

Running head: *PARENTS AS PRIMARY CAREGIVERS*

*Information Behavior in Action:*

*Parents as Primary Caregivers of Children Under the Age of Five*

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**Abstract**

One of the best ways to understand the concepts behind the field of information behavior as a student is to explore and study the needs of a particular group. This exploration of information behavior in action can be implemented by selecting a group, reviewing the relevant literature, completing fieldwork, interpreting fieldwork findings, and developing an interpretation of that groups' model of information behavior. One group relevant to a public librarian serving families is parents as primary caregivers of children under the age of five. An exploration of their information behavior and needs can provide insights for the public librarian to use to support this group as members use the public library. This paper describes the information behavior of parents as primary caregivers of children under the age of five as observed in a three-session public library play program for families. At this program, nine families were observed interacting with one another and with community resource professionals as they discussed their children and their parenting questions. Four individual interviews of mothers who were the primary caregivers of children under the age of five were also conducted. The results of these participant observations and interviews indicate that the information behavior of primary caregivers of children under the age of five relies on trusting relationships with information sources, which includes family, friends, professionals, and reputable sources online and in print, in order to fulfill their information needs.

**IBA Definition: Parents as Primary Caregivers of Children Under the Age of Five**

The group is defined as parents as primary caregivers of children under the age of five. As part of the nature of primary caregiving, group members do not maintain full-time jobs outside of the home but may engage in part-time employment. Their main responsibility is the care of one or more of their children under the age of five. This age range was chosen because most children enter school at the age of five, which changes some aspects of parental caregiving. Further, if parents choose to homeschool, that parent-child relationship changes from a caregiving focus and adds a teaching focus. Colloquially, members of this group are often referred to as stay-at-home parents.

The families who frequent mid-day early childhood programming at the Herman and Kate Kaiser Library often fit into this group. Most of these parents present as white with an estimated twenty percent of parents presenting as part of other ethnic groups. These parents have cultural contexts which affect their individual information seeking behavior as well as their interactions with other families. Though these contexts are important, fully exploring these cultural differences is beyond the scope of this project. Overall, the primary focus of parents as caregivers is their children and raising them in the context in which they find themselves.

For the information professional working with families in a public library, understanding the information behavior of this group is essential. Connection with these families begins with parents because they are nurturing the hearts and minds of the library's youngest users. Developing these relationships at this formative time can set the stage for lifetime library use for all members of the family which helps to sustain the library for generations to come. These parents are also often intense users of the library by voicing complaints and suggestions as well as by seeking out the expertise of the public library information professional serving families.

### **IBA Parents as Primary Caregivers Literature Review**

A search of the literature on the information behavior of parents in general revealed insights relevant for the analysis of the information behavior of parents as primary caregivers of young children. Recent studies and popular parenting websites focused on three elements relating to the information behavior of parents: the search for information on the medical needs of children, the use of online portals and platforms to gain information, and the effect of parental peer pressure and judgment on information seeking. While not all persons involved in the studies fell into the exact category being observed here, the overall principle of parenthood operated as a binding element.

The information seeking behavior of parents of children who have health issues seems well-analyzed by researchers. When searching online databases for articles about parents' information behavior, articles that rose to the top of the search were about health information needs such as disability, medication, cancer, and other diseases (Alsem et al., 2016; Holappa, Ahonen, Vainio, & Hameen-Antilla, 2012; Kilicarlan-Toruner & Akgun-Citak, 2013, Gates, Shulhan, Featherstone, Scott, Hartling, 2018). These studies make mention of a variety of parental choices and needs, including the use of the internet to find information (Alsem et al., 2016, p. 125), the seeking out of health professionals (Ahonen et al., 2012, p. 579), and the importance of health professionals giving parents adequate information to make difficult decisions (Kilicarlan-Toruner & Akgun-Citak, 2013, p. 176). While these conclusions are drawn about parents and their children with health needs, the overall tendencies such as using the internet and seeking out professionals may apply to parents as caregivers as well.

From the proliferation of articles on the information behavior of parents seeking information about their children's health, it can be concluded that researchers either have easy

access to these kinds of information seekers or that parents as information seekers prioritize their children's health. The focus of this behavior is on finding information about someone else: specifically, information about their children and their health. The question arises: Is this a characteristic of parents as primary caregivers or is it simply a convenient research focus?

The search for information on the internet is another area of interest for researchers regarding parents' information behavior. Parents use a variety of tools and technologies to access the internet (Jang, Hessel, & Dworkin, 2017, p. 395), often depending on their socioeconomic status (Rothbaum, Martland, Janssen, 2008, p. 118). Some parents use online forums (Ruthven, Buchanan, Jardine, 2018, p. 1073) while others use parent-focused Facebook groups (Kaufmann, Buckner, 2014, p. 479) to seek both support and information. Many of this research also overlaps with health-information seeking behavior research as many parents use online technology to learn about how to make informed health decisions for their children (Lamberton, Devaney, Bunting, 2016, p. 359).

