Toward a Model of the Everyday Life Information Needs of Urban Teenagers, Part 2: Empirical Model

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This is the second part of a two-part article that presents a theoretical and an empirical model of the everyday life information needs of urban teenagers. Part 2 focuses on the derivation of the empirical model and on its relationship to the theoretical model presented in Part 1. Part 2 also provides examples from the project data to support each of the components of the empirical model, which ties 28 information needs topics to the seven independent variables in the theoretical model. Comparison of the empirical model to the results of past youth information behavior research shows that the participants in this study tended to have the same types of information needs as previous researchers have found with more advantaged, nonminority groups of teens. This finding is significant because it suggests that teenagers have similar information needs across socioeconomic, ethnic, cultural, and geographic boundaries. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, however, additional research is necessary to confirm this possibility.

Introduction

Most information-seeking research has focused on adults or on children, with little focus on adolescents (Shenton, 2004). In an effort to redress this lack of research, the researchers secured a 3-year grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Studies (IMLS) to study the everyday life information-seeking (ELIS) behaviors of inner-city teenagers. This is the second part of a two-part article describing the results of this project.

Everyday life information-seeking behavior is an increasingly popular subset of information-seeking research (Savolainen, 2004). ELIS research deals with information behavior related to people’s private lives, as opposed to information behavior relating to work or academic needs. As Savolainen (2004) explained, “Typically, ELIS studies discuss the ways in which people use various information sources to meet information needs in areas such as health, consumption, and leisure” (p. 1).

A review of literature in the areas of ELIS research and adolescent information behavior research (Part 1) showed that little research has been conducted into the ELIS behaviors and preferences of adolescents, and even less work has been tied directly to inner-city teens. As a result, little is known about teens’ ELIS needs, uses, and preferences, and even less is known about urban teens’ ELIS needs, uses, and preferences. This second article will propose an empirical model of urban teens’ everyday life information needs, discuss the relationship of the empirical model to the theoretical model presented in Part 1 (Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2006), and provide examples from the data that support each of the individual components of the empirical model.

Methodology

As detailed in Part 1, two groups of urban teenagers participated in this qualitative research study: members of the Free Library of Philadelphia’s Teen Leadership Program, and participants in the Boys & Girls Clubs of Philadelphia after school programs. There were 27 teens in all, 16 from the Free Library and 11 from the Boys & Girls Clubs. Twenty-five were African American; one was Asian American; and one was White. They ranged in age from 14 to 17 and were in grades 9 through 12.

The participants provided data via written surveys, tape-recorded audio journals, written activity logs, photographs, and semistructured group interviews (Fontana & Frey, 1998). These five data collection methods produced about 400 pages of raw data. The researchers used iterative pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which is similar to the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), to analyze the data. The researchers employed QSR NVivo 2 (QSR International, 2002) to facilitate the manipulation of the raw data during the data analysis stage.

Four major themes emerged during data analysis: urban teens’ preferred people sources/channels, urban teens’ preferred communication media, urban teens’ preferred media...
sources, and urban teens’ most frequent/significant information needs topics. (For a more detailed explanation of the data analysis process, see Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2005.) These four themes comprised the four major categories within the resulting coding scheme.

An extensive search of the information science and developmental psychology literature revealed no one comprehensive theory or model that could explain the reasons why teens engage in ELIS. Consequently, the researchers decided that an integrated theoretical model of urban teen ELIS human information sources/channels, communication media, media sources, and information needs’ topics was premature. They sought instead to create a theoretical model focusing on the category codes in section four of the original coding scheme, “Information Needs Topics” (see Table 1), and to correlate these information needs topics to more general theoretical functions of urban teen ELIS.

While a comprehensive theory or model that could explain the underlying reasons why teens engage in ELIS was absent, Havighurst’s (1972) 11 developmental tasks of adolescence did provide a starting point for model derivation. Twelve additional tasks were added to provide explanations for the full list of 28 information needs topics. The combined 23 developmental tasks were grouped into seven independent variables to form the theoretical model. The model includes seven areas of urban teen development that ELIS behaviors serve to support: the social self, the emotional self, the reflective self, the physical self, the creative self, the cognitive self, and the sexual self.

