1998). Rural citizens' information needs a survey undertaken on behalf of the Shetland Islands citizens advice bureau. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science, 30*(4), 223–240.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste.* London: Routledge.

Bruce, C. (2008). *Informed learning.* Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries.

Case, D. O. (2002). *Looking for information: A survey of research on information seeking, needs, and behavior.* University of Kentucky, Lexington: Academic Press.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chatman, E. A. (1991). Life in a small world: Applicability of gratification theory to information-seeking behavior. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science, 42*(6), 438–449.

Chatman, E. A. (1996). The impoverished life-world of outsiders. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science, 47*(3), 193–206.

Chatman, E. A. (1999). A theory of life in the round: Study of information poverty in a women's maximum security prison. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science, 50*(3), 207–217.

Chatman, E. A. (2001). Framing social life in theory and research. In L. Hoglund (Ed.), *Information seeking in context: Proceedings of the 3rd international conference on research in information needs, seeking and use in different contexts.* London: Taylor Graham.

Childers, T., & Post, J. A. (1975). *The information-poor in America.* New Jersey Scarecrow Press.

The Children's Society. (2006). *The good childhood inquiry launch report.* London: The Children's Society.

CILIP. (2004). Information literacy: Definition. Retrieved December 1, 2011, from http://www.cilip.org.uk/policyadvocacy/informationliteracy/definition/default.htm

Clarke, A. E. (2005). *Situational analysis: Grounded theory after the postmodern turn.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. L. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Department for Education and Skills. (2007). *Every parent matters.* London: Department for Education and Skills.

Dewdney, P., & Harris, R. M. (1992). Community information needs: The case of wife assault. *Library and Information Science Research, 14*(1), 5–29.

Dutton, W. H., & Helsper, E. J. (2007). The Internet in Britain: 2007 *Oxford Internet surveys.* Oxford: University of Oxford.

Erdelez, S. (1997). Information encountering: A conceptual framework for accidental information discovery. In P. Vakkari, R. Savolainen, & B. Dervin (Eds.), *Information seeking in context: Proceedings of an international conference on research in information needs, seeking and use in different contexts* (pp. 412–421). London: Taylor Graham.

Fisher, K. E., Erdelez, S., & McKechnie, L. (2005). *Theories of information behavior.* Medford: American Society for Information Science and Technology.

Fisher, K. E., & Hinton, M. B. (2004). Information grounds and the use of need-based services by immigrants in Queens, New York: A context-based, outcome evaluation approach. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, 55*(8), 754–766.

Fisher, K. E., & Landry, C. F. (2007). Understanding the information behaviour of stay-at-home mothers through affect. In D. Nahl & D. Bilal (Eds.), *Information and emotions: The emergent affective paradigm in information behavior research and theory* (pp. 211–233). Medford, NJ: Information Today.

Fisher, K. E., Marcoux, E., Miller, L., Sánchez, A., & Cunningham, E. (2004). Information behaviour of migrant Hispanic farm workers and their families in the Pacific Northwest. *Information Research, 10 (1).* Retrieved December 1, 2011, from http://informationr.net/ir/10-1/paper199.html

Fitzgerald, M. A. (1997). Misinformation on the Internet: Applying evaluation skills to online information. *Emergency Librarian, 24*(3), 9–14.

Foster, A., & Ford, N. (2003). Serendipity and information seeking: An empirical study. *Journal of Documentation, 59*(3), 321–340.

Freely, M. (2000). *The parent trap: Children, families and the new morality.* London: Virago Press.

Glaser, B. G. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity.* Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Granovetter, M. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology, 78*(6), 1360–1380.

Granovetter, M. (1983). The strength of weak ties: A network theory revisited. In R. Collins (Ed.), *Sociological Theory* (Vol. 1, pp. 201–233). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Great Britain. (1989). *Children act: ch.41.* London: HMSO.

Great Britain. (2004). *Children act: ch.31.* London: HMSO.

Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Haider, J., & Bawden, D. (2007). Conceptions of "information poverty" in LIS: A discourse analysis. *Journal of Documentation, 63*(4), 534–557.

Hersberger, J. (2001). Everyday information needs and information sources of homeless parents. *The New Review of Information Behaviour Research, 2*, 119–134.

HM Treasury. (2003). *Every child matters: The green paper.* Cm 5860. London: DfES.

HM Treasury. (2004). *Every child matters: Change for children.* London: Department for Education. Retrieved December 1, 2011 from https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DfES/1081/2004

Huotari, M. L., & Chatman, E. A. (2001). Using everyday life information seeking to explain organizational behaviour. *Library and Information Science Research, 23*(4), 351–366.

Julien, H., & Michels, D. (2000). Source selection among information seekers: Ideals and realities. *Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science, 25*(1), 1–18.

Kai, J. (1996a). Parents' difficulties and information needs in coping with acute illness in preschool children: A qualitative study. *British Medical Journal, 313*, 987–990.