The friction between the proliferation of information available online and the quality of that information is difficult to navigate for parents attempting to find high quality information. A study in Belgium of postpartum mothers found that while the vast majority of the mothers in their study used the internet to find information and found that information useful, overall the quality score of the information found was middling at best (Slomian, Bruyère, Reginster, & Emonts, 2017, p. 46). One researcher explored internet use through the lens of Dervin's sense-making model, positing that mothers' internet use is a form of gap-bridging because coming across gaps in knowledge is a common circumstance in parenting (Jang, Dworkin, Hessel, 2015, p. 221). These gap bridging efforts can be often be complicated by the quality of the information and the availability of tools to access that information. The effects of the online piece of parents'

information behavior is wide-reaching as the internet and internet access has become such a consuming part of modern life.

One challenge for parents in their information-seeking behavior connected to internet use is parental peer pressure and its perceived rise due to an increased use of internet and social media tools. Even as parents have access to more support and resources through the internet, “parenting has become one of the most-charged political and cultural subjects of our age” (Lamberton et al., 2016, 360). Parents want to find the right answer and are also increasingly isolated even in a digitally connected environment (p. 360; Ruthven et al., 2018, pp. 8-10). The use of social media both offers more information access and can lead to excessive unhealthy comparison (Chae, 2015, p. 517). This kind of social peer pressure could make parents’ information seeking in both online and in-person settings more difficult for fear of being perceived as wrong or incorrect.

Overall the research discovered about parents’ information behavior presents a consensus on the ideas that parents want to be informed, use the internet, and often feel uncomfortable pressure about their parenting skills. These themes are interconnected in that the search for information often leads to the internet which in turn can promote unhealthy and unwarranted comparison when all the searcher wanted was to try to connect with others to obtain information. This networked complexity demonstrates the inherent challenge yet fascinating exploration that is studying the information behavior of particular groups.

Where the divide begins in the analysis of parents as caregivers’ information behavior is as one explores popular sources beyond the scholarly research on parents. Despite the scholarly research on the difficulties of peer pressure, popular parenting websites seem to perpetuate some of the shaming and pressure tendencies. They are either unaware of the research on parents’

difficulties in feeling adequate in terms of their parenting skills or they are exploiting that knowledge. This kind of gap between the research and the information that is made easily accessible by parents making online searches is not helpful for parents.

This challenge for parents seeking information through popular sources is made even more problematic when viewed through the model of lay information mediary behavior (LIMB). In this model, the lay information mediary (LIM) seeks information on behalf of someone else, the muse (Abrahamson & Fisher, n.d.). As it relates to parental information behavior, the parent could be the LIM while the child or children that parent cares for is the muse for which information is sought. This LIMB pattern of information seeking is often seen in connection with health information because of the challenges that patients may have interacting with professionals while ill (Abrahamson & Fisher, 2007, Background Literature, para. 9). Much of the research on LIMB focuses on its relation to online searches and interactions (Neal, D. M. & McKenzie, P.M., 2010; Abrahamson, J.A., Fisher, K.E., Turner, A.G., Durrance, J.C., & Combs Turner, T, 2008; Cutrona, S.L. et al., 2015) as well as in person with health experts (Kjos, A.L, Worley, M.M., & Schommer, J.C., 2011). As parents attempt to navigate the difficult waters of finding information through popular sources online, they are often doing so on behalf of their children and seeking to solve a problem. When those popular sources are not useful or reputable, they hamper the information search for parents as LIMs.

A particularly disturbing anomaly in the research is that even the most cursory glance at popular parenting websites (Parents.com; Parenting.com) reveals articles displaying excessive clickbait and fear-mongering tendencies. These articles appear in the top “trending” area where articles are displayed due to popularity. Some searches of Facebook groups marketed to appeal to parents reveals some groups that share the same types of frightening information in group

descriptions and cover photos (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/209540745755798>). This kind of fear-based information cannot be healthy or useful for parents seeking to educate themselves about parenting or to connect to other parents, as evidenced by the research that demonstrates the difficulties that parents face regarding parenting pressure. Yet, by the very nature of trending topics, parents themselves are clicking on these articles and encouraging their popularity. It is a puzzling phenomenon that deserves further study for this population as well as for other groups.

While clickbait and “fake news” regarding topics specifically related to parenting does not seem to be a current research focus, the general trends and effects of clickbait for those who consume news is beginning to be studied. One study (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2017) discussed how although a connection between clicks and interests is widely assumed, particularly when it comes to “junk” news items (p. 669), a more critical approach suggests that clicks are not necessarily precise indicators of interest in that news item. Even with the supposition that clicks are not sole indicators of topic interest, clickbait and fake news remains a growing problem, particularly for the medical community (Bolton & Yaxley, 2017). Not only is false information being shared in many venues, especially online, but also some are profiting from sharing that false information either through advertising or selling products or services (p. 119).

Fake news takes many forms, from simple satire all the way to dangerous conspiracy theories (Berghel, 2017) with arguments for rights to free speech and privacy as well as the ease with which information spreads complicating the debate as to what should be done about these issues. If the wider world is struggling with determining what is true and what is not, how much more difficult is it for a parent who is simply trying to find information to help them parent their



child? Are they clicking on scary articles because they are interested, afraid, or merely skeptical? Research dedicated to exploring this arena would be useful.