**Development of the Empirical Model**

After the theoretical model was developed, the next step in modeling urban teen ELIS was to create an empirical model encompassing the 28 information needs topics from the coding scheme. These 28 codes represent topics for which the study participants actively sought information during the data collection period, or for which they needed or wanted information but did not seek it. The codes were arranged into a visual model to indicate their relationship to each of the seven independent variables in the theoretical model (see Figure 1).

Reading the model from left to right, the first column lists the dependent variable: “urban teen ELIS needs.” The middle column lists the seven components of the theoretical model, that is, the seven areas of urban adolescent development. The right-most column lists the 28 empirical variables, derived via the data analysis process. These are the types of information need that correspond to each of the seven theoretical variables.

For example, there are three empirical variables tied to the theoretical variable emotional self; These three are familial relationships, emotional health, and religious practice. Each of these three empirical variables describes a topic for which the study participants sought, gathered, mentally considered, or needed but did not seek information. Translating this portion of the combined empirical model into prose language, one can say, “Within the area of the development of the emotional self, the study participants dealt with information pertaining to familial relationships, emotional health, and religious practice.”

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**TABLE 1. Original coding scheme—Urban teens’ everyday life information needs topics.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information needs topics</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Daily life routine</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Social activities</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Creative performance</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Academics</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Personal finances</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>6 Current events</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Goods and services</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Emotional health</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Friend/peer/romantic relationships</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Popular culture</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Familial relationships</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Fashion</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 College</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Health</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**FIG. 1. An empirical model of urban teens’ everyday life information needs.**
Discussion

Data Support for the Empirical Variables

This section will present each of the empirical variables with one or more representative excerpts from the raw data, both to define the empirical variables and to show that each one was supported by data from the participants. That is, this is user-centered research, as opposed to a prescriptive analysis of user behavior. The developmental tasks related to each theoretical variable are provided as variable operationalizations.

Theoretical variable: The social self. Development of the social self involves “developing stable and productive peer relationships” (Havighurst’s task #8; Havighurst, 1972) and “understanding and negotiating the social world.” Participants needed information relating to friend/peer/romantic relationships, social activities, popular culture, fashion, and social/legal norms to support their developing social selves.

Friend/peer/romantic relationships. A number of the participants reported romantic relationship issues during the data collection period. As a female participant wrote in her activity log: “Boy problems. What should I do?” (004; 1 612). Many participants also devoted considerable time and energy to gathering information relating to building and maintaining relationships with friends. For example, a female participant called a friend to ask why she and another friend were in a fight that day at school: [I was wondering] “Why was Kathy fighting Jasmine?” I called her on the phone, and she said they wasn’t [sic] getting along real well” (024; 53–54).

Social activities. The participants sought information relating to a number of social activities, such as going to parties, seeing movies, and attending sports events. Because the data collection period fell in the spring, the prom was a prominent social activity in the data. For example, a male participant said in his audio journal: “Where can I go after the prom? A teacher suggested to go to AC [Atlantic City] or stay in the city. I decided to go to AC and try to have fun” (011; 30–32). Much information gathering related to social activities involved consulting with friends to generate leisure plans. For instance, another male participant explained, “On my way to school, I happened to see my old friend, Terry. We then began conversing, and I decided that we should go out this weekend. So we then brainstormed places that we would like, or we would enjoy to go this weekend, and came upon parties, movies, and malls” (004; 19–23).

Popular culture. Celebrities, sports figures, musicians, and hip-hop culture were some of the most common subtopics relating to popular culture. For example, one participant explained in his audio journal: “Today, especially, I wanted to get the latest gossip or scandal, so I continued to listen to Power 99 because Wendy Williams came on in a couple of seconds. She’s, like, the gossip queen, and so I listened to her, and she gave all the latest gossip in Hollywood and on celebrities and all that other good stuff” (010; 47–50).

Fashion. Clothing and hairstyles were also frequent topics of information seeking. A number of the participants looked for photographs and magazines articles about prom hair and clothing styles. One of the female participants ran an informal hair-braiding business, and she consulted her private collection of styling books a number of times during the data collection period.