Kai, J. (1996b). What worries parents when their preschool children are acutely ill, and why: A Qualitative Study. *British Medical Journal, 313*, 983–986.
Kelton, K., Fleischmann, K. R., & Wallace, W. A. (2008). Trust in digital information. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, 59*(3), 363–374.
Kurbanoglu, S. S. (2003). Self-efficacy: A concept closely linked to information literacy and lifelong learning. *Journal of Documentation, 59*(6), 635–646.
Kurbanoglu, S. S. (2006). Developing the information literacy self-efficacy scale. *Journal of Documentation, 62*(6), 730–743.
Layard, R., & Dunn, J. (2009). *A good childhood: Searching for values in a competitive age*. London: Penguin.
Limberg, L. (1999). Three conceptions of information seeking and use. In T. D. Wilson & D. K. Allen (Eds.), *Exploring the contexts of information behaviour. Proceedings of the second international conference on research in information needs, seeking and use in different contexts. Sheffield, UK. 13/15 August* (pp. 116–135). London: Taylor Graham.
Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. London: Sage.
Lloyd, A. (2005). Information literacy: Different contexts, different concepts, different truths? *Journal of Librarianship & Information Science, 37*(2), 82–88.
Lloyd, A. (2009). Information practice: Information experiences of ambulance officers in training and on-road practice. *Journal of Documentation, 65*(3), 396–419.
Lloyd, A. (2010). *Information literacy landscapes: Information literacy in education, workplace and everyday contexts*. London: Chandos.
Lupton, M. (2008). *Information literacy and learning*. Unpublished thesis, Queensland University of Technology Queensland.
Mansourian, Y., & Ford, N. (2007). Search persistence and failure on the Web: A "bounded rationality" and "satisficing analysis." *Journal of Documentation, 63*(5), 680–701.
Marshall, A., Henwood, F., Carlin, L., Guy, E., Sinozic, T., & Smith, H. (2009). Information to fight the flab: Findings from the Net.Weight study. *Journal of Information Literacy, 3*(2), 50–63. Retrieved December 1, 2011, from http://ojs.lboro.ac.uk/ojs/index.php/JIL/article/view/PRA-V3-I2-2009-3
Marshall, L., & Williams, D. (2006). Health information: Does quality count for the consumer? *Journal of Librarianship & Information Science, 38* (3), 141–156.
Moore, R., & Moschis, G. (1978). *Consumer information use: Individual vs. social predictors*. Paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism Annual Convention, Seattle, Washington. Retrieved December 1, 2011, from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED158321
Nahl, D., & Bilal, D. (2007). *Information and emotion: The emergent affective paradigm in information behavior research and theory*. Medford, NJ: Information Today.
Niederdeppe, J. (2008). Beyond knowledge gaps: Examining socioeconomic differences in response to cancer news. *Human Communication Research, 34*(3), 423–447.
Pettigrew, K. E. (1999). Waiting for chiropody: Contextual results from an ethnographic study of the information behavior among attendees at community clinics. *Information Processing and Management, 35*(6), 801–817.
Pettigrew, K. E., Fidel, R., & Bruce, H. (2001). Conceptual frameworks in information behavior. In M. E. Williams (Ed.), *Annual review of information science and technology*. Chicago: American Library Association and the Association of College and Research Libraries.
Savolainen, R. (1995). Everyday life information seeking: Approaching information seeking in the context of "way of life." *Library and Information Science Research, 17*(3), 259–294.
Savolainen, R. (2009). Small world and information grounds as contexts of information seeking and sharing. *Library and Information Science Research, 31*, 38–45.
Shenton, A. (2009a). Inferential information-seeking. *Library Review, 58*(5), 353–361.
Shenton, A. (2009b). Search images, information seeking and information literacy. *Library Review, 58*(2), 109–115.
Simon, H. A. (1955). A behavioral model of rational choice. *Quarterly Journal of Economics 6*(1), 99–118.
Tuominene, K., Savolainen, R., & Talja, S. (2005). Information literacy as a sociotechnical practice. *Library Quarterly, 75*(3), 329–345.
UNESCO. (2005). *High-level colloquium on information literacy and lifelong learning, November 6–9*. Paper presented at the High-Level Colloquium on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning, November 6–9, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria, Egypt.

Warner, E. S., Murray, A. D., & Palmour, V. E. (1973). Information needs of urban residents. Final Report. Ohio: Ohio State University.
Wilson, P. (1977). *Public knowledge, private ignorance: Toward a library and information policy.* Greenwood: Westport, CT.

Christopher Walker is a part-time lecturer at Leeds Metropolitan University, UK. He also works as an academic law librarian and a freelance researcher. In 2007 he was awarded a Centenary Scholarship to study for a PhD at Leeds Metropolitan University, focusing on the "Information World of Parents of Primary School Children." An article arising from the early phase of his doctoral research was published in the Journal of Information Literacy, and he has also presented his findings at the Librarians' Information Literacy Annual Conference (LILAC) on two occasions. Prior to undertaking his doctoral research, he worked for thirteen years as a professional librarian; firstly as a public librarian and subsequently in strategic and management posts in the National Health Service (NHS). During his time in the NHS, he jointly published a short paper in the Health Information Libraries Journal, entitled "The Practice Nurse Project: A Partnership Approach to Information Provision in Leeds."