The most interesting part of the research on information behavior of parents as caregivers is what does not exist or is not easily found. Anecdotally, many parents of young children report that sleep in terms of both quantity and quality is difficult to come by. Where then is the research about how sleep deprivation and difficulty affect the acquisition of behavior? Another area not well researched is how parents seek information about anything beyond that which is relevant to their children. Perhaps this concept is connected to the question of sleep or to a new question of how much time parents have to acquire new information or pursue interests unrelated to their children.

In this rapidly changing digital age, parental search behavior will be affected, especially in terms of online searching. How will algorithms continue to impact what information parents see as they search various online platforms? How does the long-term use of screens and devices by parents impact how they obtain information and how they interact with their children? As disinformation continues to spread in the world as a whole, how do parents discern what is true when approached with conspiracy theories and fake news affecting their children's health and wellbeing, such as anti-vaccination campaigns or so-called school shooting "truthers?" The world as a whole is complicated and confusing which is often difficult for parents raising small children to understand and handle. The information world of parents as caregivers is growing more complex with both increased misinformation and information overload.

The information behavior of parents as caregivers is fascinating to explore. As they execute the incredibly complex and difficult task of raising a young human, they must also navigate a confusing world that often presents conflicting information. The literature focuses on

important aspects of this group's behavior, but also seems to ignore other significant areas of interest. Learning more about their information needs, habits, and behaviors can provide insight on how to support the members of this group in their present role as parents as primary caregivers of children under the age of five.

### **IBA Part 2: Studying Information Behavior**

The research questions for this project focus on the information behavior of parents as primary caregivers in parenting situations. The first question is general: Where do parents look for information as a parent? The second question is more specific to the observational situation: How do parents seek information in an environment designed to facilitate in-person interaction? Other questions relevant to the gaps in the literature were considered but were found not to fit with the scope of this project. To answer these questions for the purposes of a class assignment, observations were made at a three-session workshop for young children and their caregivers. Further, four interviews of parents who are primary caregivers to children ages 0-5 were completed.

### **Observations**

The Build a Reader Center (BARC) 1-2-3 Play With Me Parent Child Workshop is part of the overall program plan for the Herman and Kate Kaiser (HKK) Library and is facilitated by the Youth Librarian. Four TCCL locations currently offer this kind of programming, with expansion in the future. Every Build a Reader Center location hosts these workshops, has a family play area, and maintains a parenting collection. These centers are based on the Family Place Libraries model ([FamilyPlaceLibraries.org](http://FamilyPlaceLibraries.org)).

For the observation in this study, the Youth Librarian is also the researcher. This program is offered two to three times per year. When offered, it is held once a week for three

consecutive weeks, typically in the morning, for an hour and fifteen minutes. The room is set up with eight to ten play stations with themes such as “Blocks,” “Music,” and “Transportation Toys” (See Appendix A for room diagram). Each week a different community resource professional is available to chat with and answer questions from attending parents from the areas of music and movement, child development, and speech pathology. As the facilitator, the Youth Librarian welcomes each family, introduces the specialists, ensures each family has an opportunity to speak with the specialist, interacts with everyone during the program, and takes note of questions asked by families for future workshops and for connecting those families to further information.

The program is limited to 10-12 families that include at least one child aged one to three, with siblings between the ages of zero and five welcome to attend as well. Adult attendees are generally the parent as primary caregiver, but occasionally there are grandparents or nannies who bring children to the program. In addition to connecting with resource professionals, adult attendees are also encouraged to connect with other parents, potentially developing friendships.

Ten families registered for the workshop held on three Tuesdays in October 2018. Ten of these families attended the first two weeks, while only seven attended the last session. Each of these families had one or two children present; some families had other children who attended school while others did not. One family had a grandmother as primary caregiver, so interactions with her were excluded from the observation. Two families spoke languages other than English at home. All families had been recruited by the Youth Librarian from children’s programming to attend the workshop. They knew community resource professionals would be in attendance and were encouraged to think of questions to ask these professionals.

The primary information available at this workshop were the professionals who were available to answer attendees questions and engage in conversation. Each professional also brought paper handouts relevant to their specialty. Every play station had a sign with additional tips encouraging further play or ideas to expand on at home. At the first program session, each family received a prepared packet with a schedule, letter of introduction, and play and early-literacy related handouts from websites like Colorín Colorado and the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Other resources, such as the BARC Parenting Collection available for browsing and checkout in the HKK Children's Area, were outside the room in the main library area, but attendees did not necessarily know about them unless specifically told.

Another information resource available at the workshop was other parents and caregivers. One purpose of the workshop is to encourage the development of relationships between fellow parents and families, as facilitated by requiring and limiting registration to a certain number of families for each three-week session. As observed in these three sessions, some parents spoke with each other about their children and their questions in addition to talking with the professionals.

As observed over the three weeks, the questions and conversations observed revolved around typical parenting and development questions. Participants discussed issues like sleep challenges, bathroom and toilet training, speech delays, and tantrums. Overall, adult participants appeared satisfied with answers they received from both community resource professionals and other parents.