Other fashion-related queries were more general. For example, one participant explained in her audio journal, “This evening I was curious, after watching TV, what the latest fashions were. So I picked up my April issue of the Cosmo Girl magazine where I found a bunch of things and a bunch of trends for this spring” (010; 66–70).

Social/legal norms. The participants reported a number of questions relating to expected patterns of behavior. A number of students wanted to know what types of clothing were appropriate to wear to formal functions, such as school ceremonies, funerals, and awards banquets. Other participants were interested in knowing the legal age at which minors could engage in a legally restricted activity. For example, one participant wrote in her activity log: “How old do I have to be to get a driver’s permit?” (009; 27).

Theoretical variable: The emotional self. The development of the emotional self includes “establishing emotional and psychological independence from his or her parents” (Havighurst’s task #7; Havighurst, 1972); “developing increased impulse control and behavioral maturity” (Havighurst’s task #11); “seeking emotional health and security;” and “establishing relationships with adults other than parents/guardians.” Information topics related to the emotional self include familial relationships, emotional health, and religious practice.

Familial relationships. Establishing and maintaining familial relationships is a crucial aspect of the study participants’ lives. For example, in his audio journal one participant talked about visiting a sick uncle: “I wonder what time I should go to check on my uncle because my guardian wanted me to check on my uncle because he’s a little sick” (008; 107–108).

Another participant discussed an argument with her mother:

I really hate having arguments with my mom, but I’m a teenager. You’re going to have arguments with your parents . . . so I just been thinking about some hotlines I can call, maybe like a Boys & Girls Club kind of hotline. I think that’s what it’s called, to call to ask them, you know, give me some advice or something, on how to deal with arguments with your mom or dad. . . . From what the commercials say, I guess they can help you out in those kinds of situations.” (014, 12–18)
Emotional health. A number of the participants sought methods of protecting themselves from emotional harm, or struggling to heal after an emotional setback. For example, students wrote in their activity logs, “Who should I talk to when I’m mad?” (027; 31), and “Where can I find teenage help hotlines?” (006; 7).

In one particularly compelling example of an emotional struggle, one of the participants was struggling to come to terms with her sexual identity. Although much of her information seeking relating to this issue pertains to the empirical variable sexual identity, much of it also pertains to emotional health. She was searching for a person with whom she could discuss the emotional side of her growing realization that she is gay. She initially identified her school counselor as a person who could offer her emotional support, but her fear that that her discussions with him might not remain confidential made her hesitant to seek his help: “On the way to school I was wondering if I was going to get to talk to Mr. L. about the papers he had gave [sic] me. [I need] to talk to somebody about what was going on, some personal issues. And he told me that the information was confidential and stuff, but I still wasn’t sure if I wanted to go along with it . . .” (003; 201–204).

Religious practice. Religion figured less prominently in the participants’ lives than did emotional concerns, yet religion was a method by which at least two of the participants found some emotional comfort or fulfillment. One participant commented in his audio journal, “I came back from church. It was a good service today. I like what the preacher had said” (020; 65–66). Another mentioned in her audio journal, “Today I went to church with my cousin. The pastor preached a real good sermon today” (023; 33–34).

Theoretical variable: The reflective self. Development of the reflective self encompasses “developing a personal sense of identity” (Havighurst’s task #5; Havighurst, 1972); establishing adult vocational goals (Havighurst’s task #6); adopting a personal value system (Havighurst’s task #10); developing a sense of civic duty; establishing a cultural identity; and questioning how the world works. In relation to the development of the reflective self, the participants needed information relating to self-image, philosophical concerns, heritage/cultural identity, civic duty, college, and career.

Self-image. The emotional fragility of adolescence was readily apparent in the self-musing of the study participants. A number of them questioned their self-worth in the eyes of others, as evident in one participant’s written log: “Why do people hate me for dumb reasons?” (001; 3). Others worried about their physical appearance and wondered how they looked to their peers.

Philosophical concerns. The participants engaged in a number of instances of searching for a general understanding of society’s fundamental beliefs and values, as in asking, “What’s the difference between love/hate?” (001; 95), or “Why does death come so suddenly?” (003; 55).

The Iraqi war generated especially rich data relating to philosophical concerns. Several participants questioned the reasons for the United States’ entry into the war. As one male participant said in his audio journal:

But, like the President says, it’s for the freedom of Iraq, so it’s for the freedom of every country. I mean if we should have freedom of every country, I guess what he’s doing is right. So . . . I’m really grateful for living in America, ‘cause if I didn’t live in America, then a lot of these things would be happening where I would live. So I’m real grateful for that. (002; 319–323)

Another participant effectively explained the concept of philosophical issues in her audio journal:

I was thinking about many things that concerned me. For example, why can’t I say who invented diseases? Why do people get sick? Why are so many people dying? Sometimes I ask myself these types of questions. These are the questions that you won’t discuss with anyone except your inner self. These are the questions that don’t come out. To get information, I will need someone to talk to, but I really don’t have anyone to talk to. . . . When these kinds of questions pop up, I go right to the Internet. I was looking on the Internet, and I wanted to be able to enter my questions and be able to talk to someone. (001; 52–61)

Again, the social aspect of urban teen ELIS is evident. When this teen turns to computers for ELIS assistance, she prefers to use the Internet to locate a person with whom to communicate about her topic, as opposed to looking for the actual information she desires.

Heritage/cultural identity. Twenty-five of the 27 participants were African American, and a small portion of their information behavior involved topics related to African American culture. One young woman wrote that she wanted to find a “Black poetry sight [sic]” (010; 43). Another participant wanted “to find a book on Malcolm X because I’m very interested in this and Black history” (004; 265–266). Another participant was interested in learning about voodoo practices because she was of Haitian descent.

Civic duty. In addition to questioning values and practices of the society in which they live, many of the participants questioned their own value to society as they struggled to define future roles for themselves. For example, “When I go to the Club, I do my hour of community service because I am in the Keystone Club. Keystone is a club for community service and free enterprise, education, and career development, leadership, unity, and self-recreation. . . . I was nominated youth of the year” (021; 17–27).

Again, the war in Iraq figured prominently: “I really don’t want to go to war; I’m against it. . . . At my school, we walked out [in protest]. It was fun; the teachers walked out too” (019; 34–37).
College. Many of the older participants were interested in gathering information about colleges and universities. In their activity logs, they wrote questions such as “Where can I get information about the Penn State main campus?” (O13; 33); “How long do you need to attend college to get a master’s degree?” (O25; 27); and “Who do I go to if you need to know where to get a college loan?” (O15; 9).

Career. Questions pertaining to career-related information ranged from the childlike “What do I want to be when I grow up?” (O25; 35), to the more mature, “What career offers the best satisfaction and income for me?” (O10; 19).

Most of the participants’ audio journal discussions about their future careers indicated that their plans were still uncertain. As one teen said, “I can’t wait ‘till I go to college. I want to be a teenage psychologist, actress, and fashion designer. And I also want to travel the world” (O01; 146–147).

In some cases, queries relating to college and career overlapped. For example, “In English, my teacher taught us about SATs and that we should try to go to college.com to see what grade areas you need to get on the SATs. So when I go home, I’m gonna do that. . . . I need my SATs ‘cause I want to go to college. . . . I want to go for teaching” (O20; 35–43).

This brings up an important general point concerning the empirical variables: some instances of information need fell into two or more categories simultaneously, such as college and career in the preceding example.

Self-actualization. Maslow (1970) proposed that after fulfilling basic human needs, such as the need for shelter, safety, and nourishment, humans seek to fulfill the need for self-actualization, or the need to realize fully one’s potential. Whereas civic duty describes a desire to improve society, self-actualization describes a desire to improve oneself. For example, one of the participants expressed pride in the achievements of other teens in her inner-city neighborhood, pride that led her to aspire to attend college:

> It make my heart feel good to see that the kids in my neighborhood, the older kids like my sister’s age, everybody [is] in college. Ain’t nobody just home doing nothing. That’s where I hope to be in a couple of years. I only got two years left of high school. Right now, I be on the Internet looking up colleges to see which one is the best for me. (O21; 82–93)

She later explained further in her audio journal, “The courses that I am going to be taking at community college [this summer] are going to help me further in life. I am going to go to school to be a registered nurse, so I’m gonna need my sociology classes. I’m gonna need chemistry, biology 101, and everything else” (O21; 131–134).