After each program, the resource professionals chatted with the Youth Librarian about situations they had observed. One said that she noticed that it took extended conversation with some parents before those parents seemed comfortable opening up to more personal questions

about child development. Another noted that some parents asked a lot of good questions and seemed prepared to ask those questions, while others just wanted to talk. Overall, the resource professionals appreciated the program and enjoyed sharing information with and answering questions from attending families.

One barrier to information was inherent to the design of the program: the presence of the children. One of the easiest ways to support parents' information seeking has been to have programs where children can be present. Yet, it is also the presence of the children and their needs which can make access of information difficult for parents as they are parenting their children during the program. For example, children needed help with a specific toy or with a disagreement with another child over who can play with which toy and parents need to intervene. Community resource professionals attempted to mitigate these issues by being flexible in conversation, willing to be interrupted, and able to jump back in to conversation once the distraction has passed.

Another barrier seemed to be a parent's own personality and/or culture. Some parents were quiet and limited their interaction with the professionals or other parents beyond basic greetings. In some observed interactions, it was difficult to determine why some parents avoided other parents or limited their interactions. Were they focused on their children, disinterested in relating to other parents, or intentionally avoiding others? Whatever the reason, some parents appeared to miss out on interactions with others that the workshop is meant to facilitate.

### **Interviews**

The four parents asked for interviews were not parents who attended the workshop. These interviewees were friends of the researcher and were approached because due to the nature of these friendships these prospective interviewees would be comfortable saying no to the

researcher in a way that those attending the workshop and thus experiencing a library-related service from the researcher may not have felt comfortable not agreeing to be interviewed. In either scenario, there was a possible conflict of interest and for the purposes of this class project, the friendship path was chosen.

Two interview participants lived in Oklahoma and two lived in other states (Missouri and Ohio). Two interviewees had two children and two interviewees had one child. All four interviewees present as white women and all had a bachelor's degree. One also had a master's degree and two had some coursework towards a master's degree. A full list of demographic questions was not asked for the purposes of this project but would be necessary for a full-scale qualitative study. One interview was conducted in person and three were conducted over the phone. All interviewees consented to being recorded, but the equipment failed in the fourth interview. Detailed notes were taken by the researcher during each interview.

Interviewee 1, "Chloe," had two young children under the age of five and had been a parent for three and a half years. She named safety, health, and development as her top three responsibilities as a parent. Her information need was learning more about her youngest child's allergies and how to avoid a specific allergen. She began with searches on Google and then moved to conversations with others with knowledge on the subject, such as other moms. She preferred hearing about the experiences of others and felt those examples carried more weight. If she has more time, she would eventually turn to a book for more information. Her biggest challenge in finding information was what she called "researcher error" and not always knowing how to ask the right question or use the right search terms. Another challenge was finding the time as a busy mom.

Interviewee 2, “Shelby,” had one child under the age of five and had been a parent for fourteen months. Her top responsibilities as a parent included keeping her child alive and safe, providing basic needs like food, and helping their development and education. Her information need came when her child had his first head cold and she wanted to know what the criteria were for taking him to the doctor. She started with Google and found many medical websites. She made sure to pick what she called an official website and specifically not a mom forum. Later she would ask her own mother or other mothers in her circle for advice. One of her favorite resources that she had used with this and other health-related issues is a 24-hour nurseline provided by her doctor’s office. She considered false information a barrier to getting what she needs when she is researching an issue about her child or any other situation and would like a fact-checking source specifically for parenting and parenting rumors that circulate amongst her mom friends.

Interviewee 3, “Andrea,” had one child under the age of five and had been a parent for two years. Her top parenting responsibilities were feeding, educating, entertaining, and managing behavior. She started an information search recently when her child began expressing more aggression and tantrums. She began with online searches for books using a library website, calling the library her first place to look. Selecting the keywords of toddler discipline, she sorted the results by year published so she could find the most recent books. Once she found titles she thought were relevant, she used Amazon’s Look Inside feature to look at the table of contents to determine if she wanted to request the book to view in person. After she orders in and then picks up an assortment of books on the topic, she narrows those selections even further based on whether the books fit her own parenting style. She likes to choose books that are well reviewed and respected, but also values the opinions of mom friends she knows and often uses Goodreads

to look at recommendations. She does not like it when she cannot find or access an entire book on a subject she wants to learn about, because she prefers a book to articles on the internet.

Interviewee 4, “Nicole,” had two children under the age of five and had been a parent for three years. Her priorities were to encourage self-confidence and resiliency, help them become responsible citizens particularly through her faith, and to be a source of love for her children and show them how to be that for others. The information need she researched was how to handle the changing phases of her three-year-old, specifically issues with tantrums. She began by googling which led her to articles on different parenting websites and books to find. She also followed different parents on Instagram who offer parenting tips and suggestions. Nicole called herself a compulsive “Google-er” and that she was often looking for information online. She was most interested in finding information that aligned with her parenting style. One thing that she found frustrating in an information search is that there will not be just one right solution or answer to find, especially as it relates to parenting. She had to take pieces of information from different sources to find something that works for her family and parenting her son. She also mentioned talking to others who are more experienced parents for advice and found that experience helpful.

These interviews reflected a small portion of the parents as caregivers population and as such the findings from this interview cannot be representative of the group. However, the process of conducting the interviews helped to shape ideas for future study and consideration for the researcher when it comes to this population. Further, the insights of these four interviewees offer a small window into the information behavior of this group.

The observations of a group of parents with their children and parenting-related experts demonstrated a wide view of parents’ information behavior while the interviews focused in on individual parents’ specific reflection on their information seeking process. For a more rigorous



study, interviewing a selection of parents from the observation would yield interesting data that could reveal connections between their individual behavior and their behavior in a group. Even though interviews of observation participants were not completed for the purposes of this project, the insights from the interviews still have implications relevant to the observation experience.

An overarching theme in both settings was the importance of trust. While that specific word was not always mentioned by participants, their actions and overall language lent themselves to the theme of trust. Parents in the workshop were observed to prefer to spend time in conversation with experts before being willing to ask detailed or personal questions. Some parents interviewed mentioned the importance of finding experts or information that aligned with their preferred parenting style and of talking to people in their life that they felt could speak to their parenting situation. For parents as primary caregivers, their child or children are one of the most, if not the most, important and valuable responsibility in their lives. This emphasis on trust is understandably paramount for parents of young children in both group and individual information behavior settings.

### **IBA Project Part 3: Theory into Practice**

#### **Information Behavior Model for Parents as Primary Caregivers**

The season of parenting of young children is, as the saying goes, one in which the days are long and the years are short. As these parents seek information, they have a relatively brief window of time to gather information and put it into use. Not only are children not young for long (although if a parent has multiple children, that window is extended), but many parenting issues, questions, and gaps in knowledge require brief searches and quick decisions. While considering this time frame, the literature review, the observations, and interviews, a number of information models seem relevant to parents' information seeking behavior: Dervin's sense-

making model, Savolainen's Everyday Life Information Seeking approach (ELIS), Bates' berrypicking framework, and the emerging Lay Information Mediary Behavior (LIMB) model. The information model for this project can be found at the end of this section and in Appendix C.

Dervin's metaphor of sense-making (Brown, 2018) is the foundation for a model for parents' information behavior. At the center of their information-seeking behavior, parents are constantly trying to make sense of the needs of another small human who cannot clearly articulate their wants or needs for most of the parenting window. Further, every stage of a child's development brings fresh questions and gaps in knowledge. Parents know they have gaps, they need to fill those gaps, and that is as far as they need to go on their information search until the next gap arises and they start the process over again.

ELIS from Savolainen (1995) is relevant due to its focus on seeking information in regular and everyday life as opposed to in a work or research setting. In ELIS, information seekers are looking for information to decide by their way of life (how things are ordered) and their mastery of life (how to keep that order), especially in terms of one's life context, including social capital and values. Parents want information that helps them navigate this complex way of life that is parenting and their life's context directly impacts how they seek information. While ELIS is typically considered a long-term or lifelong model, its principles still impact the development of a model for parents' information behavior for this short window of time because of the sheer importance of parenting in those first years of childhood. As parents turn to sources online, in books, or in person, the importance of trust in all of those relationships and settings is paramount.

Bates' (1989) berrypicking comes into play for this group because much of individual parental information seeking involves the internet. As they are making sense of their world and