Although the path to self-actualization often involved college and career, for these teens it was more than just a desire to attend college or to select a future vocation; it was a desire to fulfill one’s potential. In some cases, this meant simply completing the current school year: “I am trying to bring up my grades so I can pass to the 10th grade” (O26; 15–16).

Theoretical variable: The physical self. The development of the physical self includes “adjusting to a new physical sense of self” (Havighurst’s task #1; Havighurst, 1972); “developing physical self-sufficiency;” and “seeking physical safety and security.” The participants needed and/or sought information relating to six areas of the physical self: daily life routine, physical safety, goods and services, personal finances, “health, and job responsibilities.

Daily life routine. Much of the participants’ information behavior related to daily life routine, or minor recurring events that served to bring order to their daily lives as Savolainen (1995) pointed out with his “mastery of life” concept. Common activities falling under daily life routine included checking the time of day, selecting clothing, monitoring weather reports, and choosing meals. For instance, “While waiting for the bus, I wanted to know what time the bus was coming. So I called Septa on the Septa phone” (O12; 40–41), and “Me and my little brother was kinda hungry, and I didn’t feel like cooking. So I wanted to know how much was some pizza from Dominos, and we found a menu” (O22; 14–16).

Physical safety. The participants painted a dangerous picture of life in the inner city. Physical safety was often a threat, particularly in school. Much attention was given to describing fights between students at their various schools, with security guards and metal detectors a visible presence. One participant sought refuge from the chaos in her school library: “At my school there are some safe havens, like some quiet places [where] nothing goes on: the office, the counselor’s office, and the library. Other than that, everywhere else is a wild zone. That’s why I spend most of my [free] time at the library, looking up books or on the Internet, even if I’m just surfing the Web” (O21; 71–75).

Goods and services. The participants had many information needs related to commercial products, such as pricing and availability questions. In their activity logs, participants wrote questions such as “Where can I get some wide shoes?” (O11; 33), and “How much does it cost for next day film developing?” (O14; 69).

In some cases, comparison-shopping efforts were quite sophisticated and involved multiple steps. For instance,

> We decided we were going to throw our friend a surprise April Fool’s birthday party, so everybody got their assignment. My assignment was to go to Party City and get the balloons and everything. So when I got home I went to www.mapquest.com to find out where the nearest Party City was, went to their Web site, priced balloons and other decorations, and then stopped by Shop Rite and priced the cake (O06; 41–46).

Personal finances. The participants often needed information relating to the management of their financial resources. In many cases, they wanted to increase their work hours or...
take on new part-time jobs to increase their incomes: “This morning after getting to school, I went to my computer lab and I searched for where can I find another part-time job. I’m looking for another part time job to keep the money coming” (010; 255–256).

Much of the information behavior in this area, and in the area of information pertaining to goods and services as well, related to the management of cellular phone accounts. Cell phones were largely viewed as status items, and all of the participants had them. Paying for their cell phone accounts was often a burden that required management:

When I went into Radio Shack, I asked them how much the Nokia 3885 cost and how much text messages I would be able to send with my plan. They said that phone was unable to send text messages, so I looked at another phone. I looked at an LG Sprint phone. They said if I get PCS Vision for $60 a month, I’d be able to do unlimited text messaging, and I’d be able to send pictures. I asked the guy, “Can I pay half cash now, and put the remaining balance on my account?” He said they were unable to do that. (006; 95–101)

Health. Information pertaining to health-related issues was also a frequent need. Some participants asked questions about the health conditions of friends and family members, such as, “If my friend thinks she’s pregnant, where can she find a clinic?” (016; 11), and, in reference to her sister’s newly diagnosed condition, “What is alopecia?” (004; 69). Others asked questions related to their own health, such as, “What is more comfortable, a tampon or a pad?” (011; 41), and “How does one go about getting free insurance?” (016; 47).