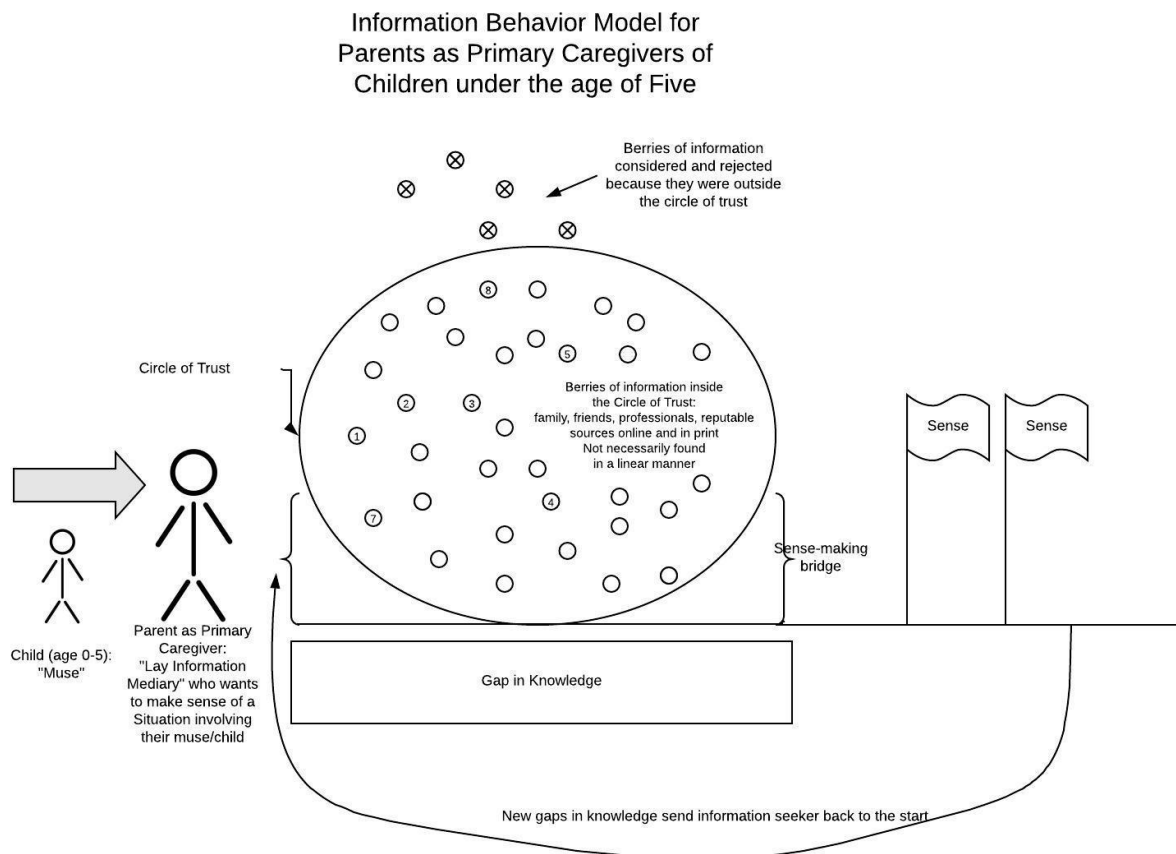
seeking information to fill gaps in parenting knowledge, they are often grasping at figurative berries of information. For the purposes of this model, the idea of berrypicking, though, has been extended beyond the online interface. Conceptualizing the many possible information sources parents use as “information berries” demonstrates the way in which many parents pick from the sources they have available.

Because the primary concern in parents’ information behavior is generally the needs of another human, the principles of the LIMB model apply to the model development. Nearly all of the information seeking in the context of the other models is done with someone else in mind: the small human who cannot always communicate. In this model, the parent is the lay information mediary and the child is the muse for which information is sought. Parents take the search for information for their children very seriously and this relationship needs to be taken into account in the model.

In the proposed information model for Parents as Primary Caregivers, a parent as Lay Information Mediary stands at the edge of a Gap in Knowledge with their child as Muse. Bridging the Gap between the Situation for which they are seeking information and Sense on the other side are the Berries of information that are family, friends, professionals, and reputable sources online and in print. These Information Berries are not typically accessed in linear fashion, as parents often have to check whichever sources are most convenient first which does not necessarily lend itself to order. These Information Berries that bridge the Gap in Knowledge reside within a Circle of Trust that the parent relies on for accurate and useful information. There are many Information Berries inside the Circle of Trust to represent the large amount of information available to parents. Some Information Berries lie outside the Circle of Trust and represent the information that is rejected because it does not align with the parent’s values or is

not deemed trustworthy because it comes from an unreliable source. On the other side of the bridge made up of Information Berries are the flags representing Sense and the moment where a parent feels confident in the information discovered. The arrow underneath the Sense flags points back to the beginning representing when a parent discovers new Gaps and needs to begin the sense-making process again.

Parents have a heavy responsibility when it comes to the parenting of their young children. Seeking information can be a challenging and stressful process, especially when the information is for another person as important as one’s child. Yet with a Circle of Trust that includes family, friends, professionals, and reputable sources online and in print, parents can find information that helps them find the right information to support and parent their child.



### **Implications for Professional Practice, System Design, and Policy-Making**

The literature revealed gaps in ways for parents to assess the truth and trustworthiness of information, especially online considering the rise of clickbait. One of the parents interviewed, “Shelby,” spoke about her desire for a system that would help fact-check parent-related stories. She described hearing stories from other moms that seemed outlandish and too scary to be true. She knew that it was unlikely that human traffickers were nearly snatching children from Walmart every day, as other moms conspiratorially reported to each other like in-person clickbait. Yet, she did not have a way of simply finding evidence to the contrary of these fear-mongering stories. She knew about other fact-checking services such as Snopes but thought one dedicated to parenting topics and stories would be particularly beneficial to parents navigating the confusing world that is parenting information.

Her desire for a fact-checking system combined with the overarching theme from both observations and interviews of the importance of trust inspired the idea of a public-library-run database that incorporated information about parenting-related topics and services in a city. Public libraries such as the Tulsa City-County Library system already collect information about different services to share with their customers in a database called Tulsa Organizations and Service (Tulsa City-County Library, 2018). What could such a database with an expanded yet specific scope just for parents and parenting topics look like? For the purposes of this imagining, this product is called *Stories and Services: A Resource for Parents*.

In a city such as Tulsa, organizations are constantly trying to connect with those who need their services, especially when it comes to young families. Umbrella organizations like the Community Service Council aggregate smaller organizations in an effort to make it easier for families to find information about similar or related services. These organizations and any others

not under a bigger umbrella wanting to offer a service to families, often for free or low-cost, are looking for ways to collaborate with each other in order to provide excellent service and to not overlap service when unnecessary. An easily accessible database that connects these services for families in a given city would benefit both organizations and service recipients.

The public library is a natural space for building community, particularly in the changing modern age where some social safety nets and structures are eroding. Public libraries are trusted by both community members and organizations. The librarians and information professionals leading libraries are well versed in how to collect and present information to specific audiences. Further, these library leaders have ethical considerations which guide their actions as they relate to privacy in relation to users of library services. The public library is a perfect setting for creating, hosting, and cultivating a database of information specifically for parents. Partnership in this endeavor with local parenting-related organizations would give the project more credibility, more access to funding, and more experts to share the information load.

The vision for *Stories and Services* is an easily accessible database, preferably in a mobile application form, that allows parents to input parenting questions and access accurate information about parenting topics, stories, and services. This information would be curated by a team of specialists, including research librarians, children's and family librarians, IT specialists, parenting and child development experts, law enforcement representatives, and local government representatives. These varied experts would provide perspective from many important parenting-related topics.

The database would be designed in such a way as to connect different parenting questions with appropriate services and suggestions. In any memorandum of understanding with partnering organizations, the library would retain control of the information contained in the database to

ensure privacy standards are met. Staff of both the public library and partner organizations would promote this tool to parents and encourage its use. If successful, this database would expand to other cities and network the information being shared with people in different areas. Some stories and services may be specific to regions, but much of parenting information would be beneficial in many parts of the country.

This idea of *Stories and Services* is a big picture dream. It would require a large budget, library system leadership buy-in, community capital, and years of work. Yet, this brief window of time that is parenting children ages 0-5 is one of the most important times in a community's life. By investing deeply into a tool that would support parents in this important and difficult season, the lives of everyone in the community is bettered. If parents can find truth and answers from sources they trust in an easy-to-use application, they will be better equipped to make good decisions for their families. Promoting truth, facts, and solid information will always improve lives.

On a more realistic level, the research for this project demonstrates the importance of this group of parents as primary caregivers. They are not afraid to ask questions but they need to feel a sense of trust about their sources of information, including information professionals. While many topics and user groups clamor for the attention of a public library and its staff, parents are a group that public library staff must focus on for its long-term sustainability. These parents are raising the next generation of library users and that relationship needs to be nurtured and trust needs to be developed. For that to happen, priority needs to be placed on family and parent programming as well as on development of staff to be able to serve the needs of these parents. Programs like the Build a Reader Center model at TCCL are a step toward that direction for that public library system in supporting parents as caregivers.

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**Appendix A**

Photo of the room set-up for Build a Reader Center (BARC) 1-2-3 Play With Me Parent/Child Workshop October 2018

The entry door of the room is to the right of the beige trash can on the far right of the photo. A counter is behind the perspective of the photographer where paper flyers are available for parents (alongside purses, diaper bags, etc). The dark door in the left corner is an emergency exit, the light wood door on the left of the far wall is a toy storage closet and the light wood door on the right of the far wall is a maintenance closet (the latter two are locked to prevent entrance).

## Appendix B

### Interview Protocol

*Before we start, I'd like to explain what this interview is for, what we'll be doing during the interview, and answer any questions you have.*

*This interview is part of a project for a course in the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Oklahoma about how different people use information in their lives. My project is specifically studying parents who are primary caregivers of young children, sometimes called stay-at-home parents.*

*The interview should take no more than 30 minutes. I'll begin by asking you a few questions about your life and then ask you to describe a recent situation in which you needed to find information or learn something for your life. Your responses will be anonymously used in a written report and online presentation. Your identity will remain anonymous.*

*Do you have any questions?*

#### Questions About the Participants:

How long have you been a parent?

Are you the primary caregiver?

How old is your child(ren)?

What type of education do you have?

What would you say are your top three responsibilities as the primary caregiver to your child(ren)?

Questions about Finding Information:

Think about a time in the past month when you needed to find some information or learn something about something as a parent? Can you think of a time?

What prompted the need for information or to learn something?

Can you walk me through what you did step by step to find the information?

Helpful Prompts:

How did you know about this?

How did you hear about it?

What helped you find information?

What else might have helped?

How did it turn out?

Is this how similar situations usually play out for you or was it unique?

How do you keep track of the information you need and what you learn as a parent?

Do you ever experience any barriers to finding information?

Can you think of anything that makes it easier for you to find information?

Can you think of anything that makes it more difficult for you to find information?

Wrapping Up the Interview:

Is there anything else you would like to add about the event you described or how you use information?