Job responsibilities. Job-related queries were also frequent. Most of the participants had part-time jobs, and, as discussed above, all of the Free Library participants were employed at various library branches as Teen Leadership Assistants (TLAs). The TLAs displayed considerable interest in finding information that would help them improve their job performance, particularly in relation to creating and administering library programs. For example, one participant wanted to know, “Is the magician still coming to the library [for the children’s program I planned]?” (014; 31). Another wondered, “Where can I find ideas on kids programs to do at the library?” (010; 7).

Theoretical variable: The creative self. Two tasks are involved in developing the creative self: “expressing aesthetic preferences,” which involves the creation of a creative product or act, and “expressing aesthetic preferences,” which involves the judgment of or appreciation of a creative work. The related empirical variables include information pertaining to creative performance and information relating to creative consumption.

Creative performance. There was a relative dearth of information behavior related to taking part in creative activities; only two of the participants sought information relating to the creation of creative products, such as writing a story, performing a dance, or playing a musical instrument. One participant wanted to locate nearby dance studios where she could study dance:

I also wanted to know some dance studios in my area. I am really interested in dance. Dance is one of my favorite hobbies, and I just love to dance. So I wanted to find a studio in my area that’ll have the dancing things I like to do—you know, like R&B, hip-hop, tap, jazz. So I looked in the yellow pages on yahoo.com, and I searched for that. I found a couple. (010; 268–272)

Another participant was interested in learning how to record some of his own music:

It’s Tuesday afternoon. Me and my friend are wondering where we can get some recording studio time, ‘cause we’re trying to write—trying to make a demo or CD to get it out there so people will start—so we can look at some contracts or something. So we could get signed to a record label or something. So I think we should listen to the radio and get a phone number and ask them, call them, do they know anything about it. (009; 060–065)

Creative consumption. The majority of activities relating to the development of the creative self involved the consumption of creative works, such as listening to music or watching a dance performance, as opposed to creating music or dance. Activity log entries included a number of questions relating to movie and television viewing (e.g., “When does Soul Food air?” [012; 27]), and many questions related to popular music (e.g. “Where can I find the lyrics to Sean Paul’s new song?” [005; 11]).

Similar examples occurred in the audio journals, as well as incidents reflecting a wider range of aesthetic appreciation. For example, one participant discussed her appreciation of the sound of a British accent:

I had bought the new Floetry CD yesterday, and it’s a great CD. So I wanted to find interviews about them, like hear them talking and stuff. I love their accents, because they’re from England, and I love their accents. So I just wanted to hear them talk. I didn’t care what they talked about; I just wanted to hear them speak. (003; 152–156)

Theoretical variable: The cognitive self. The development of the cognitive self includes: “adjusting to new intellectual abilities” (Havighurst’s task #2; Havighurst, 1972); “adjusting to increased cognitive demands at school” (Havighurst’s task #3); “expanding verbal skills” (Havighurst’s task #4); and “understanding the physical world.” The participants dealt with information relating to three areas of the development of the cognitive self: academics, school culture, and current events.

Academics. The term academics is used here to refer to the various scholastic disciplines, such as biology or history.
The participants’ information behaviors relating to academics may or may not have been related to school.

In some cases, the participants needed this type of information for homework purposes:

I have a five-page term paper due on Down’s syndrome and sickle cell anemia for 3rd marking period. I researched for my paper on three different days. . . . I know someone with sickle cell anemia so I interviewed her and asked her questions about her life and how she grew up. And then I combined what she said with the information I got off the Internet with what she said and for Down syndrome. I looked on the Internet and encyclopedia. (021; 41–47)

In other cases, it was impossible to discern from the data whether the participants sought academic information to satisfy personal curiosity or to fulfill school requirements because they did not provide the context of the information need. For example, one participant asked in her activity log, “How far away is the moon from the earth?” (015; 23).