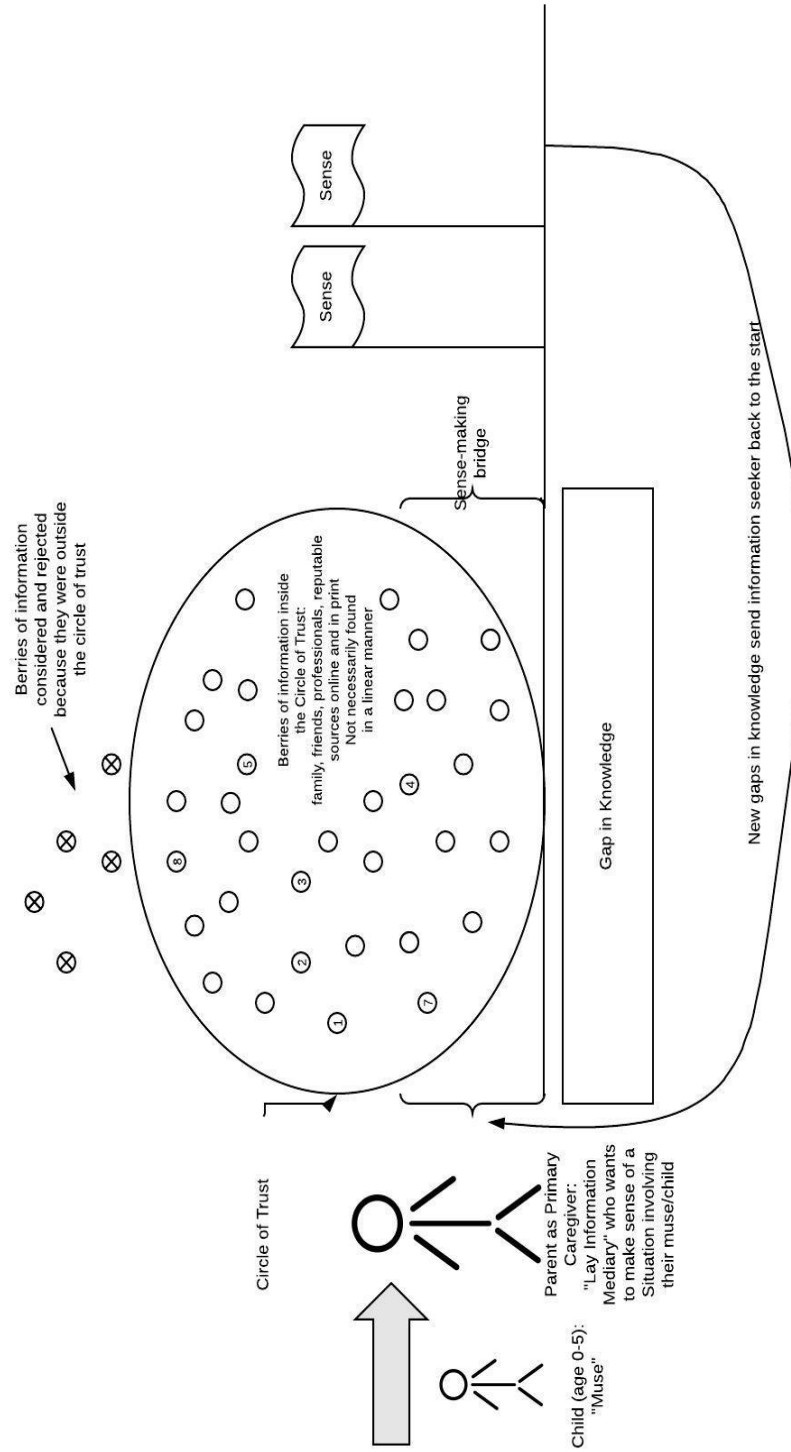
*Thank you very much for taking time for this interview.*

*We know you are very busy and greatly appreciate your time.*

Adapted from Karen Fisher's LIS510 Autumn 2009 Syllabus, University of Washington's Information School. Shared by Dr. Cecelia Brown in LIS 5053 at OU SLIS.

Appendix C

Information Behavior Model for  
Parents as Primary Caregivers of  
Children under the age of Five





Appendix D

# PARENTS AS PRIMARY CAREGIVERS

OF CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 5

**DEFINITION**

The main responsibility of group members is the care of one or more of their children under the age of five. Group members are often referred to as stay-at-home parents.



**CURRENT LITERATURE THEMES**

- Parents as primary caregivers
- seek information on the medical needs of their children
  - use online portals and platforms to gain information
  - feel effects of parental peer pressure and judgment when seeking information

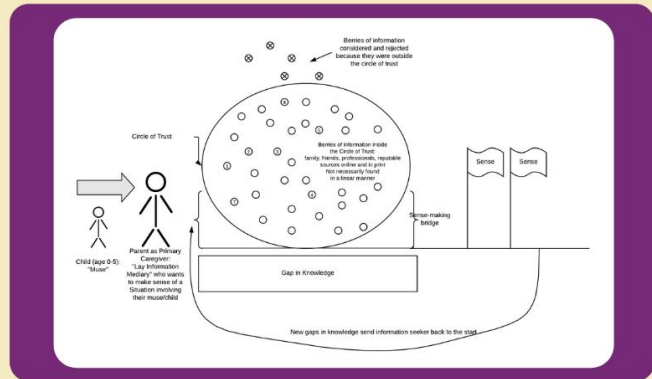


**FIELDWORK**

- Observations of three 75-minute workshops for parents of young children
- Interviews of four stay-at-home parents of children under the age of five



**INFORMATION BEHAVIOR MODEL**



**IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

- Parents are not afraid to ask questions but need to trust their sources, including information professionals
- Information professionals must prioritize the information needs of parents