School culture. School culture is a subset of understanding the physical world. It entails understanding or questioning the rules, norms, customs, and methods of school operations. One participant, for example, wondered, “What is the purpose of taking tests?” (001; 113). Another mused, “We [are] like guinea pigs. They give us tests all the time” (003; 303–304). Still another asked, “Why do we have to wear school uniforms? Because if we don’t, we will get suspended” (27; 19–20).

Current events. The participants showed varying levels of curiosity about world news and events. Most of the questions centered on the newly declared war in Iraq, such as the male participant who reported keeping a “war journal about the war, Iraqi Freedom,” (007; 12–13), or the female who wondered, “If we lose (the war) will we have a back up plan?” (025; 195).

Some of the participants wanted information about more general current events. One participant wrote in his activity log simply, “What’s happening in the world?” (004; 53). Another wanted to find out what does S.A.R.S. mean” (007; 5). Still another asked, “How much snow did some people get?” (009; 67).

**Theoretical variable: The sexual self.** The tasks related to the development of the sexual self are “learning to manage his or her sexuality” (Havighurst’s task #9; Havighurst, 1972), and “learning to recognize and accept his or her sexuality.” Under the development of the sexual self, the participants sought, gathered, or needed information relating to sexual safety and sexual identity.

Sexual safety. Many of the participants expressed worries about contracting sexual diseases, the females more than the males, even though both sexes were exposed to warnings about possible health risks of sexual behavior. As one female explained in her audio journal:

An issue that came up today that scared my class and myself was the STD talk. The purpose of the talk was to allow teenagers to be aware of STDs. Especially gonorrhea and chlamydia. I was quite sure everyone knew about STDs, but what made this scary was the way he [the guest speaker] displayed and verbally said his information. For instance, he would talk low one moment, and then get hyped the next. (004; 56–61)

Another female questioned her friend’s sensibility in continuing to date a boy who had previously given her a sexually transmitted disease:

My friend, she keeps telling me that she’s pregnant. . . . Before she told me this, her boyfriend, her old boyfriend, gave her a disease. And she broke up with him. She thought she was pregnant. She went to the doctor’s, got herself checked out and everything. And they gave her the antibiotics and everything, pregnancy test, everything, and she wasn’t pregnant. So next thing you know, she comes and tells me a couple months afterward that she thinks she’s pregnant. She didn’t get her period. Her period [was] late. So I said to myself, “Don’t let me find out that you still doing it to the boy after he gave you something. (001; 30–38)

Sexual identity. As discussed above under “emotional health,” one of the participants was struggling to understand whether or not she was homosexual. She engaged in a number of related information behaviors, primarily searching for an agency where she could talk to a counselor or other objective adult. For example, she explained that:

I was trying to figure out how I was going to get to this center. . . . The kids can come on certain days, and I was trying to figure out where it was at, for transgender, bi/gay youth. . . . So I looked in the PGM [Philadelphia Gay Magazine]. . . . That gave me the information . . . the phone number and stuff like that if you want to call. (003; 216–225)

Another participant was trying to understand the concept of homosexuality, more out of general curiosity than due to an identity struggle. She wrote that she was trying to understand “Why do girls like girls?” (001; 109).

**Conclusion**

Overall, the most significant and lasting contributions of this study are the theoretical and empirical models of urban teens’ everyday life information needs. These models: (a) confirm and expand the work of previous researchers, and (b) clarify the role of serving urban teens’ everyday life information needs.

As Table 2 shows, the participants in this study tended to have the same types of information needs as previous researchers have found with more advantaged, nonminority
groups of teens. This finding is significant because it suggests that teenagers have similar information needs across socioeconomic, ethnic, cultural, and geographic boundaries. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, however, additional research is necessary to confirm this possibility.

Whenever possible, these inner-city teens consulted humans first when needing information, turning first to friends and family to fulfill their information needs. This preference for humans as information sources is a common finding across socioeconomic and age divisions (e.g., Julien & Michels, 2000; Savolainen, 2004; Shenton & Dixon, 2003). The participants decided which people to consult based on established human relationships, question topics, and the locations of their information seeking. As the participants explained in one of the group interviews, their choices were guided by the “it depends” principle, supporting Williamson’s (1998) and McKenzie’s (2003) emphasis on the social context of ELIS behavior.

While analysis of urban teens’ preferred information sources and channels was not the main focus this study, the participants evidenced general tendencies toward relying on easily accessible, familiar information sources and channels. Again, this is in line with much of the previous ELIS research, which has emphasized the repetitive nature of ELIS behaviors:

The key word is everyday life, which refers to a set of attributes characterizing relatively stable and recurrent qualities of both work and free time activities. The most central attributes of everyday life are familiar, ordinary, and routine, and they qualify the structural conditions of action (e.g., the recurrent “rhythms” of work and leisure hours). (Savolainen, 2004, p. 1)

The participants’ reliance on proven methods of information seeking and their widespread use of the principle of least effort does not represent laziness or carelessness. Rather, it represents rational behavior that saves time, effort, and other limited resources. For example, one of the participants explained in the group interview that she reads a print newspaper daily: “I get the newspaper every day through school when they give them out. But if I had to pay for it, no [I wouldn’t read a print newspaper.]” In view of her limited financial resources, her behavior represents a sensible habit.

**Methodological Implications**

This study has important methodological implications for future qualitative studies of human information behavior, particularly research with young people. It shows that multiple forms of data collection can uncover more complete qualitative data than single forms, as variant forms increase the likelihood of fuller participation from individual participants. For example, the female participant who discussed her search for emotional support while realizing that she was gay did not record related data with her written logs, survey, or photographs; nor did she discuss it in the group interviews. The more intimate audio journal format evidently provided her sufficient privacy to discuss this sensitive topic.

Moreover, the multiple forms of data collection led to fuller participation across the participant pool, as they enabled teens with varying communication preferences to make use of the data collection methods most related to their preferences. That is, in most cases the participants who contributed the most to the group interviews tended to have shorter audio journals; those who produced the lengthiest qualitative data than single forms, as variant forms increase the likelihood of fuller participation from individual participants. For example, the female participant who discussed her search for emotional support while realizing that she was gay did not record related data with her written logs, survey, or photographs; nor did she discuss it in the group interviews. The more intimate audio journal format evidently provided her sufficient privacy to discuss this sensitive topic.

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This study also shows that the often-ignored urban teen population can provide rich data for analysis. Although the participants expressed little interest in schoolwork or other academic pursuits, most of them expressed great interest in participating in the study, saying that they were excited that adults were interested in hearing their thoughts and opinions. The researchers were surprised to find that 25 of the 27 teens ended their audio journals either by thanking the
researchers for allowing them to participate in the study or by saying that they hoped their contributions would prove useful. And although the group interviews were scheduled to last one hour each, interviews number three and four extended long beyond the designated time because of the participants’ excitement in contributing.

This study also has implications for validity testing in qualitative research. Study replication is rare in qualitative work, largely because contextual variances make true replication difficult, if not impossible. Table 2 shows that previous studies confirm many of the findings of the current study, thereby increasing the credibility of the two models offered here and demonstrating how point-to-point comparison of qualitative study findings with related work can serve as a form of triangulation.

Future Directions

It is important to note that this work is exploratory in nature. While the models go a long way toward describing and explaining inner-city teen ELIS behaviors, this work is intended as a starting point for future investigation, both by the researchers of this study and by other researchers as well. In addition to testing the models in other inner-city environments, an important direction for future research involves testing the models in rural and suburban environments to determine the degree to which they can be transferred to non-urban contexts. Other areas also remain for future examination, such as the effects of race, ethnicity, age, and gender.

As far as gender effects are concerned, more of the supporting data used in the preceding sections came from female participants than male participants simply because many of the girls tended to contribute more than many of the boys. Beyond the quantity of contributions, however, the data did not reveal any significant gender-related behavioral variance. Nonetheless, gender might play an important role in inner-city teens’ ELIS, making the effects of gender an important area of future study with this fascinating yet often ignored population. The theoretical and empirical models presented here pave the way toward these future studies.

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